

Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



April 2013

Be patient when communicating with your middle schooler

When she was in elementary school, your child probably couldn't wait to tell you what she learned in math class or what she did at recess. But now that she's older? You're lucky to get a mumbled "Fine" when you ask how her day went.

As hard as that can be for parents, it's a normal part of how children move toward adulthood. But that doesn't mean the lines of communication between you and your child must slam shut. It just means you need to be creative about keeping them open. You can:

- **Keep asking questions.** Prepare for curt replies, but don't give up on learning about your child's life. Don't interrogate her, but do let her know you care. Try simple questions like, "Who did you eat lunch with?" or "What did you work on during study hall?"
- **Stop and listen.** Your child may occasionally surprise you by wanting to share something. Don't miss it because you're busy checking your email or doing dishes. Stop what you're doing and give her your undivided attention.
- **Go high-tech.** Rather than poke your head into her room every five minutes, send her a text or instant message. She'll be so shocked, you'll definitely get her attention!



Source: E. M. Alderman, M.D., "Communicating with Your Preteen," ParentsConnect, www.parentsconnect.com/parenting-your-kids/parenting/parenting-style/communicate_with_preteen.html.



Review testing tips as exams approach

This is standardized testing season for schools everywhere—and many important final exams are coming up soon as well. It is also a time of high stress for many students. Share these tips for test success with your child:

- **Begin early.** Your child must begin studying weeks—not days—in advance.
- **Make a schedule.** For example, Monday: math homework; study science 30 minutes; study English 30 minutes. Tuesday: history homework; study science 30 minutes.
- **Get plenty of sleep** the night before a test. Review a final time, then get at least nine hours of sleep.
- **Start easy.** Determine which test questions he can confidently answer and answer those first.
- **Cross off answers** he knows are not right on a multiple-choice test. Then he might be looking at a choice between two final answers, rather than four.

Source: Teacher Vision, "Top Ten Test-Taking Tips for Students," Pearson Education, www.teachervision.fen.com/study-skills/teaching-methods/6390.html.

Encourage your child to check homework grades

Forgetting one or two assignments can hurt an overall grade significantly. Frequent grade checks can help. Have your child keep a list of each subject. When homework is returned, she should write down the grade received. Every few weeks, have her check her overall grade.

SQ3R can lead to an A

Textbooks can be intimidating, but they're valuable study tools. Teach your child to follow the SQ3R strategy when she reads them:

- **Survey.** Scan the section titles, maps or charts and summaries.
- **Question.** Ask yourself questions that you'll answer by reading.
- **Read.** Read to find the answers to the questions asked.
- **Restate.** Rephrase information in your own words.
- **Review.** What did you learn? How does it relate to what you already know?



Source: "A Strategy for Reading Textbooks," How-to-Study.com, www.how-to-study.com/study-skills/en/a-strategy-for-reading-textbooks.asp.

Strategies for improved reading comprehension

In middle school, reading comprehension plays an important role in every subject.

Here are some tips:

- **Taking notes** forces your child to pay attention to what is important.
- **Studying vocabulary** is key to mastering comprehension.
- **Rereading** a second and third time can make a huge difference.



Source: Math and Reading Help, "Middle School Reading: Improving your Seventh and Eighth Grader's Reading Comprehension," <http://tinyurl.com/9ubv4k4>.



Is missing some school for special family time okay?

Q: We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to take a weeklong family vacation this spring. Unfortunately, it's the week after my child's spring break. Is it okay to pull him out of school for those extra days?

A: This is a tough call. On one hand, school should always be your child's number-one priority, and he should never be allowed to miss class for trivial reasons. On the other hand, family time is critical, and it's often hard to come by these days. So you shouldn't casually dismiss the chance to go away together.



To decide what to do, ask yourself:

- **Is there any leeway?** Are your travel dates written in stone, or can you adjust your arrival/departure a little? If you must be away while school is in session, can you go for a shorter period of time?
- **Can I make it educational?** If you decide that this week away is what is best for your family, turn it into a learning opportunity. Take your child to a museum or live performance while you're on vacation. Ask him to blog about the trip (in real time) and research historical facts about the area.
- **Can my child keep up** with his schoolwork? Is there a way for him to work while he's gone and email his assignments back to school? Ask his teachers well in advance.



Do you establish limits for your child?

Your child will demand many freedoms at this age. She is ready for some, and she may not be ready for others. Setting limits when it comes to both school and her social life will help your child succeed. Answer *yes* for something you do often and *no* for something you do rarely or never:

- ___ **1. Do you set**—and stick to—limits according to what is in your child's best interest?
- ___ **2. Do you communicate** these limits and expectations very clearly to your child?
- ___ **3. Do you give** your child a firm answer, but not an angry or aggressive response? She may be disappointed, but don't use that as an excuse to argue.
- ___ **4. Do you modify** limits based on your child's good and mature behavior? Give her a chance to demonstrate that she can be mature.

- ___ **5. Do you understand** that loving your child does not mean you are her "buddy"? It is your job to provide kind, but firm, authority for her.

How did you score? Mostly yes answers mean you are adept at setting limits and saying "no" when you must. Mostly no? Check the quiz for some suggestions on setting limits for your child.

"There is no such thing as a perfect parent, so just be a real one."
—Sue Atkins

Review area and perimeter

Area and perimeter are part of many school math courses. But they also have real-life applications. For example, they always apply when making changes to a room or building.

Here are some tips you can give your child:

- **When you think about area**, think *inside* the box. Area is the measurement of the inside of an enclosed space.
- **When you think about perimeter**, think *outside* the box. Perimeter is what you get when you add up the borders of an enclosed space.

Have your child practice finding area and perimeter of spaces around your home. Enlist his help any time you have a project that requires measurement.

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math: The Middle School Years*, University of California, Berkeley.

Editorials can spur thinking

Sharpen your child's thinking skills, by having him read newspaper editorials. With what do you agree or disagree? What important details does the author leave out? By reading and analyzing editorials, your child is evaluating arguments.



Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside.

Tailor expectations to your child's individual skills

It's important to set expectations for your child to be academically successful, but it's equally important to make sure those expectations are realistic. For example:

- **Are you setting a goal** for her just because "all the other sixth graders" seem to be meeting it?
- **Has she always been** a reluctant reader? If so, encouraging honors English may not make sense.

Source: "Set Reasonable Expectations and Goals for Your Child," FamilyEducation.com, <http://life.familyeducation.com/parenting/responsibilities/45286.html>.

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