

# Helping Students Learn

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Lawton Middle School

November

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How is your child managing middle school classes?

**Q: My daughter seems intimidated by her workload this year. How can I keep her from feeling overwhelmed?**

**A:** Handling six or seven classes can worry even the most enthusiastic student. To help your child divide her workload into smaller, more manageable tasks:

- **Deconstruct big assignments.** If your child is having fits about the idea of writing a term paper, for example, explain that it's really just a series of little jobs. (Choose a topic, gather research materials, write an outline, etc.) Help her make a plan for completing these steps. Use daily to-do lists.
- **Give your child a calendar.** She should note when big projects are due, as well as the dates of recurring assignments (such as weekly journal entries). If she's working on a long-term project, note deadlines for finishing its parts. Seeing everything laid out in front of her puts her in control.
- **Regroup each week.** Every Friday, review assignments with your child. What has she completed? What's on the horizon in the next several days? See how well she's using her calendar. Is it up-to-date? If it's almost the end of the month, has she flipped the page to see what's coming up? Compliment her organizational skills!



## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Give the gift of internal motivation

There are two kinds of motivation: *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. Extrinsic motivation has to do with outside rewards like prizes. Intrinsic motivation, however, happens on the inside. It's the good feeling that comes from reaching a goal. To focus less on the outside and more on the inside:

- **Be supportive.** As your child studies, show that you care. Give him a hug. Offer help when he needs it.
- **Don't compare your child to others.** If he feels that he doesn't "measure up," his motivation will be hurt, not helped.
- **Praise your child.** Don't get overly gushy or insincere, but say that you admire his hard work.

Source: Marilyn Atherley, "Motivating Students to Learn," PageWise, Inc., [http://de.essortment.com/motivatingstude\\_rbsm.htm](http://de.essortment.com/motivatingstude_rbsm.htm).

## DISCIPLINE

### Avoid discipline mistakes

If your discipline efforts constantly frustrate you and your child, it's time to rethink what you're doing. Make sure you:

- **Focus** on a few key rules. Discuss rules and consequences ahead of time.
- **Support** school rules at home. Different rules could confuse your child.
- **Avoid** giving lectures. Instead, state the facts simply.

Source: Janet E. Heining, Ph.D., and Sharon K. Weiss, M.Ed., *From Chaos to Calm*, ISBN: 0-399-52661-7 (Perigee, 1-800-788-6262, [www.penguinputnam.com](http://www.penguinputnam.com)).

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Boost reading skills

Reading comprehension is the ability to fully understand what is read. It also includes being able to draw conclusions from reading material.



To improve these skills:

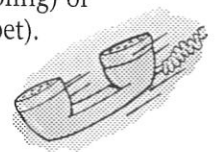
- **Talk** with your child about parts of the text. What is the main idea? In fiction, who are the main characters?
- **Help** your child think critically. Ask for her opinions about the reading.

Source: Marguerite C. Radencich, *How to Help Your Child With Homework*, ISBN: 1-57542-006-6 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Keep teachers informed

Students do best when parents and teachers work together. Even if a parent-teacher conference is far off, tell the school about big changes in your child's life. They might be positive (the birth of a sibling) or negative (the death of a pet). But school staff want to understand what's affecting your child.



Source: Rosemarie Clark, Donna Hawkins and Beth Vachon, *The School-Savvy Parent*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Keep emphasis on good manners

Good manners contribute to a comfortable learning environment at school, promoting better grades. You may feel that you have been reminding your child about his manners for the last 10 years, but it doesn't seem to be sinking in.

Keep at it. Remember, many children are forgetful at this age. They probably don't mean to be rude. They are just thinking about so many things that good manners escape them. Make it easier by:

- **Telling your child exactly what you expect.** Be mindful of his needs when you do so. For example, "When we get to Aunt Paula's house, I expect you to say hello to her, to Uncle Jack and to Grandma. Then you can go read your book until it's time for dinner."
- **Giving gentle reminders.** Saying, "I'll fall over if you ever remember to take a message," does not teach your child how to speak to adults on the phone. Instead, "It would be a big help if you would write down the caller's name and number next time you answer a call for me. I am going to put a pen and a pad of paper next to the phone."
- **Modeling good manners for him.** If you speak nicely to everyone, including your child's friends, he will too. You may not be the first person to notice this, though. Most middle schoolers are more polite and mannerly outside their own homes than in them.

Source: Robin Goldstein, *Stop Treating Me Like a Kid! Everyday Parenting: The 10- to 13-Year-Old*, ISBN: 0-1401-7945-3 (Penguin Books USA, 1-800-526-0275, <http://us.penguingroup.com>).



## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you helping your middle schooler improve his writing skills at home?

Writing is an essential academic skill. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child develop it.

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you encourage** your child to "brainstorm" (think of ideas) before he writes?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you suggest** ways for your child to organize ideas, such as on index cards?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you have** your child make several drafts of a composition before turning it in?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you give** your child editing tips, such as "Make sure ideas flow smoothly"?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you read** your child's work and offer compliments and helpful feedback?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer shows that you're emphasizing good writing skills. For each *no* answer, try using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child."  
—Maria Montessori

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Encourage your child to fulfill commitments

Middle schoolers often have many commitments (family, school, sports, lessons, etc.). Make sure your child doesn't take on too many. Then have her:

- **Use a schedule.** She can plan ahead and keep track of obligations.
- **Focus on teamwork.** Remind her that others are depending on her.
- **Finish what she starts.** Expect her to stick with commitments.

Source: Leslie Garisto Pfaff, "The Practice Problem," *Parents*, May 2004 (Gruner + Jahr USA Publishing, 1-800-727-3682, [www.parents.com](http://www.parents.com)).

## AFTER SCHOOL

### Set up, enforce a family 'keep in touch' policy

Your family probably has an after-school routine that works well for you. Remind your child that if he wants to change plans, he has to contact you. He should ask permission, for example, before going to a friend's house. You should always know how to reach each other.

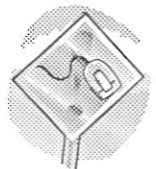
Source: Shari Steelsmith, *Go to Your Room! Consequences That Teach*, ISBN: 0-9650477-2-5 (Raefield-Roberts Publishers and Parenting Press, 1-800-992-6657, [www.parentingpress.com](http://www.parentingpress.com)).

## WHEN YOU NEED HELP

### Help your child surf safely

Your child is probably a whiz at learning online. But does she know how to keep herself safe there? Parents and kids need to learn Internet safety rules. Many groups want to help. A good place to start is the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children ([www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org)). Visit its site yourself, and then share tips with your child.

Source: "When Online Kids Are at Risk: Where to Get Help," *Net Family News*, <http://netfamilynews.org/emergencyhelp.html>.



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