

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



October 2018

Dodson Middle School  
Home of the Dolphins

## Encourage your middle schooler to put study skills into practice

Without strong study skills, even kids who pay attention in class face challenges in middle school. Study skills are the tools that enable students to take charge of their own learning. The best way your child can sharpen her study skills is to practice them every day. Encourage her to:

- **Read ahead.** By scanning the next day's chapter or lesson ahead of time, your child will be better prepared for class. She'll know what her questions are and will be able to participate more.
- **Review class notes.** Even when your child doesn't have homework in a class, she should look over her class notes at night. It is a quick way to reinforce the material she's learning.
- **Minimize distractions.** Have your child get a snack *before* settling down to study, and turn off devices she doesn't need to complete her work.
- **Ask for help.** If your child is confused about the particulars of an assignment, she can ask a classmate. If she is struggling with a concept, she should talk to her teacher the next day and ask for help.
- **Celebrate success.** When your child finishes a challenging assignment, encourage her to give herself a small reward. Remind her that her dedication was the key to her success!



Source: *Homework & Study Skills: Engaging Parents to Support Student Learning*, The Parent Institute.



## Get teacher insights at a conference

Asking for a parent-teacher conference is a very effective way to learn more about your child and how to support him in school. In middle school, these conferences are often brief. To make the best use of your time:

- **Jot down a list of questions** and things you want to discuss ahead of time.
- **Be prompt.** Lateness may delay other conferences or shorten your time with the teacher.
- **Stay on topic.** Focus on your child's learning and avoid chatting about things that don't affect it.
- **Keep an open mind.** Listen carefully to what the teacher has to say before offering a response. Be prepared to hear about your child's weaknesses as well as his strengths.
- **Ask for suggestions** of ways you can help at home. You and the teacher are a team!
- **Take notes.** This will help you remember what you discussed.
- **Talk with your child** about any plans you and the teacher make.

## Don't blame bad luck

Things at school may not always turn out the way your child hopes they will. But chalking these times up to bad luck can make her feel like a powerless victim.



Instead, empower her to take action. When something goes wrong, ask what she can learn from it. Help her think of ways she could handle similar situations in the future.

## Support reading at home

Research shows that students' ideas about their own reading abilities affect their achievement. That's why it is vital for you to help your child enjoy reading and see himself as a reader! Here are five ways:

1. **Set a daily** family reading time.
2. **Read aloud** with your child.
3. **Discuss books** you each like.
4. **Fill your home** with reading materials.
5. **Don't insist** that your child read books in his free time that he doesn't like.

Source: M.I. Susperreguy and others, "Self-Concept Predicts Academic Achievement Across Levels of the Achievement Distribution: Domain Specificity for Math and Reading," *Child Development*, niswc.com/readingconcept.

## Counselors help with issues that can hamper learning

To be productive learners, students need good mental health. School counselors are key players on the educational team. In addition to helping your child plan for her academic future, her counselor can help her:

- **Solve problems** with friends.
- **Develop coping skills**, including methods for dealing with bullying.
- **Find support**, if your child or your family is facing a crisis.





## What can I do to keep stress from affecting my child?

**Q:** My eighth grader takes tough classes, plays sports and has a lot of friends. He's on the go all the time! It has to be stressful. How can I help?

**A:** Most middle schoolers feel a little stress from time to time—and it's usually harmless. To determine if your son's stress is on overload, ask yourself:

- **Does he always seem tired** or on edge?
- **Does he have trouble** concentrating?
- **Is he frequently unhappy**, angry or self-critical?

If the answers are *yes*, he may indeed feel overstressed. To ease the situation:

- **Talk about it.** You might say, "I understand how hard you work to do well in each of your classes. It's a real challenge, isn't it?"
- **Help him reset his expectations.** Remind him that he can't be all things to all people, and no one expects him to be.
- **Review his schedule** and set priorities. He'll have to fulfill his school responsibilities, but he can scale back extracurricular and social activities.
- **Offer love and support.** Let him know that he can come to you when he feels overwhelmed or unable to cope.



## Are you making time for your child?

Your middle schooler probably doesn't cling to you the way she used to when she was younger, but she needs your time and attention just as much as ever. Are you there for your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you create** opportunities to spend time together doing things that interest your child?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you make** the most of times when you have your child's undivided attention, such as in the car?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you eat** at least one meal a day as a family?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you allow** your child to bring friends to some family activities?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to have experiences that boost her independence?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are adapting to your child's changing needs for togetherness. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"In family relationships, love is really spelled T.I.M.E."*  
—Dieter F. Uchtdorf

## Increase comfort with math

Educators have identified several factors that help students succeed with math, including:

- **A sense of well-being.** Your child should feel safe making mistakes and taking risks in order to learn. Emphasize effort and progress, not grades.
- **Playfulness.** Help your child have fun with math. Act out story problems. Play math games.
- **Passion.** Your child can catch this from you. Show enthusiasm for math: "I love it when doing math helps me save money."

Source: M. Pearse, "Non-Math Essentials for Learning Math," Edutopia, [nswc.com/non-math](http://nswc.com/non-math).

## Sleep shouldn't be social

Adequate sleep is critical to your child's performance in school. But in a recent study of 12- to 13-year-olds, more than one-fifth of the students reported waking up every night to check social media. To help your child get the sleep she needs, keep her phone and other devices outside her bedroom at night.



Source: S. Power, C. Taylor and K. Horton, "Sleepless in school? The social dimensions of young people's bedtime rest and routines," *Journal of Youth Studies*.

## Model the importance of responsible behavior

It may not always seem like it, but your middle schooler looks to you to learn how to act. To encourage him to act responsibly:

- **Let your child know** that you value responsible traits like self-control and persistence. Model these qualities, and praise him when he demonstrates them.
- **Let your child see** you take responsibility for your mistakes. "I left my gardening tools in the rain, and now they are rusted. I should have been more careful."

### Helping Students Learn®

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