

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



April 2017

Howell Township Public Schools

Review test-success strategies that really make the grade

As the end of the year approaches, final exams appear on the horizon. If this is your child's first year in middle school, she may not have taken finals before. To help her succeed on these key tests, have your child:

- **Start preparing now.** End-of-year tests can come quickly, one after another. Your child may have four tests in one week. Studying all that material should begin weeks in advance, not days.
- **Schedule her time.** Have your child put her homework and study times on a calendar. For example: Monday—do math homework, study science for 30 minutes before dinner, study English for 30 minutes after dinner.
- **Get enough sleep.** The night before a test, your child should do a final review of the material. Then she should go to bed at a time that will allow her to get at least nine hours of sleep.
- **Skim before she starts.** If possible, your child should read over the entire test when she receives it. She should determine which questions she can answer easily and do those first. Then she can go back to the ones she isn't so sure about and give them some more thought.
- **Eliminate incorrect answers.** If the test is multiple choice, your child should cross out any answers she knows are not right. If she doesn't know the right answer, she'll have fewer options to choose from.



Take every chance to listen

Middle school students don't always share a lot of details about their lives with their parents. So when they do want to talk, it's important for parents to stop and listen.

If your child comes up and says, "The coolest thing happened today," don't miss a chance to communicate because you're busy checking your email. Give her your full attention—she just might open up again.

Help a tutor help your child

If homework has become a constant battle or if your child's grades are slipping, you may want to have a tutor provide some one-on-one learning support. To help your child get the most out of tutoring sessions:

- **Provide a distraction-free place** for the tutor to work with him.
- **Set reachable goals,** such as raising his grade a few percentage points per month.
- **Avoid "pitching in."** Save your comments and discuss them with the tutor after the session.



Source: J. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.



Middle schoolers need self-respect

Self-respect lets middle schoolers see themselves as people who deserve to be treated fairly and kindly. It also helps them understand that they should treat others the same way. To foster self-respect:

- **Point out your child's talents** and explain that other people have different strengths and weaknesses. The ability to be happy for others, rather than envious of their success, is an important part of self-respect.
- **Take a firm stand** against substance abuse. Tell your child that self-respect includes respect for his personal health and safety.
- **Promote a positive attitude.** Encourage your child to make a fresh start after a setback.
- **Help your child resist** negative peer pressure. Talk about ways he can avoid situations that aren't right for him.
- **Be a role model.** Treat your child and yourself with respect.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Touchstone.

Community service broadens understanding

Volunteering is a great way for your child to make a difference in the community—and learn valuable lessons. Volunteering can help your child:



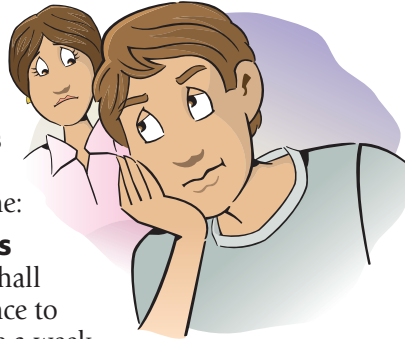
- **Gain insight.** Providing assistance to disadvantaged people could help your child understand that they are people just like she is, deserving of respect.
- **Expand her world** beyond school, home and friends. Your child may gain a greater awareness of the issues that affect your community and the contribution she can make.



Is it OK to let my child spend afternoons alone?

Q: I work full-time. My seventh grader is mature enough to stay by himself after school, but I worry about his being home alone every afternoon. Is it OK for kids this age to be alone so much? What should I do?

A: This situation may not call for an all or nothing decision. Since you feel your child is responsible enough to be alone for a few hours, it may be enough to limit the number of days he is at home alone each week. To find other options for some of his unsupervised time:



- **Check out after-school programs** at the school. Participating in a study hall or a club could offer your child a chance to hang out with other kids once or twice a week.
- **Research neighborhood options.** See what your local community center has to offer for middle schoolers. Does your town have an intramural sports program? Perhaps you can arrange a carpool to practices with other players' parents.

To help keep your child safe when he does come home alone, post a list of numbers he can call in an emergency, including a neighbor or trusted adult he can contact if he can't reach you. Make sure he understands your rules about things like checking in, answering the door, cooking and having friends over.



Are you insisting on attendance?

It may be getting warmer, but it's not summer yet. Your child needs to be in all her classes until the school year is over. Are you doing all you can to make sure your child is in school on time, every day? Answer *yes* or *no*:

- ___ **1. Are you emphasizing** that school attendance is your child's first priority?
- ___ **2. Do you avoid** taking your child out of school unless she is sick or it is an emergency?
- ___ **3. Do you stress** to your child that you will not tolerate her skipping class?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to create routines that will help her get to school on time, like setting an alarm?
- ___ **5. Have you asked** the school to notify you if your child is not in class?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are making the importance of attendance clear to your child. For each no, try that idea.

"In automobile terms, the child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering."
—Benjamin Spock, M.D.

Keep your child in mind when setting expectations

When you make your expectations clear to your middle schooler, he's more likely to meet them. But it's important that your expectations be reasonable. When setting them, ask yourself:

- **Are my expectations flexible?** General information on what students this age "should" be doing is based on averages, not individuals. Your expectations should be appropriate for *your* child.
- **Are they realistic?** If your child has been a reluctant reader since preschool, expecting him to excel in honors English may not make sense.

Reading comprehension starts with questions

Your child will get more out of reading if she thinks *before* diving in. She should ask herself:



- **What do I know** about this subject already?
- **Why am I reading this?** What will I need to know after reading it?
- **What can help me** focus on reading? Should I sit up or change location?

Talking improves discipline

Questioning authority comes naturally to middle schoolers. They want a say in what happens to them, or at least to understand why it's happening. For effective discipline:

- **Explain the reasons** for your rules. Your child may not realize that a certain rule is to ensure his safety, for example.
- **Talk with your child often**—about more than just ways he could improve. Express interest in his opinions and his life. He's more likely to follow your rules when he knows you care about him.

Source: C. Pratt, "Middle School Discipline That Works," EduGuide, niswc.com/discipline_reasons.

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