

# Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board



February 2013

## What to do when cliques interfere with your child's ability to learn

More than anything, most middle school kids just want to fit in at school. But what if your child goes from fitting in with her friends one day to being shunned the next? Chances are she's fallen victim to a clique. Typically a bigger issue for girls, cliques—ever-shifting groups of peers which actively exclude certain kids—are a fact of life during adolescence. Feeling left out can be hard on your child's self-esteem and may have a negative effect on her academic performance.



You can help your child by:

- **Defining cliques.** Explain, "Cliques aren't really about friendship. They're about power. So if someone in the group starts being mean, she's doing it because it makes her feel powerful."
- **Reminding her** that being shunned isn't her fault. Preteens assume that if they were prettier, thinner, etc., they wouldn't fall victim to a clique. But that's not true. Make sure your child understands this.
- **Brainstorming ways** for your child to deal with cliques. Can she focus on friendships outside of school? Look for new friends in class? Whatever she decides, keep reinforcing the idea that she is not powerless.
- **Offering perspective.** Remind her that these clique issues will eventually end. Her most important job is to focus on learning.

Source: C.C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *Parenting 911: How to Safeguard and Rescue Your 10- to 15-Year-Old from Substance Abuse, Depression, Sexual Encounters, Violence, Failure in School, Danger on the Internet, and Other Risky Situations*, Broadway Books.



## Build thinking skills like Socrates did!

Is your middle schooler ready for the Socratic method? Absolutely! Simply put, the Socratic method builds thinking skills through asking questions. You can help by asking your child questions such as:

- **"Can you give me** another example? I'm not sure that I understand."
- **"What makes you think so?** Is it because of what you heard, or do you have your own reasons?"
- **"Have you considered** other ideas? What do you imagine your teacher (or anyone else involved) is thinking about this situation?"
- **"What will happen** if you do that?" "Can you think of any consequences?" "How do you plan to deal with them?"
- **"What is this math problem** really asking you to solve?" "Is there anything in the problem that indicates what operation you should use?"

Source: K.R. Stephens, "Nurturing Critical Thinking," Duke Gifted Letter, [www.tip.duke.edu/node/821](http://www.tip.duke.edu/node/821).

## Setting goals can keep your child motivated

Many middle school students need help becoming motivated to do schoolwork. Help by:



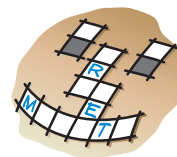
- **Having your child** list her classes and write a realistic goal next to each one. She may not be able to turn that C in history into an A immediately, but a B is a good goal to start with.
- **Discussing the list regularly.** Does your child have homework in that class? When is the next test, quiz or project?
- **Getting her teachers' input** on how your child is doing. Knowing you and her teachers care about her success is an important motivator.

Source: M. Whitley, "Motivating students to improve achievement," CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/COMMUNITY/08/29/whitley/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

## Build skills through games

Improve your child's language skills by playing reading and writing-related games. You can:

- **Challenge your child** to see who can finish a crossword puzzle first.
- **Play a word game together**, such as Scrabble or Boggle.



Source: "Summer activities for middle school students," Just Read, Families! The Florida Department of Education, [www.justreadfamilies.org/greatideas/middle.asp?style=print](http://www.justreadfamilies.org/greatideas/middle.asp?style=print).

## Communicate about school

You want to know what's going on at school. For meaningful discussions with your child:

- **Ask questions** that encourage thoughtful answers. Instead of "Is everything okay at school?" try, "I hear history is pretty challenging. Tell me about the last chapter you read."
- **Express concern.** Instead of broad advice like "study harder," emphasize that you care about your child. Say, "Let's talk about how I can help."

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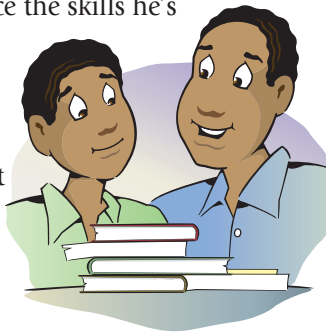


## How can parents avoid daily homework struggles?

**Q: My child is a good student, but getting him to do his homework can be torture! How can I get him to complete his assignments without turning it into a nightly battle?**

**A:** The reality is that homework isn't going away anytime soon. So that means you and your child will have to find a way to make homework time less of an ordeal for both of you. Here are some ways you can help:

- **Explain why it matters.** Talk to your child about the purpose of homework: It helps him practice and reinforce the skills he's learning in class.
- **Offer more control.** Your child can't choose *not* to do his homework, but he can choose *how* to do it. Would he rather sprawl on his bedroom floor than sit at his desk? Let him. Does he prefer music to utter silence? Turn on the radio for some quiet background music. Is after dinner a better time for him to work than before dinner? Fine.
- **Get involved.** Take an interest in the things your child is learning. Ask him to teach you something new. If you become engaged in his work, he might, too.



Source: C.C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *Parenting 911: How to Safeguard and Rescue Your 10- to 15-Year-Old from Substance Abuse, Depression, Sexual Encounters, Violence, Failure in School, Danger on the Internet, and Other Risky Situations*, Broadway Books.



## Do you know your child's learning style?

Most people learn more when they can learn in their preferred way. Take this quiz to see if you know your child's learning style and are encouraging her to make use of it. Answer *yes* for something you do often, and *no* for something you do rarely or never.

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you know** if having background music playing helps your child in concentrating? Listening may help her learn.
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you know** if your child needs visual aids, such as charts and pictures, to help her understand? She may learn visually.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you know** if your child learns better if she can move around? She may learn by doing something physical.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to try methods that use her learning style?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to tell her teachers which way she learns best? Mention her learning style to teachers when you have the chance.

**How well are you doing?** *Mostly yes answers mean you are helping your child take advantage of her preferred learning style.*

*"Even though your kids will consistently do the exact opposite of what you're telling them to do, you have to keep loving them just as much."*  
—Bill Cosby

## Teach your child about financial responsibility

Learning to manage money isn't just a vital life skill for your child—it's also a terrific way to help him become more responsible and practice important math skills.

To boost your child's "money smarts":

- **Share** your financial values.
- **Talk** about the difference between needs and wants.
- **Encourage** him to set financial goals.
- **Reinforce** the importance of saving.
- **Demonstrate** real-life budgeting.



Source: P. Richard, "15 Ways to Teach Kids About Money," FamilyEducation.com, <http://life.familyeducation.com/money-and-kids/parenting/36332.html?detoured=1>.

## Texting can be used to your advantage

If your child has a cell phone, she surely communicates with friends by texting. But also encourage her to communicate with *you* via text. When you text with your child:

- **You stay informed**, such as knowing when she gets on and off the school bus.
- **You can use a neutral tone** to give instructions, such as "Do your homework."

Source: K. Tuttle, "Texting tips for parents and teens," The Boston Globe, [www.boston.com/lifestyle/family/articles/2010/09/11/texting\\_tips\\_for\\_parents\\_and\\_teens/](http://www.boston.com/lifestyle/family/articles/2010/09/11/texting_tips_for_parents_and_teens/).

## Marijuana use by middle schoolers raises future risks

Marijuana use at any age is illegal and highly risky. Kids who abuse drugs are gambling with their academic future. And studies show that the earlier kids start, the worse it is. Let your child know you strongly disapprove of illegal drug use. Know who your child is with and what she's doing at all times.

Source: "Marijuana Use Among Teens," Teen Drug Abuse, [www.teendrugabuse.us/marijuana.html](http://www.teendrugabuse.us/marijuana.html).

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