

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



MIDDLE SCHOOL

October 2023

Prairie Heights Middle School

Reinforce your middle schooler's sense of academic honesty

The emergence of new artificial intelligence tools has raised concerns about cheating in school. But the truth is that cheating has been on the rise for some time. In one survey, the majority of middle schoolers admitted to having cheated at one time or another. Studies also show that:

- **Academic cheating** tends to start in middle school.
 - **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.
 - **Cheaters often think** they'll be at a disadvantage if they don't cheat, because "everyone else" does.
 - **Kids who feel pressured** to earn high grades are more likely to cheat.
- Emphasize to your child that you expect honesty at all times. Then, since students don't always recognize cheating for what it is, explain that it includes:
- **Copying homework answers** from another student.
 - **Receiving or giving help on tests.** This includes sharing questions with students in another section of the class.
 - **Copying from a source** without giving credit.
 - **Using technology** to solve problems or produce work that your child was supposed to do independently.



Source: D.M. Cohen, Ed.D., "Ethics in Action Series: What Parents Can Do When Their Child is Cheating," Character.org.



Guide your child toward math solutions

Is your child intimidated by middle school math? Are you? If your middle schooler gets stuck while working on math problems, you may wonder how to help. It's useful to think of yourself as a guide rather than an instructor.

By asking questions, you can help your child figure things out. Ask:

- **Which problem** are you working on? Help your child focus on one problem at a time.
 - **What do the instructions** say? Have your child read them out loud.
 - **Is there any part** of the problem you can do?
 - **Are there things** you've learned before that can help you here?
 - **Where could you look** for more explanation? Your child can read the class website and also search sites like YouTube for instructional videos to watch.
- If your child is still confused after giving a real effort, ask: "How soon can you ask the teacher for help?"

Oversee social media use

Nearly 40% of middle schoolers use social media. They need adult guidance as they learn to navigate this world safely. To help:

- **Discuss privacy.** Review settings and tell your child not to share personal data.
- **Set standards.** No hurtful posts. No posting anything your child wouldn't want you or the whole world to see.
- **Monitor the effect** of social media activity on your child's mood. Provide balance by scheduling device-free times.

Source: "The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021," Common Sense Media.

Engagement has benefits

Three wonderful things happen when you get involved at school. You understand more about the school and how it operates. You learn whom to contact if you have questions or concerns. And the school gains a better understanding of you and your family.



Try this homework strategy

Research shows that middle schoolers prefer to do assignments away from home, with their peers around. And they like parents to be less involved. To give preferences a chance:



- **Check on achievement.** If your child is doing well, consider allowing a choice of study locations, within reason.
- **Let your child try studying** with a buddy. Monitor the sessions.
- **Praise responsible learning.** "I see you working hard on your assignments. That's why you make progress!"

Source: H.Z. Kackar and others, "Age and gender differences in adolescents' homework experiences," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Elsevier.

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What should I do to help my child stop procrastinating?

Q: My middle schooler puts off doing schoolwork. Assignments get turned in late. Projects don't get started until the last minute. How can I help my child stop doing this and learn to use time wisely?

A: Many middle schoolers share this self-sabotaging habit. Time management just doesn't come naturally to them.



You can help your child learn this key skill. Show your student how to:

- **Organize.** Insist that your child write all assignments in a planner. Have your student do a once-a-week backpack and study area tidy-up and file school papers. This cuts down on time-wasting searches for needed items.
- **Prioritize.** Teach your child to list tasks under one of three headings: Must Do, Would Be Nice to Do and Can Skip This. Make it clear that must-do tasks—including schoolwork—have to come first.
- **Schedule.** Your child needs to block out enough time for the must-dos. Some kids can plan a weekly schedule. Others need to make one daily.
- **Follow through.** It isn't easy to spend time working on a project when friends are out and about, so encourage and praise your child for staying on track. And make sure there is time in the schedule for some fun!



How well is your student adjusting?

For several weeks, new middle schoolers have been getting used to the differences in how things work from elementary school. Are you supporting your child during this transition? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you ask** your child about school logistics, such as finding classrooms and accessing online materials, and help solve any issues?
- ___ **2. Do you discuss** how well your child is keeping up with classes?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** together about the teachers' expectations?
- ___ **4. Do you help** your child role-play ways to handle sticky situations?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** friendships with other students, by

allowing your child to invite them home, for example?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are smoothing the transition to middle school. For each no, try that idea.

"Any transition is easier if you believe in yourself and your talent."

—Priyanka Chopra

What if your child doesn't like a teacher?

Adapting to the different priorities and methods of several teachers is a challenge for some middle schoolers. Your child may dislike a teacher who is strict or gives hard tests. To respond effectively to these feelings:

- **Listen.** Ask your child to be specific about what the teacher says or does.
- **Avoid taking sides.** The teacher may have a different viewpoint.
- **Explain to your child** that "You don't have to like teachers to learn from them." Your child may have to study longer and harder to meet the challenge.
- **Talk to the teacher** if you believe an issue needs addressing. Listen to the teacher's side, give yours, and work out a plan for going forward.

Source: M. Hartwell-Walker, Ed.D., "When a Teacher and Child Don't Get along," Psych Central.

Review time and activities

Extracurricular activities can boost interest in school, but too many can interfere with schoolwork. Review your child's activities together. Which do your child enjoy most? Which have the most benefit? How much time does each take?



Evaluating activities in this way will help your child make smart choices if cutbacks are needed to achieve the right balance between schoolwork and fun.

Effort improves learning

Research shows that students often think that study strategies that seem easy, like re-reading, are more effective. In fact, strategies that involve more work for students—such as solving practice problems or quizzing themselves—usually lead to better recall.

Source: A. Duckworth, "What New Research Says About How to Improve Students' Study Habits," Education Week.

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