

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Onalaska Elementary School



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Help your student evaluate the reliability of online content

Middle schoolers often begin online research with a quick Google search. But when they get the list of results, they are faced with a challenge.

Studies show that students have difficulty telling the difference between unbiased information and content created to promote a particular product or point of view.

To help your child learn to find reliable sources of news and information online, share these strategies:

- **Assess links.** Does the link lead to a news source your child knows to be trustworthy? Or does it go to a site that offers only one point of view?
- **Consider the author.** What is the content creator's expertise?
- **Look for clues** about the purpose of the site. If an article says "sponsored content," it isn't news. It's advertising.
- **Read more.** Sometimes an article will take one sentence from another source out of context. It's a good idea for your child to read more of the original source. She can also check one source's facts against another's.
- **Check the date.** A source from 1996 may be acceptable for a time line of ancient Greek civilization. But your child should find an up-to-date source if she's writing a report about today's economy.



Source: S. McGrew and others, "Can Students Evaluate Online Sources? Learning From Assessments of Civic Online Reasoning," *Theory & Research in Social Education*, Taylor & Francis.



Responsible learning happens daily

Taking responsibility for learning involves more than turning in homework when it's due and studying for tests. Help your middle schooler learn that it also means giving school his best effort every day.

Encourage your child to make these responsible habits part of his daily routine:

- **Reading ahead.** By skimming over the next day's lesson or chapter ahead of time, your child will be better prepared for class. Advance reading can also help him ask better questions.
- **Reviewing his notes.** Whether or not your child has homework in a subject, he should still look over his class notes each night. It's an easy way to reinforce what he's learning.
- **Attending every class.** Even if your middle schooler does the homework and reading, he won't learn what the teacher thinks is important if he isn't in class. He should miss a class only if he is sick or there is an emergency.

Set rules for the present that take care of the future

Middle schoolers live in the moment. It's hard for them to connect doing something today—like studying for tomorrow's test—to their grade at the end of the semester.

To help your child get the work done, enforce firm rules about study time. Then, when the results are positive, remind her that her consistent hard work is paying off.

Get creative about writing

Strong writing skills support school success. But tell your child to practice writing, and he'll probably roll his eyes. Instead, look for creative ways to add writing to his day. You might ask your child to:

- **Put requests in writing.** The next time your child wants something, have him write a persuasive argument for why he should get it. Ask him to address any objections he thinks you may have.
- **Cover a family event** on social media. He can take photos and write posts to go with them so that friends can see what's going on in your lives.



Help make success possible

Every year, your middle schooler will be expected to do more—at school and at home. To help her meet the challenge:

- **Create routines.** Doing a task in a familiar way makes it more automatic.
- **Catch your child** before she plugs in. If you need her to do something, have her do it before she turns on the TV, computer or tablet.
- **Encourage her interests.** Your support as your child works at something she loves may inspire her to work hard at other things—like school!





Is holiday togetherness too much to ask from my child?

Q: We're heading into the holidays, but my eighth grader isn't exactly overjoyed about family time. I really want him to spend time with us. Should I make him join in all the family holiday activities?



A: Your middle schooler's wish to separate a little from you is a normal part of growing up. Supporting his independence while maintaining his connection to family will take some flexibility. But in the process, you can teach him about limits and compromise. Rather than insist your child do everything with the family this season:

- **Prioritize.** Skipping Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's isn't an option. But let your child know you understand he wants to spend time with his friends. Perhaps he could pass up your annual shopping marathon.
- **Update.** Accept that it may be time to retire or adapt some "little kid" activities. Instead of making the usual handprint turkey decorations, give your child a hot glue gun and ask him to create an autumn centerpiece.
- **Maintain perspective.** Try not to take it personally when your child doesn't want to participate in family activities. Keep in mind that while he may scorn these things now, he'll probably enjoy them with his own kids someday!



Are you stressing academic honesty?

Surveys show that most middle and high school students cheat in school at some time—and that many don't believe cheating is serious. Are you making the importance of academic honesty clear? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Have you read** the school honor code with your child, and talked about the need to follow it?
2. **Do you talk** about different kinds of cheating, such as sharing test questions and copying homework answers?
3. **Do you explain** that copying passages from the internet and passing them off as her own work is cheating?
4. **Do you discuss** the consequences of cheating?

5. **Do you set** an example for your child by being honest yourself?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean that you are addressing the issue of cheating head on. For each no, try that idea.

"With integrity, you have nothing to fear, since you have nothing to hide."

—Zig Ziglar

Direct some 'brain movies'

Can your child remember every detail of his favorite Netflix show, but nothing about the passage he just read for English? Show him how to turn reading assignments into "brain movies." Here's how:

1. **Choose a poem** or story that is filled with sensory-rich language, such as Longfellow's "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere."
2. **Find images online** that set the scene and show them to your child.
3. **Read the passage** aloud and ask your child to imagine what it would look like as a movie.



Creating mental images helps kids focus on details and remember what they read.

Source: D. Wilson and M. Conyers, "Brain Movies: When Readers Can Picture It, They Understand It," *Edutopia*, niswc.com/mid_brainmovie.

Commitments take thought

Honoring commitments is a cornerstone of character. Teach your child that before she makes a commitment—whether it's to bring supplies for a group project or help a neighbor clean up his yard—she should consider what's involved. It's great to take on new responsibilities, but she should do so only when she's sure she can follow through.

Add science to conversation

Some middle schoolers think science is all boring formulas. But it is fascinating! To engage your child, sprinkle some science into family conversations. Discuss:

1. **The night sky.** Can your family identify any constellations?
2. **Inventions** you appreciate.
3. **The foods you eat.** Which are the healthiest? Why?

Source: V. Perrone, *101 Educational Conversations With Your Sixth Grader*, Chelsea House Publishers.

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