

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District  
School Board



March 2013

## Different involvement is needed in your child's middle school years

When your child was in elementary school, you may have helped with his homework each night, volunteered in his classroom and attended lots of school events. But now that he is older and his school experience is changing, research says it may be time to change your approach to your involvement, too.

Despite what your child may be telling you, he still needs you to be involved. But research shows that, during middle school, what parents do *at home* to support their child's education can be twice as effective as what they do *at school*. The best things parents can do for a middle schooler include:

- **Communicating expectations.** Simply telling your child that you expect him to work hard and succeed has a big impact on his learning.
- **Reinforcing what he's learning at school.** Encouraging your child to take what he's learning in school (such as math) and apply it to his everyday life (such as sticking to a budget at the mall) can help him see why education matters.
- **Discussing his future.** Does your child want to be a veterinarian? A writer? Explore the requirements for different professions. Whatever he dreams of doing, a solid education is his ticket to achieving his goal.
- **Finding learning strategies** that work for him—watching, listening, doing, reasoning, interacting with others. What's best for your child's individual needs?



Source: D. Viadero, "Scholars: Parent-School Ties Should Shift in Teen Years," Education Week, [www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/11/18/12parent\\_ep.h29.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/11/18/12parent_ep.h29.html).



## Focus on preventing bullying at school

Studies show that as many as one out of four kids has been the victim of bullying at school. Bullying affects children's attendance, schoolwork and even their health. To prevent bullying:

- **Encourage your child** to stay in supervised areas. When no adults are present, she should be with at least one other child.
- **Tell your child** that watching while someone is bullied is nearly as bad as doing the bullying. Your child should tell an adult. If she feels safe doing so, she should stand up to the bully: "Leave Jimmy alone!"
- **Be clear** that you will not tolerate her posting nasty comments on the Internet or in text messages—this is still bullying.

Source: J. Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D., and R. Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D., "The Buzz on Bullying," American School Counselor Association, <http://tinyurl.com/ajg9mzv>.

## Look for websites that encourage reading

You want your child to read for pleasure, but he'd rather spend his free time online. What's the solution? Combine the two! Here are two reading-rich websites to try:

1. **Read.gov** ([www.read.gov/teens](http://www.read.gov/teens)) is run by the Library of Congress. Find reading resources and e-books of literary classics.
2. **RIF Reading Planet** ([www.rif.org/kids/readingplanet.htm](http://www.rif.org/kids/readingplanet.htm)) is a section of the Reading is Fundamental website designed just for kids, with activities based on books, book suggestions and more.

## Assembling items builds important skills

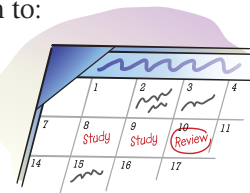
The next time you purchase something marked "some assembly required," do the job with your middle schooler. Ask her to read through the instructions, gather the necessary tools and organize the steps. She'll be building thinking, math and science skills—and self-esteem.



## Review these test-taking strategies with your child

Tests for your middle school child are likely to be more frequent, challenging and abstract than they were when he was in elementary school. To help your child improve test performance, tell him to:

- **Schedule** plenty of study time.
- **Keep** learning styles in mind when studying.
- **Use** important facts and concepts to make practice tests.
- **Save** the last day of studying for review.



Source: W.R. Luckie and W. Smethurst, *Study Power: Study Skills to Improve Your Learning and Your Grades*, Brookline Books.



## What can I do when my child lies to me about school?

**Q:** My child told me she was doing fine in school. Then her report card came home. She wasn't doing fine! She has also lied about not having homework. What should we do?

**A:** When kids lie, it's often because they're scared. They worry that they'll disappoint parents and get in trouble. So they lie and think the problem will go away. To address this, you can take a two-pronged approach:

### 1. Start by asking yourself some questions:

- **Are my rules** too strict?
- **Are my expectations** reasonable?
- **Am I quick** to blame and criticize?
- **Do I react** calmly to the truth?

### 2. Then talk with your child:

- **Focus on we, not you.** "We can solve this problem." Explain that it will be a team effort, and your child can count on your support.
- **Avoid accusations and demands.** Don't say, "You never study" or "Look me in the eye!" To think clearly, kids need to be relaxed.
- **Give your child time** to reflect and talk. Try to determine what is causing the difficulty.
- **Offer reassurance.** Say she's not the only one who has faced such a dilemma. Start discussing solutions. Work with the school.



## Are you ready for first romances?

Early as it seems, the middle school years are when many children have their first girlfriend or boyfriend. Are you ready for it? Answer *yes* for something you do often, and *no* for something you do only rarely:

1. **Do you talk** to your child about the basics of dating—mutual respect, kindness and consideration?
2. **Do you remain** calm? A big part of middle school relationships is friendship.
3. **Do you discuss** rules with your child like you do regarding other friendships? Always know where he is and who he's with.
4. **Do you respect** your child's feelings? What may seem like a "crush" to you may feel like more to your child.
5. **Do you share** your family's values? Remind your child that

school is his priority. Talk about consequences of risky behavior.

**How did you score?** Mostly *yes* answers mean you are prepared to help your child through this phase. Mostly *no*? Try the corresponding idea from the quiz.

*"Even as kids reach adolescence, they need more than ever for us to watch over them. Adolescence is not about letting go. It's about hanging on during a very bumpy ride."*

—Ron Taffel

## Help your child stay on track by using to-do lists

Taking on new responsibilities requires being organized. That's a lot to ask of a middle schooler. To-do lists can help. Each Sunday night, have your child list goals for the week. Then have her make daily to-do lists on index cards. Your child can add to them at school as she receives assignments. Checking off tasks will give her a well-deserved sense of accomplishment.

## Stay fair and open-minded

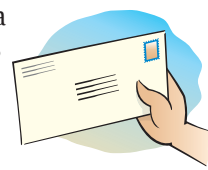
When it comes to disciplining a middle schooler, there is no one-size-fits-all standard to apply. But there are some general things to keep in mind:

- **Let your child explain.** His actions may have been intentional, but they could just as easily have been accidental.
- **Involve your child in the discipline.** "This is the second note about your behavior in class. What do you think our next move should be?"
- **Avoid labels.** Your child hasn't done his homework, but that doesn't make him a "slacker." Labels hurt and can become self-fulfilling prophecies.
- **Be firm but fair.** No matter how angry you are, keep your cool.

Source: D.L. Hill, "Disciplining Older Children," HealthyChildren.org, <http://tinyurl.com/d63afht>.

## Promote good citizenship

Children's ideas can have a positive impact on schools and communities. When kids are heard, they feel empowered and want to do more. Encourage your child to share her ideas by writing to:



- **A newspaper editor.**
- **The school principal.**
- **Local and state representatives.**

### Helping Students Learn®

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