



Promote pleasure reading for better school performance

It's true: Reading for pleasure boosts academic achievement. Studies show that children who read for pleasure have higher scores in English, math, science and history than those who rarely read outside the classroom.

To encourage your middle schooler to read for enjoyment over the winter break:

- **Keep reading materials handy.** Fill your home with books, magazines and other reading resources.
- **Set aside time** in your child's schedule for reading every day.
- **Take trips to the library or bookstore** together. See what books appeal to your child.
- **Talk with librarians** and booksellers. Ask what books they recommend for middle schoolers.
- **Get everyone** in the family reading. Show that it's fun.
- **Don't force your child** to finish reading a book that's "boring." It's OK for kids to stop reading something they aren't enjoying.
- **Read aloud.** Middle schoolers aren't too old for this. Take turns reading to each other. Or have your child read to a younger sibling.
- **Discuss books.** Tell your child about a book you liked. Or ask your child to tell you about a favorite book.

Source: C. Whitten and others, "The Impact of Pleasure Reading on Academic Success," *The Journal of Multidisciplinary Graduate Research*.

Take a look at your child's attendance



December usually contains a winter break from school. And once your child returns in January, the school year will be about half over.

This is a great time to review the first part of the year and make plans for the next. Looking at your middle schooler's school attendance should be part of this process.

Did your child attend school every day—except in the case of illness or family emergency? If so, congratulations! Encourage your child to keep up the good work for the rest of the year and beyond. Regular attendance is a strong predictor of success in school.

If attendance was lacking:

- **Remind your child** that regular school attendance is a priority in your family.
- **Emphasize the need for rest,** nutrition, exercise and health safety measures to stay in school.
- **Consider the reasons** you take your child out of school. Is it possible to make future appointments outside school hours?
- **Establish consequences** for missing classes. Let your child know that skipping school erodes your trust.

Be absolute when speaking to your child about alcohol & drugs



Now that your child is getting older, some topics—curfew, free time, chores—are open to negotiation. Others, however, are nonnegotiable. They should include vaping, alcohol use and drug abuse.

Follow these guidelines:

- **Be explicit**, but give reasons. “Underage drinking, illegal drug use and vaping are all unacceptable. They are harmful to your health. You are never allowed to participate in these behaviors.”
- **Do not expect your child** to experiment with drugs or alcohol. Yes, many young people do. But plenty of others do not! This is not a “rite of passage.” One experiment can harm your child. Say, “I expect you not to take that risk.” Do not say, “Be careful.”

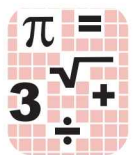
- **Restrict contact** with friends who drink or use drugs. You can’t control who your child spends time with at school. But if you know a peer who drinks or uses drugs, don’t allow your child to socialize with this person outside of school without supervision. If your child disobeys, consequences should follow.

Again, make sure your child knows that the reason is health. Experts agree that children who hang around users are more likely to become users themselves.

“The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering.”

—Benjamin Spock

Help your child study effectively for math and science classes



Studying for math and science often requires different skills than studying for other subjects. To study math and science effectively, encourage your child to:

- **Schedule extra time**, especially if those subjects are challenging. Your child should block out time to work on these subjects every day.
- **Start each study session** with review before working on new material. Your child should look over what the teacher covered in class.
- **Check understanding**. Your child should read any sample questions in the reading and answer them.

If your child can’t answer all of them, it’s time to look back through the text.

- **Draw a picture**. If your child is having trouble understanding something, suggest drawing a diagram. Making a picture of something can help students see how things fit together.
- **Answer all of the questions**. Some teachers may assign only the first five problems on a worksheet or only the even-numbered ones. However, tackling *all* the questions or solving *all* the problems, will give your child more practice. When similar questions show up on a test, your child will be confident in solving them.

Do you monitor your child’s time after school?



Research shows that the hours immediately after school are when children are most likely to get into trouble. It’s important

to make home-alone time as safe and structured as possible. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out how well you are doing:

- ___ **1. Do you make sure** your child has an adult contact after school, such as a relative, neighbor or sitter?
- ___ **2. Do you keep in touch** by phone when your child is out of school and you are not home?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to be involved in supervised extra-curricular activities after school?
- ___ **4. Do you have rules** about who may be in the house when you are not there?
- ___ **5. Have you discussed** with your child the dangers that kids can get into after school (such as alcohol and drugs) and how to avoid them?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are working hard to keep your child safe and productive after school. For *no* answers, try those suggestions.

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These strategies can help your middle schooler retain learning



It can be challenging for students to remember what they have learned. That's because the human brain is wired to forget.

To improve retention:

- **Be sure your child understands** the material. It's tough to memorize something without knowing what it means in the first place.
- **Set it to music.** Encourage your child to make up a tune or simple rhyme to remember names, dates or math formulas.
- **Surround your child** with the material. If the class is studying a certain history topic, share books, movies and songs about it, too.
- **Encourage visualization.** Get your child to associate the material with a mental image. A picture really is worth a thousand words.
- **Make it personal.** Ask your child to explain the material to you. Students retain more when they restate things in their own words.
- **Remind your middle schooler** to read through all class notes while studying. Afterward, your child can go back and try to recall the information.
- **Suggest that your child** review essential information just before bedtime. The brain processes and stores information while people sleep.

