

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

MIDDLE SCHOOL



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Granite Falls Middle School
Geared For Motivation & Success

You still have a large part to play in your child's school success

You may be wondering how involved you need to be with your child's education now that she's in middle school. Can you really make a difference? The answer is yes!

Studies show that parents have a big effect on their children's academic achievement when they stay involved throughout their school years. Parent engagement leads to better test scores, higher graduation rates and lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse.



To play an active role:

- **Ask your child about what she's learning.** Show your interest. Ask her to teach you about the aftermath of the Civil War, or how to find the slope in a math problem. Make a point of giving her your undivided attention when she talks about school.
- **Set high, realistic expectations.** Your child is more likely to believe in herself if she knows you believe in her. Talk to her about her goals, and cheer her on as she strives to reach them.
- **Be a role model.** Inspire your child to keep trying by displaying perseverance yourself. When solving a problem, discuss a variety of ways to do it.
- **Get involved at school.** Join the parent-teacher organization. Ask how you can help. Connecting with teachers and other involved parents can help you find resources and take action that will help your child.

Source: S.D. Sparks and A. Harwin, "How Parents Widen—or Shrink—Achievement Gaps," Education Week, niswc.com/involve.



Offer tools that make organizing easier

Your child now has more classes, more teachers, and probably more homework than he did in elementary school. To manage, he'll have to get and stay organized. Encourage him to use these useful tools:

- **Sticky notes.** Your child can write reminders and stick them on books and binders that he needs to bring home to do homework.
- **To-do lists.** Have your child write down everything he needs to do each day.
- **A calendar.** Writing down his homework time, due dates and activities lets your child see how much time he really has available.
- **Schedules.** Schedules help kids get things done. Have your child make one every day. For example:
 - 3:00 Home from school
 - 3:15 Relax, snack
 - 3:30 Homework
 - 4:30 Read
 - 5:00 Dress for lacrosse practice
 - 5:30 Leave for practice

Real learning takes thought

To succeed in school, your child will have to do more than just memorize science formulas or historic events. She will have to think about what she's learning and apply her knowledge in different situations.

As your child studies, encourage her to make connections. Have her ask herself, "How does this relate to something I have learned or experienced before?"

Three steps improve textbook reading skills

When your child reads academic material, he is reading to remember. Share three steps to help him get the most from this kind of reading:



1. **Scan the text.** He should pay attention to graphics, headlines and boldface text.
2. **Read it again slowly.** Your child should take notes and write down words or concepts he doesn't understand.
3. **Review the reading.** Going through it again can improve his comprehension.

Adapt rules, not discipline

Does your child seem to grow and change on a daily basis? You may need to adjust your specific rules and consequences as she develops. But your approach to discipline should stay consistent. Remember to:

- **Stay calm.** If your child's behavior has upset you, or if she is angry or upset, take a break before dealing with the issue.
- **Hear your child out.** Listening demonstrates respectful behavior.
- **Make it clear** that some rules are non-negotiable—such as rules involving safety.



Source: L. Markham, "Beyond Discipline for Preetens," Aha! Parenting, niswc.com/consistent.



How can I help my child avoid overscheduling?

Q: My son enjoys lots of middle school activities. But he signed up for so many last year that he had a hard time finishing his homework, and he barely passed some of his classes. How can I help him make better choices this year?

A: Extracurricular activities can help kids make friends, feel connected to school and explore their interests. These are all positive things. But completing schoolwork and studying should be your child's first priority. Learning how to make time for both work *and* fun will help him all his life. To help him weigh his choices:

- **Talk about his classes.** What kind of daily work will they involve? Your child should remember that he will be expected to read every day.
- **Discuss his interests.** Which activities did he enjoy most last year? Which ones did he get the most out of? He may have liked all of them, but ask him to evaluate them honestly and rank them.
- **Help him think about the downsides** of favorite activities. Soccer was fun, but was he too tired after practice to study?

After he's thought about these things, help him choose one or two activities he likes best that also fit his schedule. Check back in a few weeks. If he's struggling in class, you can make changes. If not, he may have found the right mix for him.



Are you starting the year off right?

As they face the challenges and changes of a new school year, students may need some help from parents to handle them. Are you ready to help your child transition back to school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you know** the classes your child is taking, the names of her teachers and the name of her counselor?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to use a planner to keep track of assignments and test dates?
- ___ **3. Have you asked** your child if she is finding her way around the school all right?
- ___ **4. Do you understand** that your child may be independent one minute and clingy the next? Are you patient?

- ___ **5. Do you provide** stability by continuing familiar routines at home?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are easing your child's return to school. For each no, try that idea.

"Even though the future seems far away, it is actually beginning right now."
—Mattie J.T. Stepanek

Bust common myths about alcohol and drug use

Your child may have heard many things about drugs and alcohol use that aren't accurate. Discuss the dangers and share the facts about these myths:

- **Trying it a few times can't hurt.** In fact, younger users are especially susceptible to addiction.
- **As long as no one is driving, it's no big deal.** Recreational drug use and underage drinking are illegal. An arrest for either is serious business.

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, "Too Much, Too Soon, Too Risky," The Cool Spot, nismc.com/drugs_middle.

Exercise boosts brainpower

Exercise can improve your child's mood and his physical fitness. And research says it can even help him learn. Regular exercise can:

- **Increase cognitive function** and help your child stay alert in class.
- **Improve memory.**

Source: M. Macedonia and C. Repetto, "Why Your Body Can Jog Your Mind," *Frontiers in Psychology*, nismc.com/brainpower.

Strengthen your child's sense of self-worth

Self-doubt can make kids more likely to give in to peer pressure or attempt to fit in at any cost—with negative results, at home and at school. To help keep your child emotionally strong:



- **Encourage friendships** based on mutual respect and acceptance.
- **Show an interest** in her interests.
- **Discuss physical changes** she can expect and how kids mature differently.

Source: C. Francis, "Surviving Middle School: Tips for Parents from A Middle School Counselor," American School Counselor Association, nismc.com/counselor_middle.

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