

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



October 2012

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board

## Bring notes and an open mind to your next school conference

Attending a conference with your child's teachers is an excellent way to build important relationships. By planning and preparing ahead of time for your conferences, you'll be able to maximize outcomes and best work with teachers to help your child in school. To make the most of your meetings:

- **Make every effort to attend.** Conference time is an opportunity to build relationships with your child's teachers. If it's truly impossible to attend, speak to your child's teachers about meeting at a different time (or even over the phone).
- **Jot down notes ahead of time.** Do you have a few specific questions or topics you'd like to discuss with your child's teachers? Write them down before your conference so you're sure to remember them during your meeting.
- **Come with an open mind.** Even if your child told you horror stories about a certain teacher, don't let it affect how you approach your meeting with her. Start every conference with a clean slate, which may lead to better communication all around.
- **Listen to your child's teachers.** Allow your child's teachers to talk without interrupting. It might give you fresh insight into what's happening with your child at school. Be sure to ask for clarification if you don't understand something.



## Consistent discipline helps your child

Your middle schooler needs a consistent message of discipline from all the adults in her life. This lessens the chance that your child will try to manipulate you or another adult. Here are some tips:

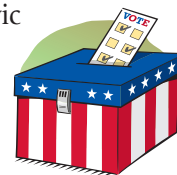
- **Agree on rules** and consequences with all parenting adults in your home. It takes the old "But Mom said it was okay!" trick right out of your child's playbook.
- **Expect relatives or friends** to follow your rules and expectations. If your child is to be home by 9 p.m., she should also be in by 9 p.m. if she is staying with a grandparent for the night.
- **Support school rules** and expectations. If the school expects students to attend every day except for illness or emergencies, let her know you support school policy. Don't give in when she begs you to stay home "just this once."

Source: "Teen Behavior Problems and Discipline," WebMD, [www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/teen-behavior-and-discipline](http://www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/teen-behavior-and-discipline).

## Build civic responsibility

Your child is an important member of her community. Try these ways to help her develop her sense of civic responsibility:

- **Get involved.** Participate in a canned food drive or pick up trash in a local park.
- **Vote.** Take your child with you when you vote and emphasize the importance of this civic duty.



## Carve out one-on-one time to spend with your child

He may not admit it, but your child needs (and wants) time together with you. It's not just important for your relationship—it's critical for his development. You and your child need time to just be together, without distractions. If you can't seem to find the time, then schedule it. Write it on your calendar. It's that important!

Source: L. Sonna, Ph.D., *The Everything Parenting a Teenager Book*, Adams Media, an F+W Publications Company.

## Participation affects grades

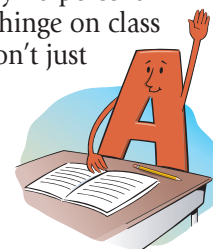
By middle school, roughly 10 percent of a student's grades can hinge on class participation. Teachers don't just want students to participate—they expect it.

Your child *should*:

- **Show up** on time with all supplies.
- **Ask questions** and stay engaged.

Your child *should avoid*:

- **Daydreaming** and doodling.
- **Texting** or playing with an MP3 player.
- **Completing** homework for another class.



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## How can parents lessen tensions with report cards?

**Q: Report-card time always causes tension between me and my child. How can I talk to him about his sometimes-not-so-good grades without our conversation turning into a fight?**

**A:** Instead of seeing your child's report card as "evidence" of how he is doing in school, use it as a tool for starting a conversation. Look at this as a chance for both of you to reflect on his overall progress. To do this:

- **Control your emotions.** If you get angry the second you see a low grade on your child's report card, it may make him shut down and become defensive. Instead, approach the situation calmly.
- **Evaluate your expectations.** Do you automatically assume a C is an awful grade? Don't be so quick to judge. Instead, consider the context. Is this class especially tough? Is the subject matter entirely new to your child? Has he been going through a rough patch emotionally? These things matter when deciding whether a "bad" grade is that awful.
- **Get his opinion.** How does your child feel about his grades? Have you asked him? Help him set appropriate goals to improve them.



## Parent Quiz

### Are you encouraging independence?

Your child's adolescence is a time when he is preparing for life as an adult. Take this quiz to see if you are helping him on his journey. Answer *yes* or *no* to evaluate if you are promoting your child's independence.

- \_\_\_ **1. I encourage** my child to tackle any problem he can safely do on his own.
- \_\_\_ **2. I support** my child when he wants to take part in a whole-some activity that doesn't include me.
- \_\_\_ **3. I don't always rush** to rescue my child. At this age, he needs to experience consequences of forgetting school-work at home.
- \_\_\_ **4. I expect** my child to do some things for himself around the house, like putting away his own things and fixing his own lunch.

- \_\_\_ **5. I allow** my child to make mistakes. I recognize that mistakes promote learning.

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you're taking appropriate steps to encourage your child's independence. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours."

—Joyce Maynard

## Embrace your child's new advanced thinking skills

Research shows that the brains of middle school children are growing rapidly. Your child can now think in a more abstract manner. She can make associations and understand more complex ideas. Support your child's cognitive development by:

- **Discussing current events.** Middle schoolers are interested in what is going on in the world. They may have opinions about what is wrong and how things should be fixed.
- **Asking for your child's opinion.** If she's not happy about a house rule, give her the opportunity to explain the responsibilities she would take on in exchange for more freedom at home.

Source: M.M. Caskey and V.A. Anfara, Jr., "NMSA Research Summary—Young Adolescents' Developmental Characteristics," National Middle School Association, [www.amle.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/DevelopmentalCharacteristics/tabid/1414/Default.aspx](http://www.amle.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/DevelopmentalCharacteristics/tabid/1414/Default.aspx).

## Promote reading with 'book bucks'

Is your child less than enthusiastic about curling up with a good book? Work together to develop a system that rewards reading books. Let your child earn "book bucks" for every book he reads. When he accumulates a certain number of bucks, he may get to help choose what is for dinner or get a break from a household chore.



## Indirect praise will boost your child's confidence

You can praise your child without even talking to her. Just compliment her to someone else—while she's listening. For example, let her overhear you say, "I was so proud of Hannah today. She read a book to her brother, and he loved it!"

### Helping Students Learn®

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