

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Cactus Canyon Junior High School



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Create an environment that makes your child want to read

Studies show that screen use is up and reading is way down on most middle schoolers' lists of fun things to do. But strong reading skills are critical for success in school. Helping your child learn to enjoy reading—and spend more time doing it—nurtures those skills.

Here's how to start:

- **Show the way.** Your reading habits can have a huge impact on your child's reading habits. Let him see you choose to relax with a book instead of streaming a movie, or read the newspaper instead of watching the news on TV.
- **Designate a daily reading time.** During a short period each day, turn off the TV, music and other digital devices. Suggest that family members use this time to read. Don't force your child, though. Just kick back with your own reading and see if he follows your lead.
- **Turn to magazines.** Whether he's obsessed with sports, cars or music, there's probably a magazine devoted to one of your child's interests. Consider subscribing, or bring home the latest issue from the library.
- **Let him choose.** A graphic novel about his favorite big-screen action hero can be a good choice if it inspires him to read.



Source: J.M. Twenge and others, "Trends in U.S. Adolescents' Media Use, 1976-2016: The Rise of Digital Media, the Decline of TV, and the (Near) Demise of Print," *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, niswc.com/readmore.



Help your child study math like a whiz

What do top math students do that could help your middle schooler? Researchers surveyed students who participated in a well-known math competition about habits that contribute to their success. These students:

- **Try to understand** the concept behind a problem, rather than simply memorizing a formula to solve it. This helps them recognize similar problems.
- **Practice.** Once they figure out how to solve a problem, they practice solving similar problems.
- **Concentrate.** Most of the students say they study alone, and nearly half minimize distractions

such as TV, music and social media while they study.

- **Don't give up.** When working on a challenging problem, these kids keep trying. If one method doesn't work, they try another approach. Many also seek help from a teacher or go online to find solution strategies.

Source: L. Loewus, "Survey: Habits of Talented Math Students," *Education Week*, niswc.com/mathsuccess.

Preparation calms nerves

Your child will be able to go into a test more relaxed if she knows she is prepared. When a test is coming up, encourage her to:

- **Start studying** several days in advance. If your child doesn't understand something, she'll have time to get help.
- **Take practice tests.** She may find some in her textbook, or she can use her reading and class notes to make her own.

Share this thought process

Mistakes are opportunities to learn. But sometimes, that doesn't happen and students make the same errors again and again. Learning takes thought. Review this process with your child for thinking through mistakes:

1. **Notice** what went right.
2. **Figure** out what went wrong.
3. **Take steps** to correct the problem.
4. **Apply** the knowledge to a new situation.

Communicate with care

It may not always seem like it, but you have a great deal of influence on your child. To be a positive source of support and guidance:

- **React calmly** to middle school drama. If your child thinks you'll overreact, she may not tell you what's going on.
- **Avoid making snap judgments** about your child. Try to find out the cause of her behavior and address that.
- **Use examples** from books, movies or the news to start discussions about important topics with your child. This avoids the embarrassment many kids feel when things get personal.



Source: P.L. Fagell, LCOC, *Middle School Matters*, Hachette.



How can I counteract the influence of mean friends?

Q: My daughter is hanging around some not-so-nice kids in middle school, and I'm afraid she'll give in to peer pressure and become not-so-nice herself. What can I do?

A: Have a conversation with your child, but not necessarily about particular people. Instead, ask questions about her friends in general, such as: What activities do they like to do together? What does your child enjoy about hanging out with them? What values do they share?

It could be that these friends make her feel more mature. Or it could be that she isn't really comfortable about the way they act, but isn't sure what to do about it.

To help your child navigate this tricky area:

- **Avoid negative comments** about her friends. Belittling them or their upbringing may make your child feel the need to defend them.
- **Ask gentle questions.** "How did you feel when Danielle acted that way toward the new girl?"
- **Offer support.** Peer pressure can be overwhelming. Listen to your child if she brings a difficult friend-related problem to you.
- **Be firm.** If you have real misgivings about some of her friends, set boundaries. Supervise the time your child spends with them.



Are you strengthening school ties?

Students who feel connected to school are more likely to perform better academically. Participation in clubs and activities reinforces this connection. Are you helping your child get involved? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

___ **1. Have you looked** over the list of school activities with your child?

with teachers after school, or join a homework club?

___ **2. Do you urge** your child to participate in at least one club or activity of his choice?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child feel part of the middle school community. For each no, try that idea.

___ **3. Do you show** enthusiasm if your child wants to try a new club or activity?

___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to attend school plays, concerts, games and events?

___ **5. Do you suggest** that your child take advantage of time

"Education is all a matter of building bridges."

—Ralph Ellison

Avoid using harsh discipline with your middle schooler

Research shows that using harsh discipline on children—hitting, verbal or physical threats—damages family relationships. This causes kids to rely on friends instead, which often leads to risky behavior and problems in school. To discipline without damage:

- **Establish a set of rules** and the consequences for breaking them. Discuss these with your child.
- **Enforce consequences calmly.** Anger won't help.
- **Reward good behavior** with trust.

Source: Society for Research in Child Development, "Harsh parenting predicts low educational attainment through increasing peer problems," ScienceDaily, niswc.com/harsh.

Meet with teachers to hear how to support learning

There doesn't have to be an official parent-teacher conference day for you to meet with a teacher. You can always request a meeting to ask questions or discuss your child's progress.

Bring a list of questions with you, so you won't forget what you want to ask. If the teacher mentions a concern, ask for ideas on addressing it. Work together on a plan of things your child can do in class and you can do at home.



Expect specific expectations

Your child is more likely to live up to your expectations in school if you make them clear. It's also important for him to be clear about his expectations for himself.

If your middle schooler says he expects a good grade on his next test, have him tell you exactly how he plans to achieve it. Suggest that he put his plans in writing.

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