

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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The School District, City of Erie
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Helping your child enjoy math can improve his performance

A recent study of children in grades five through nine found that the students who enjoyed math and were proud of their ability went on to earn higher grades than kids who felt anxious, angry, bored or hopeless about math. The researchers also found that the students' past performance in math affected their emotions about it, which in turn affected their future performance.



To help your child develop a positive attitude about math:

- **Send upbeat messages.** Telling your child you hated math when you were in school won't help him feel better about it. Instead, let him know all the ways math helps you in your life.
- **Encourage him to ask his teacher** or a classmate for help if he is struggling. This may make him feel more in control of the situation. And a boost in his performance can give him confidence.
- **Give him chances to succeed with math.** Have your child help you measure a room and calculate the amount of paint needed to paint it. Ask him to graph what you spent on electricity for the last 24 months.
- **Draw attention to the amazing things** people do with math, from getting rockets into space to designing bridges.

Source: R. Pekrun and others, "Achievement Emotions and Academic Performance: Longitudinal Models of Reciprocal Effects," *Child Development*, The Society for Research in Child Development.



There are many ways to show respect

Everyone wants to feel respected. And respect—for teachers, students and learning—is an essential ingredient in the classroom. Talk to your child about the many aspects of respect. Encourage her to:

- **Show self-respect** by acting in ways that don't leave her feeling disappointed in herself.
- **Be prompt.** Arriving on time to classes and activities shows respect for people's time.
- **Listen to others politely.** This doesn't mean your child has to agree, but she should try to understand what the other person is saying without interrupting.
- **Live up to responsibilities** by doing what she says she will and being accountable for her actions.
- **Appreciate the value** of learning. Her education will help her succeed in the world.
- **Realize that there is** something she can learn from every person she meets.

Source: "Character Education," Legacy Educational Resources, niswc.com/show_respect.

Has your child met the guidance counselor?

Your child doesn't have to have a problem to benefit from a meeting with his guidance counselor. The counselor is trained to help him set goals, choose classes that will help him meet those goals, and find the support he needs to thrive in middle school.

Source: "The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association, niswc.com/counsel.

Use SODAS to help your child make decisions

Responsible decision making is easier with SODAS. No, not soft drinks. SODAS is a decision-making method that goes like this:

- **Situation.** Your child should clearly state the decision she faces.
- **Options.** Have her make a list of all her choices. Then she can choose her top three.
- **Disadvantages.** What are the cons of her top three options?
- **Advantages.** What are the pros of those options?
- **Solution.** After weighing the pros and cons, she can decide with confidence.



Source: R. Burke, Ph.D. and others, *Common Sense Parenting*, Boys Town Press.

Ease anxiety before tests

If the thought of a test makes your child fall apart, help him prepare. Have him:

- **Find out more.** He can ask the teacher about the format and resources to study.
- **Schedule several** short study sessions.
- **Dress comfortably** and eat a nutritious breakfast before the test.



Help your child keep tests in perspective by letting him know that his best efforts matter more to you than his score.



How can I help my tired child get enough sleep?

Q: My daughter's bedtime hasn't changed since last year. But she wakes up exhausted every day. It's affecting her attitude toward school, and it's starting to affect her schoolwork, too. What should I do to help?

A: It doesn't take much—a few minutes of lost sleep yesterday, a few more minutes today—before you have a cranky, overtired student who struggles in school.

To help your child get enough sleep:

- **Review her bedtime.** Middle schoolers need between eight and 10 hours of sleep each night. Make bedtime 20 minutes earlier than your child needs to be fast asleep.
- **Set a screen curfew.** The "blue" light emitted by TVs, cell phones, computers and video games can interfere with sleep. Have your child turn off all electronics at least 30 minutes before bedtime. She can read, or relax with you. This will help her ease into "sleep mode."
- **Eliminate naps.** Don't let your child crash when she comes home from school. It can make it harder for her to fall asleep at night.
- **Make time for a bedtime talk.** If something is troubling your child, she may be lying awake at night worrying. Stop by her room for a quiet chat before lights-out. Remind her of something good she did today.



Are you aware of how school is going?

School has been in session for several weeks, so it's a good time to take stock of how well your child is adjusting to middle school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Are you aware** if your child is keeping up with his classes?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about how he feels about his abilities in each subject?
- ___ **3. Have you discussed** the teachers' expectations with your child?
- ___ **4. Do you know** who your child's school friends are? Do you monitor his social life?
- ___ **5. Have you talked** with your child about peer pressure and ways to say *no* to drugs and alcohol?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are staying on top of your child's transition back to school. For each no, try that idea.

"One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say."
—Bryant H. McGill

Address dislike of a teacher

Adapting to the different personalities and teaching styles of multiple teachers can be a challenge for some middle schoolers. If your child says she doesn't like a teacher:

- **Keep an open mind.** Ask your child to tell you specifically what the teacher does that she dislikes.
- **Remind your child** that she doesn't have to *like* a teacher to *learn* from that teacher. She may also have to work harder now than she did in elementary school.
- **Talk to the teacher.** Listen to the teacher's perspective. Share your child's concerns. Work out a plan to go forward.

Source: M. Hartwell-Walker, Ed.D., "When a Teacher and Child Don't Get Along," PsychCentral, nswc.com/dislike.

Bolster thought with action

You may have noticed your middle schooler's increasing ability to think in a more adult way. You can encourage this maturity by asking him questions about real-life issues that affect him.

To give your child a chance to put his thoughts into action, ask him to propose a volunteer opportunity for your family. Have him do some research and provide information that supports his suggestion. If possible, follow through with his choice.

Keep social media safe, fun

Social media is a big part of many middle schoolers' lives. It can have positive effects, but used recklessly it can damage self-esteem and academic performance. Monitor your child's social media use, and remind her that:



- **Nothing is private.** Even if she only communicates with people she knows, they can share her posts with others.
- **Social media makes it easy** to hurt someone. Posting negative things about people is a form of bullying.

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