

Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



September 2012

Start the school year with a commitment to good attendance

Motivation to learn, good study habits and support at home are all factors which contribute to your child's school success. But none of it matters if your child is not in school!

As your child starts a new school year, remember that one of your most important responsibilities is to make sure he's in school on the first day and every day thereafter unless there is illness or an emergency.

School absences affect:

- **Your child.** Children who miss school regularly are at risk of getting poor grades and getting in trouble with the law. Much of your child's success in life depends on a high school diploma. Having a diploma opens many doors; not having one can slam them shut.
- **The whole class.** Learning builds day-by-day, and this routine is interrupted when students only show up part of the time.
- **The entire school.** Schools get state and federal money based on average daily attendance. Lower attendance means less money.



Source: Great Schools, "School Attendance: Issues to Consider," GreatSchools.org, www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/school-attendance-issues.gs?content=644.



Respect creates a positive environment

Teachers often need to contact parents with less-than-happy news, and the topic is not always academics. Often, the child has been disrespectful in class. Every child gets frustrated, but disrespecting a teacher is never the solution.

To reinforce this lesson:

- **Let your child** see you treating her teachers (and all people) with kindness and dignity.
- **Talk to your child** about basic classroom courtesy. Discussion is an important part of middle

school learning. Your child should raise her hand before speaking, and then use an appropriate tone of voice.

- **Remind your child** to give teachers proper attention. Doodling, looking out the window and getting out her cell phone are all disrespectful.
- **Impress upon your child** that teachers, like all people, love to hear *please* and *thank you*.

Source: T. McIntyre, *The Behavior Survival Guide for Kids*, Free Spirit Publishing

Get to know your child's new teachers this year

Home-school communication may be more challenging in middle school, but it's still important. Be sure to:

- **Reach out to staff.** Contact your child's teachers early in the year.
- **Visit the school.** Attend open house.
- **Attend conferences.** This is a good way to get "face time" with a teacher.

Help your child with more advanced homework

Even though your child's schoolwork may be more complicated now that she's in middle school, she still needs your help. Try these tips to help your child with homework:

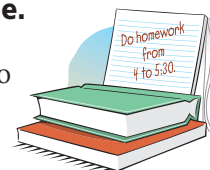
- **Know** what your child is studying.
- **Suggest** ways to find information.

Source: K. Grabarek, "Staying Involved: Approaches to Helping Our Middle School and High School Students Learn," Parent Academic Resources Incorporated, www.academicresources.org/learning.html.

A homework routine is essential in middle school

Homework in middle school can be summed up with one word: *more*. There is *more* of it, it is given *more* frequently and it is *more* complex. For most students, this requires a new level of discipline. To help your child make a successful transition:

- **Set up a suitable homework spot.** It should be well-lit, well-stocked and free from distractions.
- **Work out a schedule.** Homework will more likely be finished if "Do homework from 4 to 5:30" is posted in a prominent place.
- **Set short- and long-term goals.** Break up large assignments into chunks and have a due date for each chunk.



Source: S.S. Zentall and S. Goldstein, *Seven Steps to Homework Success*, Specialty Press, Inc.

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How can parents get excited about the new school year?

Q: I seem to be more upset about school starting than my seventh grader is! How can I face the routine of homework, earlier bedtimes and after-school activities when I'm secretly still pining for summer?

A: We all wish those carefree summer days would go on forever, but, while it's true that back-to-school time means more obligations, it doesn't mean an end to family fun. Because school brings so many new experiences, it's the opposite!

Here are some ways to help you transition into the new school year:

- **Get excited for your child.** What cool classes will she be taking this year? Will she be studying a foreign language? Embrace the new culture as a family. Nibble on French food. Listen to traditional Spanish music. Broaden your horizons together.
- **See things through fresh eyes.** Look forward to your child having new teachers, new friends and even new confidence as an older student. This will be an exciting year for her!
- **Participate.** Did you skip the book fair, fall festival or class play last year? Join in this time around. Being involved at school will help you create a connection with your child as well as other parents.



Will you stay involved during your child's middle school years?

Parent involvement drops dramatically once children leave elementary school. Take this quiz to see if you're prepared to stay involved in your child's middle school. Answer *yes* or *no* for the steps you plan to take:

- ___ **1. I will learn** about my child's new school. I'll know about the classes, the schedule and how it is different from elementary school.
- ___ **2. I will meet** and keep in touch with my child's teachers. I will supply them with contact information.
- ___ **3. I will go** to school events, even if my child says he doesn't "need" me there.
- ___ **4. I will look** for volunteer opportunities that meet my schedule.

- ___ **5. I will stay** aware of my child's responsibilities. I will know about his assignments and how he is doing.

How did you do? Each yes answer means you're supporting your child's learning this year. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Kids go where there is excitement. They stay where there is love."

—Zig Ziglar

School-week routines foster responsibility

Simple school-day routines can boost your child's responsibility. Let him create and then follow through with different routines. Put him in charge of:

- **Homework.**
- **Bedtime.**
- **Morning.**



Find ways to limit screen time for your child

Research shows that the average adolescent spends more time in front of a screen than the one to two hours daily recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. To keep screen time from getting out of control:

- **Enforce** a time limit.
- **Keep** the TV out of his room.
- **Lead** by example.

Source: "Does Your Tween Need Help Managing Screen Time?" TweenParent.com, www.tweenparent.com/articles/view/117.

Teach strategies for deflecting peer pressure

Peer pressure is common in middle school. It is important that your child knows what to do when faced with negative peer pressure. The better she gets at deflecting pressure, the more immune she may become to it.

Teach her to:

- **Think before she acts.** This avoids rash, impulsive actions.
- **Laugh it off.** Humor can defuse tension.
- **Firmly say no.** That can be all it takes.



Source: H.S. Mosatche, Ph.D. and K. Unger, M.A., *Too Old for This, Too Young for That! Your Survival Guide for the Middle-School Years*, Free Spirit Publishing.

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