A good night's sleep is critical for your child's school success



One essential element in your child's education happens far outside the classroom. It's sleep, and it's vital for school success.

Unfortunately, according to recent studies, an alarming 60% of middle school students do not get the recommended eight to 10 hours of sleep per night they need.

To determine whether your middle schooler is getting enough shut-eye, ask yourself:

- **Does my child fall asleep** within 30 minutes of going to bed?
- **Can my child wake up** fairly easily in the morning?
- **Is my child alert all day**—with no reports from school about an inability to focus in class?
- **Enforce a regular bedtime.** Don't let your child sleep in more than two hours past the normal wake time on the weekends.
- **Keep afternoon naps** under an hour. Longer naps can make falling asleep at night more difficult for your child.
- **Limit caffeine intake.** Watch for this stimulant in things like soda, iced tea and energy drinks.
- **Set a screen curfew** one hour before bedtime. Research links lights from devices to sleep problems.
- **Charge cell phones** and other digital devices out of your child's room overnight to deter late night social media scrolling.
- **Consult a health provider** if your child has ongoing problems falling asleep or is waking up multiple times at night.

If you answered *yes* to each question, chances are your child is getting adequate sleep. But if you answered *no*, it's time to:

Source: "Sleep in Middle and High School Students," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Q: I caught my child copying all the answers from a friend's homework. My child said it was no big deal and that other students do it all the time. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Unfortunately, middle school is a time when many students turn to cheating. At this age, students are highly aware of how they compare with their peers and they may view cheating as a way to keep up.

In a study conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, 90% of middle schoolers admitted to copying a friend's homework and 75% admitted to cheating on tests.

Cheating is very serious. But you can keep your child from turning one mistake into a more severe problem. Here's how:

- **Send a clear message** that cheating is wrong. It's dishonest and it robs your child of learning the skills and information needed for success in life.
- **Ask why your child cheated.** Many students are worried about disappointing their parents or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades.
- **Don't put too much emphasis** on grades. Instead, stress the importance of learning and putting forth your best effort. Let your child know that mistakes are learning opportunities and don't affect your love.
- **Help your child** strengthen study habits. These help students earn better grades on their own.
- **Find help** if your child has fallen behind. The teacher may know a student who would be willing to tutor a few hours a week.

It Matters: Discipline

Three strategies can eliminate rude back talk



As the parent of a middle school child, you may have days where it seems as if everything you say is

wrong. Even an innocent comment may be met with a rude, arrogant or scornful reply from your child.

You may be angry and frustrated. But it's best to avoid a big show of emotion. Instead:

1. **Use "I-messages."** Anything that begins "you always" or "you never" or even just "you" may sound like an accusation to your child. And nothing will gear a middle schooler up for a fight faster than that.

Instead, put the emphasis on *your* feelings. Say, "I get frustrated when the recycling piles up," instead of, "You never take the recycling to the curb!"

2. **Become a broken record.** Don't get into a debate about why your middle schooler can't go to a concert without an adult. Instead, repeat yourself. "The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts." If your child continues to complain, respond again, "The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts."

3. **Say something nice,** then walk away. There are times when you just won't be able to get any further with your child. Try, "I know you're upset, and that makes me sad for you. But you're being so rude to me that I can't talk to you right now. I'll be happy to discuss things when we are both calm."

Establish family rules that promote respectful behavior

The way children interact with their family members lays the groundwork for how they act toward others. By establishing rules for acceptable behavior, you'll be creating a more peaceful, respectful climate at home—and at school.

Encourage family members to:

- **Ask before taking** or borrowing someone else's property.
- **Share.** A box of cereal is for everyone in the family, not just your middle schooler.
- **Accept** that no one always gets their own way. Family members have to take turns.
- **Use a polite tone** when speaking.
- **Think of others.** Ask about their day. Offer support or praise when appropriate.

Don't tolerate behavior such as:

- **Physical violence** in any form.
- **Screaming** and yelling.



- **Insulting** other family members.
- **Stealing** from family members.
- **Treating** family property with disrespect.

Source: R. Howard, *Parenting at the Speed of Teens: Positive Tips on Everyday Issues*, Search Institute Press.

Avoid discipline techniques that encourage poor behavior



Experts urge parents remember these *don'ts* when establishing discipline for middle schoolers:

- **Don't leave room for error.** Instead of saying, "Try to finish your chores today," be clear and say, "Finish your chores today."
- **Don't be vague.** Kids don't learn from phrases like, "Grow up!" They need specifics. Say, "It is your responsibility to remember your chores."
- **Don't tempt your child.** Saying things like, "I'd like to see you try it!" can sound like a dare.
- **Don't ask pointless questions.** Instead of asking "How many times have I told you not to use that tone?" focus on desired behavior. Say, "Speak in a respectful tone."
- **Don't use threats.** Saying, "If you don't finish your paper before dinner, you can't have dessert," gives your child a choice. Instead, say, "You need to finish your homework before dinner."