

Helping Students Learn[®]

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



January 2012

Have your child resolve to use time effectively in the new year

You have experienced a semester of the many demands of middle school. The second semester can be even busier than the first. Using time wisely is essential. Resolve to support your child's efforts, and encourage your child to resolve to:

- **Expand her use of planners.**

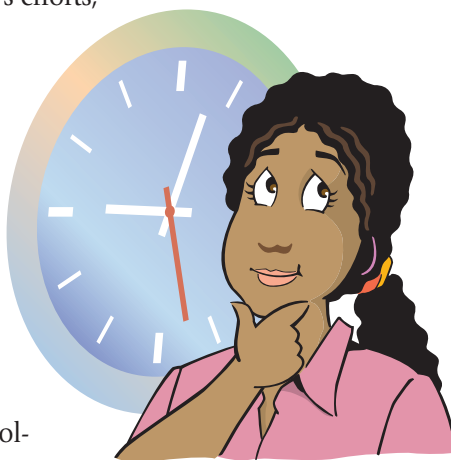
Your child should be writing down all assignments, upcoming tests and due dates. Consider adding study schedules. Keep a planner at home to complement the one from school.

- **Cut down on time wasters.**

Can your child watch 15 fewer minutes of TV daily, or spend 15 fewer minutes on social networking and texting? Divert the time to schoolwork. Set a good example by reducing some of your own time wasters.

- **Practice saying no.** Your child can't accept every invitation or volunteer for every event and continue to stay on top of her schoolwork. Using time wisely means sometimes responding with, "Thanks so much for thinking of me, but I have too much on my plate right now. Maybe another time."

- **Take a different approach for tests.** Just one time, have your child agree to study 20 minutes each night for one week, instead of waiting until the night before the test. Discuss the difference in how she used time, and what the result was.



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



Don't give in to parent peer pressure

Peer pressure starts to loom large in middle school. And kids are not the only ones who face the pressure. Many parents find themselves battling it too. Parent peer pressure is no better than the kind your child gets from his own peers. It still involves someone trying to get your child to do what isn't right. But this time it filters through you.

So, guard against the parent version of "everyone else is doing it."

Just because a parent has organized a co-ed sleepover doesn't mean your child should attend. Say, "I appreciate the invitation, but our rule right now is that Kevin doesn't attend these parties."

Above all, stick to your values no matter what others say to you. Your child will learn from your example of how to fight peer pressure.

Source: S. Borowitz, *When We're in Public, Pretend You Don't Know Me*, Warner Books.

Make excellent attendance the goal this semester

After winter break, it is especially important for your child not to miss any school. The pace of instruction starts to pick up as many teachers begin to focus on important end-of-year exams. It becomes more difficult to catch up and learn missed concepts after missed days. Unless your child is ill or you have a family emergency, strive to make sure he attends school every day this semester.

What is responsibility?

Talk with your child about traits that responsible people share. For example:

- **A sense of duty.** That means getting to school on time, finishing homework every night and doing chores.

- **Self-reliance.** That means handling many of her own tasks—such as doing her own laundry.



- **Persistence.** That means not giving up. Teach your child to cheer herself on. Saying, "I can do this," can help her through tough tasks.

Source: M.S. Josephson and others, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, Boys Town Press.

Keep up that reading habit

Your child may have more activities now that he's older, but he should always have time to read. Be sure to:

- **Continue** reading aloud.
- **Find** books on his interests.
- **Write** to him.
- **Include** reading in his online time.



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How can parents help calm anxious middle schoolers?

Q: Since my son started middle school, he seems to get stressed about everything—from homework to tests to what he should wear to school the next day. How can I help him manage his anxiety?

A: Middle school is full of big changes, and it's not unusual for kids to get worked up sometimes. There are some ways you can help your son manage his anxiety. For example:

- **Have your son** pay attention to signs of stress. If your child starts playing with his hair or biting his nails when he gets anxious, he'll know that it's time to stop and take several deep breaths.
- **Help your son** break larger projects into smaller parts. A big task is daunting, but a series of smaller ones may not be.
- **Encourage healthy habits.** A good diet and adequate sleep can go a long way toward easing anxiety.
- **Share ways to settle down** and blow off steam. Exercise, reading or chatting with a friend may be all your child needs to calm down.

Your stressed-out son may feel like the weight of the world is on his shoulders. So be sure to let him know you're always right there with him!

Source: C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, "10 Ways to Teach Your Child to Manage Stress," iVillage, www.ivillage.com/10-ways-teach-your-child-how-manage-stress/6-a-128327.



Are you using consequences wisely?

When you discipline your child, you sometimes have to assign consequences for breaking rules. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are giving consequences in an appropriate way:

- ___ **1. Do you make sure** consequences are realistic? Saying she's never going to watch TV again is unrealistic.
- ___ **2. Do you act** respectfully when giving out consequences?
- ___ **3. Do you make** consequences meaningful by involving something your child cares about? Example: If she visits an inappropriate website, she loses her computer privileges.
- ___ **4. Do you relate** consequences to the crime? Example: If she refuses to put her dirty clothes in the hamper, you don't do her laundry.

- ___ **5. Do you avoid** dragging up past mistakes or predicting mistakes your child may make in the future?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are setting suitable consequences. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Discipline is a symbol of caring to a child. He needs guidance."
—Bette Davis

Talk & listen to your child

Middle schoolers need to know that parents and other adults care about them and their opinions. To open the lines of communication, talk with your child about:

- **Classes she enjoys.**
- **Activities she likes.**
- **Her favorite music.**
- **Issues that are important to her.**

Source: C. Stevenson, "What Does it Mean to be Thirteen?" Association for Middle Level Education, www.aml.org/moya/PlanYourCelebration/PRResources/Thirteen/tabid/1196/Default.aspx.

Respect your child's new need for independence

Your child used to spend his evenings with the family—but now he'd rather hide out in his bedroom. It can be tough. Respect that your child is growing up and becoming an individual, but never let him forget that he is part of a family. He may not always want to go on family outings, so grant him some leeway. But make it clear there are times when he will be expected to come along.

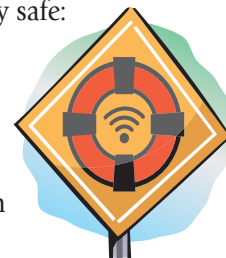
Source: T. McMahon, *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents with Kids 11 to 19*, Pocket Books.

Prioritize online safety

Your child may be a whiz on the computer, but does she know about online safety?

To help your child stay safe:

- **Talk** about the potential dangers.
- **Be** aware of what she does online.
- **Keep** the computer in a common area.



Don't feel intimidated if your child is more computer savvy than you are. Remember: You're the adult, and you know more about how the world works.

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