

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

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## Bullying heats up in middle school

The middle school years can be stressful enough. And now research shows that this may also be the time students and parents need to worry most about bullying—especially in the early years.

Studies show that boys who bully in sixth grade tend to be popular. But as middle schoolers get older, they start to get fed up with bullies. In seventh grade, bullies are much less popular. By eighth grade, they are not popular at all.

The researchers stressed that bullying is serious. Don't look at it as "part of growing up," even if the bullying is not physical. And whether done in person or electronically ("cyberbullying" via cell phone or computer), consider any of the following to be bullying:

- **Name-calling** or other insults. (This is different from light-hearted, good-natured teasing between friends.)
- **Spreading gossip.**
- **Making threats.**

It is important to act immediately if you think your child is being bullied. Children who are bullied are more likely to:

- **Feel anxious.**
- **Feel depressed.**

Report bullying to your child's school. Most schools have strict policies against bullying. Work with school officials to help your child.

Source: "Middle School: Popularity and Bullying Often Connected," University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, [www.newswise.com/articles/middle-school-popularity-and-bullying-often-connected](http://www.newswise.com/articles/middle-school-popularity-and-bullying-often-connected).



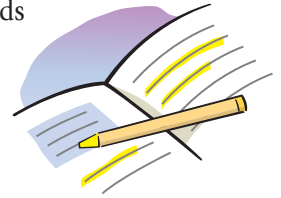
## Give a guide to test success

Your child will benefit from knowing how to make his own study guide—even if the teacher tends to provide one. Help him consider these resources:

- **His textbook.** Your child should focus on the highlights in the chapter—words in bold, chapter questions and chapter summaries.
- **His binder.** Class notes, vocabulary lists, and handouts that introduce new concepts and ideas are important.

Remember, there's no rule that says a study guide *must* be written. Your child may want to record and play back his notes. Or he may want to create drawings and diagrams.

Source: Ron Fry, *How to Study*, ISBN: 1-56414-229-9, Career Press.



## Redecorating can promote children's self-expression

Your middle schooler is probably becoming more independent. She may be trying new ways of dressing, behaving and thinking.

To help your child express herself without causing you too much stress, let her redecorate her room. She might rearrange her furniture or add some new items, such as posters or sheets. Remember to respect her choices. This shows respect for her.

## Support learning at home

Your child may have several hours of homework each night. You know you can't do the work for her, but you can help by providing:

- **Snacks** and drinks for refueling.
- **Lots** of loving support. "You finished that essay! How about a break?"



## Help your child 'wake up' tired writing

Does your child "hate to write?" You can help by offering a few strategies to instantly brighten up her writing. Suggest that your child:

- **Tell a story.** This can be something that really happened or something she made up.
- **Apply humor.** This can be her favorite joke, or a story about a funny experience.
- **Quote someone.** "You can't judge a book by its cover," my Grandpa always said. I never

knew what he meant until I met Charlie."

- **Play with language.** She could start several words in a row with the same letter (*alliteration*). "The ball bounced in the balmy breeze."
- **Use a thesaurus.** Replace tired words like *said* or *walked* with words like *mumbled* or *sauntered*.

Source: Jane Bell Kiester, *Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test*, ISBN: 0-929895-93-2, Maupin House.



## How can parents get middle schoolers to open up?

**Q:** I want to communicate better with my seventh grader, but when I try talking to her, she looks at me like I'm from another planet! Where do I start?

**A:** You've found the magic word: *communicate*. It may be tougher now than ever to communicate, but it's vital that you keep trying. The middle school years are full of emotions, physical changes and academic challenges. Whether she admits it or not, your child needs you now more than ever.

To encourage effective communication with your child:

- **Be very clear** when you talk about your values, but don't lecture her. Instead, briefly explain why you feel something is right or wrong, and then let it go.
- **Don't assume** your child's issues are identical to the ones you faced in middle school. Times have changed. So acknowledge that you may not always know exactly what she's going through at times.
- **Be clear about your expectations.** It's important that your child know what you expect from her both at school and at home.
- **Never let her forget that you love her.** Make sure she knows you're still on her side. Your support and guidance are everything to her.



## Are you supporting your child's health?

Your middle schooler's health affects his ability to learn and retain information. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are supporting habits for your child's best health and well-being:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make sure** your child eats fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your middle schooler to get at least nine hours of sleep each night?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you promote** exercise for the whole family?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** with your child about the dangers of underage drinking and illegal drugs?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to have fun in safe, healthy ways to relieve stress?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're helping your child achieve maximum health, well-being and learning potential. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"The greatest wealth is health."  
—Virgil

## Keep tabs on video games

Research shows that teens who play mostly violent games do worse in school than those who don't. They're also more likely to have arguments with teachers and others.

So limit the time your child spends playing computer and video games. Learn about games before buying them, and explain why certain games are off limits.

Source: "Managing Video Game Playing in the Home," Media Awareness Network, [www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/video\\_games/video\\_game\\_play\\_at\\_home.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/video_games/video_game_play_at_home.cfm).

## Put a spin on volunteering

Volunteering is a very rewarding activity for you and your child. To put a twist on this meaningful activity, try something that's out of your comfort zone. For example, if you are outdoorsy people, you might stock shelves at the library. You and your child may discover some hidden talents!

## Family fun is still important

Middle schoolers can be reluctant to hang out with parents. Special activities can make a difference. Here are some ideas:

- **Super snacks.** Buy or make something delicious together. Discuss life while you enjoy the treat.
- **Hip happenings.** Check the newspaper for local events, such as fairs or concerts.
- **Friendly fun.** Do something new, such as hike a mountain, and let your child bring a friend along.
- **Child's choice.** Have your middle schooler pick where to go, what to see or what to do—within reason, of course. This should give his enthusiasm a boost!



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