

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Dana Middle School  
San Pedro, CA

May 2010

## ENCOURAGING WRITING

### Summer writing = summer learning

Your child should write on most days over the summer. This doesn't mean you have to set assignments and try to keep track of whether she completes them. Summer writing should be purposeful and fun. And it doesn't have to take more than a few minutes. Some quick and easy ways to keep your child "in the writing habit" include:

- **Letters.** Encourage your child to correspond with a relative or friend. Email is okay, but texting or instant messaging is a last choice. Encourage your child to write a paragraph or at least a few complete sentences.
- **Lists and schedules.** Jotting down a shopping or to-do list may not improve your child's sentence structure. But it reinforces the important idea of writing for a purpose.
- **Journals.** Give your child a journal at the beginning of the summer. Ask her to record her thoughts, experiences and emotions.
- **Notes.** Leave notes for your child—at her place at the table, on her pillow, taped to the bathroom mirror. Ask her to write back to you.
- **Poetry and lyrics.** Ask your child to express herself through a poem or song. Writing a song may be especially appealing to middle schoolers for whom music is often important.



Source: Lynn Dean, "Family Ideas for Summer Writing," EduGuide, [www.eduguide.org/Parents-Articles/Keep-Your-Kids-Writing-this-Summer-268.aspx](http://www.eduguide.org/Parents-Articles/Keep-Your-Kids-Writing-this-Summer-268.aspx).

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Volunteer work strengthens character

Students are often required to perform community service each semester in high school. Why not give your middle schooler a head start by doing some this summer? It's a great time to devote to helping others.

Discuss some of the following activities with your child. Let him choose one. He could:

- **Be** a counselor-in-training. Help at a summer program for younger children.
- **Think** of a family that really needs help with child care. Consider babysitting for free.
- **Conduct** a food drive. Ask family, neighbors and friends to donate canned food. Deliver to a shelter or food bank.
- **Record** himself reading popular children's books. Take the recordings to a children's hospital wing.
- **Do** yard work for a person who is elderly or has a disability.

Source: Jenny Friedman, *The Busy Family's Guide to Volunteering*, ISBN: 1-58904-012-0 (Robins Lane Press, a division of Gryphon House, Inc., [www.robinslanepress.com](http://www.robinslanepress.com)).

## IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

### Sustain good attendance

Class review for final exams is important to student success. Even in the midst of review, your child may still have assigned projects and homework. Missing school at this busy time can cause your child to fall behind—quickly. Make sure your child is in school until the final bell rings on the last day.

Source: "Report to Parents—School Attendance," National Association of Elementary School Principals, [www.naesp.org/resources/2/Report\\_to\\_Parents/2008/rtp09-08.pdf](http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Report_to_Parents/2008/rtp09-08.pdf).

## TESTING TIPS

### Share these study habits

To help your middle schooler prepare for those end-of-year tests, have him:

- **Think about** what the teacher emphasized in class. Which material in the textbook and notes does he think she might include on a test?
- **Review previous tests.** Which questions might appear on the final?
- **Make up** practice questions.



## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Talk about your family

Middle schoolers are trying to figure out, "Who am I?" Creating a family biography can help. Dedicate one section or "chapter" to each family member. Include writings and illustrations about:

- **A hobby** the person enjoys.
- **A favorite school** subject.
- **A goal** for the future.
- **A wish** the relative has.
- **A family event** remembered fondly.
- **A mistake** that was a learning experience.



Source: Susan Perry, *Fun Time, Family Time*, ISBN: 03-8078-7725 (Harper Perennial, [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com)).

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents help shy middle schoolers make new friends?

**Q: My son transferred to a new school four months ago and he is miserable. He is very shy and just can't make new friends. I'm worried he will spend the entire summer alone, moping around the house. What should I do?**

**A:** You are right to be concerned about your son. Here are some things you can do to help him:

- **Talk with your child's teachers.** They might be able to help by allowing him to work in smaller groups or pairing him with more outgoing students.
- **Consult his school counselor.** Counselors are trained to help students having trouble making an adjustment to a new school.
- **Consider having your son tutor** younger students over the summer. This can boost his confidence and give him practice talking with others.
- **Encourage him to join a school organization.** Working with others on a project or a team is a good way for him to make friends.
- **Help your child explore ways** to make friends outside of school. Perhaps he can join a scout troop or a youth group. Maybe he could take an art class during the summer. Have your child think about his interests.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your family prepared for summer?

Your child has worked hard all year and summer freedom is finally on the horizon. But how *much* freedom? Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you have worked out a plan for a safe, productive and happy summer:

- \_\_\_ **1. Will an adult** know where your child is and what she is doing at all times?
- \_\_\_ **2. Have you and your child** agreed on a set of rules she will follow this summer? Example: She is never to be on the street without you after dark.
- \_\_\_ **3. Will your child** continue learning over the summer? Example: Reading every day for at least a few minutes.
- \_\_\_ **4. Will you require** your child to exercise every day? Example: Going for a family walk in the evening.
- \_\_\_ **5. Will you spend time** with your child each day in the summer? Example: Talking in the car as you run an errand.

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you and your child have a head start on a good summer. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

“Summer afternoon—to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language.”  
—Henry James

### Fix usual spelling errors

When a student misspells a word, that distorted image of the word sticks in her mind. For example, if your child always spells *recommend* “reccomend,” have her:

- 1. Rewrite** the word correctly capitalizing the hard letter(s)—like reCOMMend.
- 2. Copy** this capitalized version over and over until she can “see” the hard part correctly with her eyes shut.

Source: Eugene M. Schwartz, *How to Double Your Child's Grades in School*, ISBN: 0-941683-36-2 (Instant Improvement, Inc.).

### DISCIPLINE

### Humor softens discipline

You shouldn't laugh off *all* of your child's annoying behaviors. But a few chuckles can go a long way. Research shows that humor:

- **Helps** solve conflicts.
- **Improves** everyone's mood.
- **Wards off** depression.
- **Lightens** tense discussions.

You don't want to make jokes when your child does something seriously wrong. But during the next few years of adolescent development, some laughter couldn't hurt!

Source: Ronald L. Pitzer, “A Parent's Guide to Teens: The Growing Season Book,” University of Minnesota, [www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/07607a.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/07607a.html).

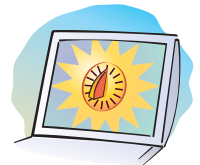
### SCREEN TIME

### Set summer screen limits

With summer right around the corner, it's time to set limits on screen time.

Researchers agree that kids should watch no more than two hours of television a day. One study found that students who watched three hours or more each day were more likely to develop learning problems.

Source: Steven Reinberg, “Teen TV Buffs Prone to Learning Problems,” *The Washington Post*, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050700959.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/07/AR2007050700959.html).



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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares. Writer: Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Pat Carter.

Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com) • ISSN 1527-1021