

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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The School District, City of Erie  
Federal Programs

## Use the power of technology to get your middle schooler writing

More than 75 percent of the teachers surveyed in a Pew Research Center poll agreed that digital technology can benefit student writing. Digital tools can encourage creativity and expression, collaboration, and the sharing of writing with others. And middle schoolers love technology.



To help your child practice his writing skills:

- **Encourage him to write** thoughtful social media posts that say more than "IDK." Challenge him to write a movie or product review using fewer than 140 characters. Ask him to use full sentences when texting you or other adults.
- **Urge your child to start a blog.** Does he love chess? Anime? Have him share his passion with others. It may inspire him to write more often.
- **Suggest that he write with a friend.** Some programs let users collaborate. Could he and a pal write a how-to book about middle school?

Ask your child's teachers for program or app recommendations, or visit Common Sense Education ([commonsense.org/education/top-picks/middle-school-writing-apps-and-websites](http://commonsense.org/education/top-picks/middle-school-writing-apps-and-websites)). As with any technology, keep safety in mind. Look for program settings that let you control who is able to see your child's posts—and let him know that you will be monitoring his accounts.

Source: K. Purcell and others, "The Impact of Digital Tools on Student Writing and How Writing is Taught in Schools," Pew Research Center.



## Snap your child out of a winter slump

By February, the excitement of a new year has worn off and summer is still months away. If your child is suffering from the mid-winter blahs, here are some ways to reenergize her efforts in school:

- **Remind her of successes.** When she is tempted to skimp on studying for a test, say, "This is a difficult class, but you did so well on the last test because of all the study time you put in. I know you can do that again with this one."
- **Take things a day at a time.** Don't try to make your child focus on a future that seems an eternity away to her. Instead, say, "Hey, it's Thursday. Just one more civics quiz and then you can look forward to the weekend!"
- **Encourage her to help** other students. Perhaps she could tutor a younger student, or set up a study group and recruit several classmates.
- **Make the ordinary special.** Say, "I got ingredients for your favorite dinner. Do a little homework, then let's make it together."

## Don't overlook progress

You might not be thrilled if your child brings home a low grade on a paper or test. But if her previous grade in the class was even lower, it's progress. Say something simple like, "You brought your grade up. I want you to know I believe in you." Avoid adding a negative spin—this is not the time to say that she still has a long way to go.

## Show math some love

Your attitude about math can affect your child's—so make sure it's positive! To show that math matters:



- **Ask questions** about your child's work. "Do you see a pattern in these problems?"
- **Encourage practical math.** Ask your child to calculate the tip at a restaurant.
- **Foster a math study routine.** Math builds on itself, so it's vital that your child practice math each day.

Source: M.J. Mohr-Schroeder and others, "Parents' Attitudes Toward Mathematics and the Influence on Their Students' Attitudes Toward Mathematics: A Quantitative Study," *School Science and Mathematics*, [niswc.com/mathitude](http://niswc.com/mathitude).

## Five minutes could solve a procrastination problem

Many students put tasks off because they aren't sure where to begin or how to accomplish them. To help your child stop procrastinating:



- **Think together** about ways he could get started on the task.
- **Ask him to commit** five minutes to working on it.

Chances are, your child will find out he *can* do the work and it isn't so bad. He may even go on to finish. If he doesn't, have him spend another five minutes planning what he'll do the next time he works on the task.



## How can I encourage my child to confide in me?

**Q:** My eighth grader is very quiet. I can tell something is bothering her, but she won't tell me what it is. This has gone on long enough that I don't think she can handle it on her own. How can I get her to talk to me?



**A:** Adolescents often clam up because they think their parents won't understand them. But when a problem persists for days or weeks, it is important for you to keep trying to help your child deal with it before it affects her schoolwork or her health. To encourage her to share:

- **Tell your child** that you want to understand. Remind her that you care about her and nothing she says could ever change that. Let her know that it's your job to help her figure things out.
- **Set some limits.** Explain that while you respect her privacy, you need her to tell you what is wrong. You can give her another afternoon to think things through on her own, but set a time when you expect her to discuss the matter with you.
- **Consult the experts.** If your child still refuses to talk, go to a teacher, pediatrician, school counselor, coach or other trusted figure in her life. Ask for help uncovering what is bothering your child.



## Are you teaching your child to be civil?

It is appropriate for middle schoolers to try out new ideas and opinions. But when they express them inappropriately, it can be a problem in school and at home. Are you teaching politeness? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do your rules** require polite language and forbid curse words and other inappropriate language?
2. **Do you forbid** your child to wear clothing that displays offensive language, pictures or symbols?
3. **Do you ask** your child not to play or repeat songs whose lyrics you find unacceptable?
4. **Do you talk** with your child about which behaviors are appropriate for different situations and which are never OK?

5. **Do you encourage** your child to consider how his actions affect other people?

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are promoting civil behavior. For each *no*, try that idea.

"Behavior is a mirror in which everyone shows his image."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## Challenge your child to solve problems at home

To be successful in school, your child needs to learn how to solve problems. Practice is the best teacher. Look for opportunities for your child to exercise his problem-solving skills. You might ask him to:

- **Create a family chore chart** that fairly distributes tasks and takes everyone's time and ability into consideration.
- **Plan and prepare a balanced meal** for the family, within a specified budget.
- **Entertain a younger sibling** for an afternoon (without resorting to screens).

## Help your child unwind

Adolescence can be stressful. And as stress goes up, grades often come down. If your child seems stressed or anxious:

- **Review** her schedule. Make sure it includes time for fun and relaxation.
- **Ensure** that she gets enough sleep—eight to 12 hours a day.
- **Encourage** her to exercise.
- **Remind** her that no one is perfect, and you don't expect her to be.



Source: M. Tartakovsky, M.S., "7 Tips for Helping Your Child Manage Stress," Psych Central, [nswc.com/relax](http://nswc.com/relax).

## Encourage service activities

Middle schoolers are busy figuring out their place in the world. They want to feel that their contributions matter. Helping your child find ways to make a difference at home and in the community will make him feel good about himself and foster his sense of responsibility to the people around him.

These activities could be as simple as shoveling snow or carrying groceries for an elderly neighbor. Or your child could join a service organization and combine his efforts with those of others who share similar goals.

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