

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Onalaska ISD

MIDDLE SCHOOL



September 2019

## For a successful year of learning, review essential study skills

Study skills have a big impact on student learning. Helping your middle schooler strengthen her skills at the beginning of the school year will ensure that she has the tools she needs to do her best in school all year long.

To lay the groundwork for academic success:

- **Promote organization.** Help your child create systems to keep track of schoolwork: using a planner to record assignments; color coding folders and binders for each class; and filing papers frequently.
- **Bolster time management.** Have your child estimate how long assignments will take. Then have her use a timer to see if her estimates are correct. This will help her schedule her future study time more effectively.
- **Encourage self-awareness.** Ask your child to figure out when she's most alert. Right after school? After blowing off some steam outdoors? Have her do most of her homework and studying during those times.
- **Teach effective management** of large long-term projects. Show her how to divide them into smaller, more manageable parts.
- **Urge prompt action.** Let your child know that being a responsible student involves asking for help when it's needed. If she is confused or has trouble with a concept, she should talk to the teacher immediately.



## Show your child you care

The middle school years aren't always easy for kids. To support your child through the ups and downs:

- **Tell** her that you love her, no matter what.
- **Plan** together for her exciting future.
- **Express** confidence in her ability to succeed.



## Prioritize daily attendance

School absences affect students in more ways than many families realize. For example:

- **Classroom performance suffers.** Absent students miss demonstrations, discussions and chances for hands-on learning. Most have trouble keeping up if they miss more than a few days.
- **Friendships suffer.** These often begin at school. Kids who miss school frequently may have fewer friends. Without them, they can lose interest in school altogether.

School attendance is the law. Enforcing it is one of the most critical ways you can help your child get the education he deserves.

## Encourage learning at home

To reinforce your child's learning, help her find ways to apply it at home. Here are a few easy ones:

- **Have your child explain** something she is studying to you. Retelling it helps cement it in her mind.
- **Ask your child** to do household math—doubling recipes, budgeting, measuring, etc.
- **Have a movie night.** Choose a thought-provoking film. Afterward, ask your child questions about it. Encourage her to think critically before answering.



## Don't let devices become distractions

Middle schoolers sometimes seem to be superglued to their phones. They text, share videos and selfies, and scroll through social media constantly.

Students often think their digital devices can help with homework. And sometimes they can. But there's one problem: Kids rarely stay focused on the homework. Soon they are checking out the latest viral meme.

Studies show that the more time students text, read online or use social media while doing schoolwork, the lower their grades are.

To help your child focus on schoolwork instead of his phone:

- **Discuss multitasking** and how research proves it doesn't work.
- **Limit use of devices** during homework time.
- **Be a role model.** Don't check your phone when you should be concentrating on something else—such as during family meals or (especially) while driving.

Source: K. Kowalski, "When Smartphones Go to School," Science News for Students, [nswc.com/mid\\_smartphone](http://nswc.com/mid_smartphone).

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## How can parents of middle schoolers stay informed?

**Q:** I know that I am supposed to let my middle schooler take more responsibility for his schoolwork. But I'm afraid that I won't be aware of things like assignments and upcoming tests. How can I stay in the loop without seeming nosy?

**A:** Staying involved and knowing how your son is doing in school are important parts of being a parent. It's not being nosy!

To encourage responsibility and still stay informed:

- **Keep asking about school.** Have your child tell you about each of his classes. The more you know about them, the more comfortable you'll feel asking about them. At least once a week, set aside time for a chat about how things are going.
- **Read everything that comes home** from school. Have your child go through his backpack and give you any handouts. Read emails from the school. Visit the school website or parent portal.
- **Touch base with your child's teachers.** Exchange contact information. Ask them if there is a website for their class you can view.
- **Attend school events** when you can. Connecting with school staff and other parents is a great way to find out what's going on at school!



## Are you making reading a pleasure?

Many middle schoolers say they don't read for pleasure. But reading for fun helps kids develop fluency and comprehension skills. Are you encouraging your child to make time for reading? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** a weekly time for family reading?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you link** reading to your child's interests by suggesting titles on topics she cares about?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you make** it easy to find something to read by keeping a variety of reading material around your home?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you talk** with your child about interesting or entertaining things you read?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you engage** her in activities that involve reading, such

as building things by following instructions?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are showing your child what a pleasure reading can be. For each no, try that idea.*

*"Reading takes us away from home, but more important, it finds homes for us everywhere."*

*—Hazel Rochman*

## Find time to talk together

Spending time with your middle schooler is the best way to keep communication—about school and everything else—flowing. If your schedule is busy, make the most of:

- **Kitchen time.** Ask for your child's help in preparing meals. As you cook, have him describe his dream meal.
- **Library time.** Browse the shelves with your child. Take an interest in the things that he likes. It shows that you value him.
- **Travel time.** Sitting side by side in the car or on the bus (rather than eye to eye) can make it easier for kids to open up.

## Give your child a chance to solve the problem

You want the best for your child. But if you rush in to solve every small problem she has at school, she won't learn how to solve bigger problems in the future for herself.

If your child receives a grade she feels is unfair, encourage her to talk to the teacher about it. If she forgets her homework, let her manage the consequences. Experience can be a great teacher.

## Sleep is critical for learning

Six out of 10 middle schoolers don't get enough sleep. This increases their risk for physical and mental health issues, as well as attention and behavior problems in school.



So how much sleep is enough? Students:

- **Aged 12 and under** need nine to 12 hours of sleep every 24 hours.
- **Aged 13 and up** should get eight to 10 hours of sleep per night.

Set and stick to a regular bedtime that helps your child wake up rested and ready to learn.

Source: "Sleep in Middle and High School Students," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [niscw.com/rest](http://niscw.com/rest).

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