

Helping Students Learn[®]

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board

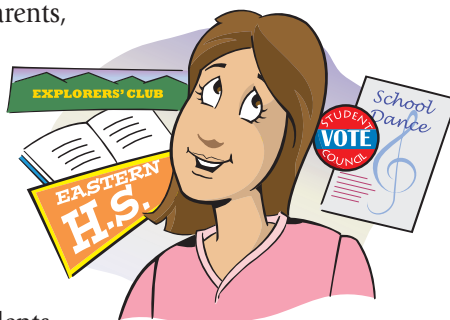


March 2012

High school isn't that far off!

For many middle schoolers and their parents, high school is only a few months away. Start preparing now for this huge transition. You can expect your child to have mixed feelings, such as:

- **Excitement** about exploring new interests, activities and friendships—and more freedom!
- **Anxiety** about new responsibilities. High school teachers know their students are maturing. They raise expectations and standards for academics, behavior and independence accordingly. Then there's the sheer size of the school and student body, and along with it a fear of feeling lost and not fitting in.



You can help by:

- **Tapping available resources.** Most middle schools give information and guidance about coping in high school. The high school, too, will likely offer one or more orientation sessions for new students. Urge your child to attend. If you can, attend sessions for parents.
- **Talking to your child.** Share some of your own high school memories. Discuss the classes your child wants to take and how she will manage her schedule. Have her talk with current high school students about their experiences.
- **Encouraging your child.** Starting high school is a huge milestone. Your child is growing up. Let her know you are proud of her and are looking forward to this new stage.

Source: E. Johnson, "Parent Involvement Essential to Successful Middle School Transition to High School," EduGuide, www.eduguide.org/library/viewarticle/2077/.



Explain why respect is important

You've talked with your child many times about how to treat others with respect. But have you had a good discussion about *why*? Middle school students want to do more than just follow orders. They are ready for higher-level thinking, so it is important that they know the reasons behind their actions. Tell your child that being respectful means:

- **Being fair.** Rude and disruptive behavior is not fair. In a classroom, disrespectful behavior is

not fair to those who are trying to teach and those who are trying to learn.

- **Being respected in return.** Your child will benefit from a reputation as a respectful, kind and polite person. Respectful people receive greater responsibilities and freedoms. They are the kind of people others look up to.

Source: L. Sonna, *The Everything Parenting a Teenager Book*, Adams Media.

Expand 'prior knowledge'

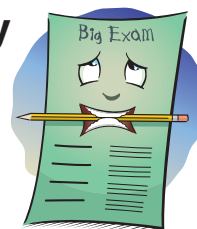
A reader's ability to understand what he reads has a lot to do with what he knows before turning the first page. This is called "prior knowledge" and it allows a reader to become more interested and engaged.

Expand your child's world by exposing him to different topics and themes. Encourage him to read newspapers, visit museums and see cultural performances. Share your own life experiences, too.

Source: K. Kuelthau and others, *Literacy and Learning: Strategies for Middle and Secondary School Teachers*, Houghton Mifflin.

Calm test anxiety

In middle school, kids begin to realize that test scores can affect their futures. And some freeze up whenever a big exam or standardized test is put in front of them. Help your child reduce test anxiety by reminding her to:



- **Ask** her teacher for tips on what to study.
- **Practice** calming techniques, like deep breathing.
- **Ignore** how quickly other students finish and focus only on her own work.

Don't let 'spring fever' affect attendance

The first rule for doing well in school is a simple one: *Your child needs to be there.* That's true even on warm spring days when he might rather be doing something else.



Poor attendance can lead to all sorts of problems, including:

- **Earning poor grades.**
- **Having to repeat a grade.**
- **Dropping out of school.**



How can parents encourage children to exercise?

Q: Unfortunately, my child didn't make the baseball team. Now he doesn't exercise at all—and I know that healthy children do better in school. How can I get him moving again?

A: By walking the walk! In other words, by making exercise part of your life, too. If you tell your child to get up and move while you hang out on the couch, it won't mean much to him. But if you slip on your sneakers and start working up a sweat? He'll get the message!

To make physical fitness a regular part of your routine this spring:

- **Examine your downtime.** Everyone enjoys doing nothing at times. But it shouldn't be your default position. If you and your child have been stuck behind desks all day, you both need to move your muscles. So go outside and throw a ball around. Shoot some baskets together. Get your blood pumping and feel the day's stress melt away.
- **Keep the car in park.** Don't automatically reach for the keys when it's time to run a quick errand. Instead, ask yourself, "Is it close by?" If the answer is *yes*, get your jacket and ask your child to come along. Walk to the store for that loaf of bread or quart of milk. You'll be completing your errands while getting exercise and precious time together with your child.



Can your child handle peer pressure?

As your child gets older, she's more likely to experience peer pressure to try things that may be harmful or wrong for her. Answer the questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're providing your child with strategies to resist peer temptation:

1. **Do you make** your family values clear to your child?
2. **Do you give** your child practice by role-playing peer pressure situations at home?
3. **Do you explain** that peer pressure is an occasion when it is okay to be rude or walk away?
4. **Do you tell** your child to blame you? Example: "It sounds like fun. But my mom already told me she'd ground me for a month if she ever caught me doing that."

5. **Do you focus** on the lesson if your child slips by discussing what she learned and planning for how to avoid the problem in future?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are actively helping your child deal with negative peer pressure. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"Your future depends on many things, but mostly on you."
—Frank Tyger

What makes a good leader?

Most people think of a leader as someone who takes charge and gives others direction. But true leadership involves more than that. To help your child develop leadership skills, talk about qualities such as:

- **Civic responsibility.** Leaders step up to care for people who need help.
- **Selflessness.** Leaders want to help others succeed.
- **Willingness to learn.** Leaders are always open to new ideas.
- **Organization.** Leaders plan ahead.
- **Flexibility.** Leaders know that everyone learns from mistakes.

Source: B. A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Check your expectations

Parents need to set expectations for their children. When clearly expressed, these expectations improve children's self-esteem and help them grow into young adults.

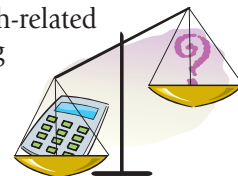
Think about your expectations for your child. Make sure they are fair, serve a purpose and realistically fit your child's needs.

Source: K.V. Thompson, "Setting Realistic Expectations for Children & Adolescents," <http://pralab.tamu.edu/documents/SettingRealisticExpectations.pdf>.

Share the value of math

When a child doesn't like math, it's often because he can't see how it relates to daily life. To make math relatable:

- **Give** your child math-related tasks, such as looking over a receipt.
- **Involve** him in family budgeting.
- **Avoid** using phrases like, "I always hated math."
- **Mention** careers where math is essential.



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