

Helping Students Learn[®]

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



February 2017

Howell Township Public Schools

Take tips from teachers to help your child succeed in school

With several classes of kids to teach, middle school teachers don't always have as much time to talk with each student's parents as they'd like. Parent-teacher conferences are often brief and may not allow the teachers to share everything on their minds.

Here are some things teachers would like families to do to support children's learning:

- **Monitor your child's efforts** to complete schoolwork. Be aware of her homework, tests and projects. Ask questions if your child never seems to have any.
- **Contact your child's teachers** if you have questions or concerns. You have the right and the responsibility to know your child's grades and how she's doing in her classes in general.
- **Know your child's friends.** The influence of peers often takes on greater importance in middle school. If your child starts hanging out with friends who rarely study, or who experiment with harmful behaviors, she may be more likely to do the same.
- **Monitor your child's stress.** Middle school students have a lot to manage. Make sure your child has time for family, as well as some time to relax, built into her weekly schedule.
- **Let your child know you love her.** Tell her often (but not in front of her friends). Listen to her and encourage her. Remember, you are still the most influential and important person in your child's life.



Boot up a desire to learn

Middle schoolers love technology, and engaging with it can motivate them to learn. So, when your child is planning a project, encourage her to consider including multi-media elements she can create on a computer, tablet or phone. She'll gain real-world tech skills, and the fun she has may inspire her to keep going and learn more.

Healthy food fuels learning

What's on your child's plate? Research shows that kids who eat a healthy diet are better learners. To help your child understand and make more responsible food choices:



- **Share the research.** Students who don't eat enough fruits, vegetables and dairy products tend to get lower grades.
- **Make it simple.** Stock your kitchen with easy-to-grab fresh fruit, sliced vegetables, skim milk and nuts.
- **Insist on breakfast.** Your child can't do his best in class if he is hungry.

Source: "Health and Academic Achievement," National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, CDC.gov, niscw.com/eatright.



Share five steps to informed decisions

Few skills are more critical for achievement in school and life than the ability to make wise decisions. Guide your child through this five-step process:

- 1. Get the facts.** If your child is deciding whether he can take a job looking after a neighbor's dog for the weekend, he should find out exactly what is involved.
- 2. Consider conflicts.** He has to study. He's also invited to a party. Can he do both *and* walk the dog?
- 3. Think about how choices affect others.** If caring for the dog means he'll have to miss the party, will his friend be upset? If he turns down the job, will the neighbor ever ask him again?
- 4. Come up with alternatives.** Can your child explain to his friend that he hopes to get a steady dog-sitting job? Maybe they can get together next week.
- 5. Accept that a good choice** may at times require a small sacrifice to achieve a greater benefit.

Source: B.A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For: For Teens*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Report cards are guides for future goals

When your student brings home a report card, think of it as a learning opportunity. Together with your child:



- **Talk about it.** Calmly discuss any surprises, good or bad.
- **Set goals.** If your child did well, talk about how she can keep up the good work. If she struggled, brainstorm ways she can improve.
- **Celebrate.** A's are always a reason to celebrate, but if your child worked hard and brought a C up to a B, she deserves a pat on the back for that, too!



What should I do if I find out my child's been cheating?

Q: I caught my son copying all of the answers from his friend's homework. He says that it's not a big deal and that everyone in middle school does it. How can I stop him from cheating again?

A: Cheating is a serious issue. So, make time to talk with your child—and to really listen.

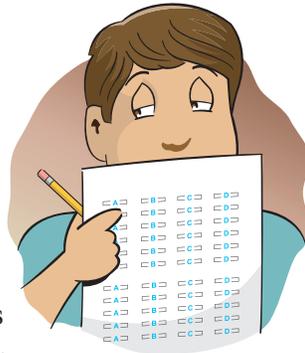
Explain that cheating is a big deal, and that it is *always* wrong. It is dishonest, and it's unfair to students who don't cheat. What's more, it robs your child of learning he needs for future success.

Ask your child why he feels the need to cheat. Is he afraid of disappointing you or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades? Is he trying to get a reward for top grades? Make sure that you're not putting too much emphasis on grades. Stress the importance of learning for learning's sake.

Next, work together on solutions to stop the cheating:

- **Help your child manage his time.** Make sure his schedule includes plenty of time set aside for doing homework or studying.
- **Help him improve his study habits** so he can make better grades on his own.
- **Encourage him to ask teachers for help** if he doesn't understand.

If the problem persists, talk with the teachers. Together you will be able to get your son back on the right track.



Watch for overscheduling

Extracurricular activities are fun for kids and can add a lot to their education. But it's important to make sure that your child's after-school activities don't interfere with her ability to perform in class. Keep an eye on:

- **Your child's grades.** Have her marks slid since basketball season started?
- **Her homework habits.** Is her after-noon homework and study routine now extending late into the night?
- **Her mood.** Has your easy-going child become stressed and irritable? She may have too much on her plate.

If your child is trying to do too much, consider scaling back her activities for a while.

Make the most of texting

Texting. It's the language of middle schoolers. And it can be a great way to improve communication with your child. Texting can:



- **Keep you informed** of your child's whereabouts and who she's with. And she won't be embarrassed by having her friends hear her talk to her parents.
- **Help your child follow directions.** Texting instructions to her creates a written record she can refer to.

Of course, texting shouldn't replace talking with your child. And be sure you and your child follow the school's cell phone policy.



Are you ready for tween romance?

As early as it may seem, the middle school years are when many kids first have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Are you prepared to help your child navigate relationships? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about dating basics—respect for yourself, respect for the other person, kindness and consideration?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** rules about relationships and remind your child that school comes first?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about your family's values regarding appropriate behavior?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** about the consequences of risky behavior?
- ___ **5. Are you staying calm?** Many relationships at this age

are more about friendship than getting "serious."

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are ready to help your child enter this new phase. For each no, try that idea.

"It kills you to see them grow up. But I guess it would kill you quicker if they didn't."

—Barbara Kingsolver

Discuss goals and progress

You've helped your child set goals for his classes and he has posted them in a place where he can see them. Now what?

Have regular chats with your child about his progress. Use his goal list as a conversation starter and ask questions such as, "Is there homework in this class?" "When is the next test, quiz or project?" "Did you get any schoolwork back that you can review?"

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