

# 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

## Act now to reduce your middle schooler's risk of substance abuse

Experts say that people are more likely to misuse drugs during times of transition. For many students, middle school can be a challenging transition period.

Middle schoolers face new classmates, harder classes and more expectations. At the same time, they want to try new things. Drugs and alcohol may seem appealingly new and adult.



But because they aren't adults, middle schoolers don't always see the risks of this behavior. Substance abuse early in life increases the risk of addiction and damage to brain function. It's critical to prevent it before it starts.

Take action now to protect your child. Here's how:

- **Ask what he has learned** in school about substance abuse. Reinforce those messages at home.
- **Make it clear that you expect** him to avoid drugs, alcohol, tobacco and vaping products. Discuss the dangers of misusing prescription drugs. Enforce your rules consistently.
- **Build a strong relationship** with your child. Participate in activities together. Make family time a priority.
- **Be a good role model.** Your example is the most powerful teacher.

Source: "Preventing Drug Misuse and Addiction: The Best Strategy," National Institute on Drug Abuse, [nisdwc.com/drugfree](http://nisdwc.com/drugfree).



### Talk about what should go into notes

It's nearly impossible for students to simply remember everything teachers say in class. They need to be able to take effective notes that will remind them of key facts and concepts. Share these note-taking tips with your child:

- **Write down** what the teacher writes down. If it's on the board, it's usually something your child should learn.
- **Listen for lists.** If the teacher says, "Three factors caused the conflict ..." your child should write them down.
- **Make the most of pauses.** A teacher who stops talking is likely giving students a chance to write.
- **Notice extreme words** like *best*, *most* and *last*. When the teacher uses them, your child should take notes.
- **Write down information** the teacher repeats.
- **Pay special attention** at the end of class. Teachers sometimes squeeze in important information if they realize they are running out of time.

### Stay on top of attendance

In the second half of the year, the pace of instruction picks up and exam preparation is added to students' regular workloads. Kids who miss school find it more difficult to catch up. Emphasize the importance of attending every class. Accept no excuses except an illness or emergency.



### Decisions affect the future

Studies show that thinking about how a decision will affect the present *and then* the future helps people make better choices. Encourage your child to:

- **Anticipate consequences.** If she completes her homework now, she'll be able to relax later. Then tomorrow she'll get full credit for the assignment.
- **Imagine alternatives.** If she plays a game now, she may be too tired to do her homework later and then she won't get any credit for it.

She may see that making a small sacrifice in the present can lead to a long-term benefit.

Source: "Sequential options prompt future thinking, boost patience," ScienceDaily, [nisdwc.com/sequence](http://nisdwc.com/sequence).

### Supervise social media use

Social media is replacing social interaction in many middle schoolers' lives—and that can be a problem. Research links high emotional investment in social media with high anxiety. To foster your child's well-being:

- **Set limits** on social media time.
- **Discuss what is appropriate** to post and what's not.
- **Follow his accounts.** Let him know you'll look at them.
- **Encourage him** to invite friends over for real-life activities.



Source: K. Barrett, "Social Media's Impact on Students' Mental Health Comes Into Focus," *neaToday*, [nisdwc.com/socialmedia](http://nisdwc.com/socialmedia).



## How should parents handle cheating on homework?

**Q:** My child has been copying the answers from friends' homework. She says "everyone does it." What should I do?

**A:** Cheating is a major issue with serious consequences. So it's important to take time to talk about it with your child.

Be clear that copying homework is cheating, and cheating is always wrong. It's dishonest, and unfair to others who don't cheat. And it cheats your child of the skills and knowledge she needs.

Explain that you are unhappy about the cheating, but you're also worried about why she cheated. Is she afraid of disappointing you? Is she struggling with the topic? Did she just not want to do the work?

Make sure not to put too much emphasis on grades. Instead, stress the value of learning for its own sake. Then help your child find solutions that let her complete work without cheating. For example, she could:

- **Improve time management.** Review her schedule and help her schedule ample homework and study time.
- **Develop strong study habits,** such as organization, goal-setting and persistence.
- **Ask the teacher to suggest resources** she can check if she can't understand the homework—and follow up if she's still confused.



## Are you providing relationship guidance?

Middle school transitions aren't all academic. Many students will begin to explore romance in these years. Are you helping your child navigate relationships responsibly? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you discuss** the basics of dating—respect for yourself, respect for the other person, kindness and consideration?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you establish** rules about relationships and remind your child that school takes priority?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you keep** your cool on the topic? Middle school dating is often more about friendship than getting serious.
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** with your child about values as well as the consequences of risky behavior?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you show** respect for your child's feelings?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are guiding your child as he enters this new phase. For each no, try that idea.*

*"When teaching your kids about the concept of respect, teach them of their worth as a person."*

—Claire Stranberg

## Inspire your child to strive

A carrot may motivate a horse. Motivating a middle schooler, on the other hand, isn't quite as simple. To encourage your child to do her best:

- **Challenge and support her.** Urge your child to aim high. Remember that if she falls short, she still needs your love and acceptance.
- **Avoid comparisons.** "Your sister got an A-. Can you beat that?" Competitions only motivate people who feel they have a shot at winning. If your child thinks she might fail, she'll have no desire to try.

## Use report cards to plan

Reviewing your middle schooler's report card together is a useful way to help him chart a course for the rest of the year. If he has done well, discuss his plans to keep up the good work.

If he's struggling, help him brainstorm ways to do better going forward. "You did a great job with your science homework, but stumbled on tests. What if I quiz you for 10 minutes each night the week before a test?"

## Encourage healthy eating

A healthy diet helps students stay alert in class and retain what they learn there. You can't watch every bite your child puts in her mouth, so help her become an informed eater. To promote responsible food choices:

- 1. Expose your child** to lots of healthy foods. Bring home new produce to try.
- 2. Cook together.** Involve your child in preparing nutritious meals.
- 3. Offer smart snacks.** Toss the soda and chips. Stock up on cut veggies she can grab on the run.



Source: L. Wiggins, "Middle Schoolers Learning Nutrition Education," University of Florida, [niswc.com/healthy](http://niswc.com/healthy).

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