

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



February 2011

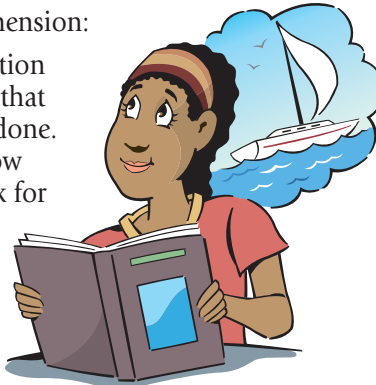
Dana Middle School
San Pedro, CA

Cultivate better comprehension

By middle school, much of your child's school success will depend on reading comprehension. Comprehension is more than knowing how to read the words. It is understanding—and remembering—what the entire book or selection is saying. Comprehension occurs when the reading material encourages your child to think, rather than making her tune out.

To strengthen your child's reading comprehension:

- **Help her make connections.** A connection happens when your child reads something that reminds her of something she has seen or done. Now the reading material has meaning. Now it has made her think. Help your child look for books or articles that are about or refer to her favorite things, places or memories.
- **Encourage more reading.** You've no doubt heard before that it is okay for children to read just about anything, as long as they read. The more a child reads, the more fluent she becomes. Reading becomes easier and easier for her. And the easier the act of reading is, the more energy and interest she has left over to focus on comprehending the *meaning* of what she reads.
- **Ask questions about what she's read.** Examples: Can you tell me a funny (or sad, or unusual) part of the book? Who was the main character? What kind of personality does she (or he) have? Does she (or he) remind you of anyone you know? All these will help your child think about what she reads, helping her improve comprehension.



Source: David Booth, *Reading Doesn't Matter Anymore*, ISBN: 1-55138-202-4, Stenhouse Publishers.



Good character originates at home

Think of your middle schooler's character as a work in progress. Here's how you can help your child grow into a person of good character:

- **Insist** on honesty. If your child breaks a rule and then lies about it, consider two consequences—one for the broken rule and one for the lie.
- **Praise** positive behavior. If your middle schooler demonstrates good character, praise him! Your reinforcement will encourage him to continue that behavior.
- **Give** him low-key prompts. "I won't worry about reminding you to take out the trash. I know you'll do it on your own."
- **Look** for ways to put his good character into action. Join a volunteer group together.
- **Be** a strong role model. Live up to the values you're promoting.

Source: R. and J. Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D., "Building Your Child's Character: Challenges and Solutions," American School Counselor Association, www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=482.

Three C's promote respect

Practice the three C's of respect with your child and others, and expect your child to practice them in return. They are:

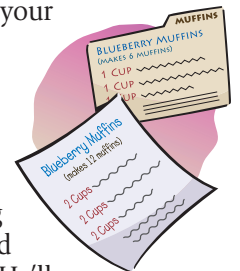
1. **Communication.** Respectful people ask others about their feelings and opinions.
2. **Courtesy.** Manners count. *Please* and *thank you* really are magic words.
3. **Consideration.** A respectful person thinks about another's concerns.

Source: John F. Taylor, *From Defiance to Cooperation*, ISBN: 0-7615-2955-1, Prima Publishing.

Everyday math builds skills

Math becomes more complex in middle school. But surrounding your child with numbers can keep him comfortable. Boost your child's math skills with your:

- **Kitchen.** Rather than simply following a recipe, ask your child to double or halve it. He'll need arithmetic to get it right.
- **Newspaper.** Flip to the sports page. How many points is his favorite basketball player averaging per game?



Send a message of love

Experts say children—especially adolescents—need parents to show them their love. This Valentine's Day and beyond, your child will hear your "I love you" message loud and clear when you:

- **Drop** what you are doing when your child wants to talk. Just listen.
- **Make** a date. Do something together, just you and your child.
- **Say**, "I'm so glad you're my child."





How can parents encourage discipline *and* freedom?

Q: My son's bedroom is a disaster area! I try to respect his space, but there are clothes and school things everywhere. How can I restore order while still giving him some control?

A: Giving your child some freedom can be an important way for him to learn responsibility. But it sounds like things have gotten out of hand. To restore order without taking away your child's independence:

- **Be clear.** Tell your child exactly what you expect as far as the state of his room goes. "It's fine if your desk gets a little cluttered, but it's not okay to leave dirty dishes in here."
- **Brainstorm solutions.** Help your child find ways to meet the standards you've set for his room. For instance, if you'd like to see less clutter, try giving him a few bins or shelves to use for storage.
- **Hold him accountable.** If your child refuses to meet the standards you've set, enforce a consequence. Discuss the consequence in advance so your child knows what will happen if he slips up.
- **Respect his methods.** You don't need to like your child's approach to taking care of his room, but don't ridicule it, either. As long as his bed gets made, does it really matter if the pillows are in the "right" order?



Are you offering homework support?

Middle school is a time of increased expectations—and increased homework. Parents should never do homework, but middle schoolers may need parental support. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are properly supporting your child at homework time:

- ___ **1. Do you provide** your child with a well-lit, relatively quiet place to do homework?
- ___ **2. Do you stay** informed of what teachers expect?
- ___ **3. Do you try** to be available during your child's homework time to encourage and offer advice where appropriate?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child find homework resources, like the Internet?
- ___ **5. Do you speak** to your child's teachers if homework is consistently too difficult for your child?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you are giving your child the right amount of support for homework. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"It is the greatest mistake to do nothing because you can only do little. Do what you can."
—Sydney Smith

Health problems can affect your child's schoolwork

A study in the medical journal *Obesity* found that overweight middle school students:

- **Had** lower scores on standardized tests.
- **Missed** more school.
- **Had** lower scores on physical fitness tests.

To help your child maintain good nutrition:

- **Suggest** fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein instead of snacks high in sugar, fat and salt.
- **Encourage** regular exercise.

Source: J. Stein, "Scholastic burden," Los Angeles Times, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jul/28/health/he-capsule28>.

Three tips calm test anxiety

Many middle schoolers suffer from test anxiety. Tell your child to:

- 1. Be prepared.** Study 15 or 20 minutes a day as far in advance as possible.
- 2. Breathe.** Take deep breaths and think peaceful thoughts.
- 3. Dress for the test.** Wear comfortable clothes.

Remember middle school

"You don't understand!" Kids say this a lot, and sometimes they're right.

Think back to when you were your child's age. Look at your old school photos, if possible. What were your worries, hopes, questions and feelings? Chances are, you and your child have plenty in common.



Keep these memories in mind as you deal with your child. Soon you may hear "You don't understand!" a little less often.

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