Middle School
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Clarke County School District
still make the difference!

Don't let spring fever affect your middle schooler's attendance

Fever is a reason to keep kids home from school. Spring fever, however, doesn't count.

The first rule for academic success is a simple one: Students need to be in class. That's true even on warm spring days when some middle schoolers would rather be anywhere else.

Poor attendance can lead to these problems, now and in years to come:

- **Low grades.**
- **Having to repeat a grade.**
- **Dropping out of school.**
- **Trouble with the law.**

Families play an important role in making sure their children's attendance is on track. To reinforce your middle schooler's attendance:

- **Share your expectations.** Your child should be in every class on time every day. Say that school is your child's most important job, and showing up is essential.
- **Check your child's** attendance record. Absences add up more quickly than many families realize.
- **Be firm.** Don't let your child skip school for unnecessary reasons, such as being tired or unprepared.
- **Make sure teachers know** how to contact you if your child is absent.
- **Work with the school** if you discover your child has been skipping school or classes. There may be a bigger problem going on.

Talk to your child first, then to teachers and other school staff if necessary. Many attendance problems can be solved when families and schools work together.

Goals can help students stay motivated

Setting goals is an effective way for students to feel engaged in school. As middle schoolers take greater ownership of their learning, the responsibility for setting and managing those goals now shifts to them.

Encourage your child to:

- **Be realistic.** Bringing every grade up to an A by the end of the year may not be achievable. Instead, help your child identify the most important need and set a specific goal to address that. "I want to raise my science grade from a C to a B."
- **Write down goals.** Putting a goal in writing increases students' commitment to them.
- **Plan.** Accomplishing goals takes vision, effort and time. If bringing up a science grade will take an extra 30 minutes of study each night, your child may need to reduce the time spent on other activities.
- **Check**. Review goals every few weeks. How is your child doing? What changes, if any, should be made?

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens,* Touchstone.

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Five strategies help students feel capable of academic success

A belief in one's abilities often fuels academic success. It fosters confidence, encourages effort and improves resilience.

Unfortunately, self-esteem often plummets as the teen years approach. To give your middle schooler's self-confidence a boost:

1. **Ask for your child's opinion.** What does your child think about that new law? What should your family do this weekend? Children feel valued when adults seek their input.
2. **Focus on effort and progress.** When you look over schoolwork, start by commenting on what your child did well and acknowledging effort.
3. **Support interests.** You may have imagined raising a star athlete, but your child's passion might be playing the trumpet. Show support by asking questions, sharing related articles and attending events.
4. **Offer genuine praise.** Be specific with your compliments to make them more meaningful. "I like the way you used detail and shadows in this drawing!"
5. **Foster positive self-talk.** Help your child turn harsh self-criticism into constructive thoughts. For example, instead of self-blame after a difficult test, encourage your child to say, "Now I know exactly what to focus on next time."

> **"Believe you can and you're halfway there."**
>
> *—Theodore Roosevelt*

Help your child connect science terms to everyday life

Physics may seem like one of the most challenging sciences, but it's also with us all the time in our everyday lives. Help your child stop and notice.

Thinking about science in real-life terms can help students master the subject. The key is to translate the language of science into the language of middle schoolers. For example:

- **Rest.** This is the state of the gum wrapper or pile of books your child leaves on the counter or the floor. An object is at rest when it is simply lying there and not moving at all.
- **Inertia.** This is your child's state after dropping the item. Your child knows picking up the item and putting it away is the right thing to do, but doesn't feel like it. Inertia is a fancy term for resisting a change from one state to another.
- **Force.** This is what you add to the mix. Force makes change happen. When you say that everything must be picked up before going out this weekend, you exert a force. This force overcomes the inertia. Your child moves and picks up the items.
- **Mass.** This is one indicator of how hard your child will have to work at cleaning up. Smaller objects (the gum wrapper) that are lighter have less mass and are easier to move. Bigger objects (a stack of books) that are heavier have more mass and are more difficult to move.

Source: D. and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes, Grades 6-8: It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's Done!* Kaplan Publishing.

Do you support your child during study time?

Middle school is a time of increasing expectations and schoolwork. With only a couple of months of school left, support from you can help your child handle them. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are supporting your child in effective ways:

1. **Do you encourage** your child to complete schoolwork in a well-lit and quiet place?
2. **Do you stay informed** about what your child's teachers expect?
3. **Do you try to be available** to answer questions and help your child solve problems during study time?
4. **Do you remind your child** to use available resources—the internet, a study group or a study buddy?
5. **Do you let teachers know** if assignments are consistently too difficult for your child, or if they take longer than the teacher intends?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are supporting your middle schooler's schoolwork efforts. Mostly no? Try the suggestions in this quiz for handling study time.

Middle School Parents still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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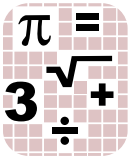
Inspire your middle schooler's interest in science and math



Science and math sometimes get a bad reputation among students. Many believe they're "just not good" in these subjects.

However, when middle school students engage in activities related to science, technology, engineering and math (the STEM subjects), they often change their minds.

If your middle schooler thinks science or math is too challenging:

- **Enjoy science** and technology media together. Search on YouTube or Common Sense Media to find science shows and games for kids of all ages.
- **Head to the kitchen.** Cooking involves both math and chemistry. And you get to eat the results! As you cook together, ask your child questions, such as: "Why do you think water boils when it gets hot?" "What happened when we forgot to add baking powder to the cookies?" "How much flour will we need if we double this recipe?
- **Visit a natural history museum** or science center in person or online. Your child can look for STEM exhibits, learn about the history of technology and discover how things work.
- **Celebrate the process.** When your child is learning something new in a class, it's often hard at first. So rather than focusing on grades earned, talk about what your child is learning and the new skills your child is developing.

Source: L. Halim and others, "Effect of environmental factors on students' interest in STEM careers: The mediating role of self-efficacy," *Research in Science & Technological Education.*

Share tips with your child for creating healthy digital habits

The use of digital devices can have a significant impact on students' academic performance, mental health and overall well-being. To instill healthy digital habits, encourage your child to:

- **Have face-to-face conversations.** Does your child text you or other family members from another room in your home? If so, suggest your child stop texting and start talking.
- **Try to find answers independently.** Asking "Siri" for answers won't teach your child how to solve problems or conduct research.
- **Turn off devices when socializing.** Kids benefit from having social interactions with their peers. So, recommend your child make a pact with friends: "The first person to pick up their phone has to throw everyone's lunch trash away."
- **Face awkward or boring situations** without turning to the phone. Challenge your child to find other ways to pass the time.
- **Be aware of mood.** Too much social media use can leave kids feeling lonely, anxious or depressed. When that happens, encourage your child to get off social media and turn to a friend or trusted adult.
- **Establish a cooling-off period.** Say, "If you see a text or post that makes you mad, wait 24 hours before sending a response." That will give your child time to think about how to address the situation.

Source: L. Kolb, "6 Ways to Help Students Manage Their Smartphones," International Society for Technology in Education.

Questions & Answers

Q: With schoolwork, friends and sports, my middle schooler is constantly going, going, going! My child doesn't complain, but I worry that it is too much pressure and stress. What can I do?

A: First, remember that a little stress is normal (and usually harmless). To figure out whether your child's stress is too much, ask yourself:

- **Is my child** always tired or irritable?
- **Does my child** have trouble sleeping or concentrating?
- **Does my child** seem unhappy?
- **Is my child** becoming angry or self-critical?

If you answered *yes* to each question, then your child may indeed be under too much pressure. To relieve it:

- **Acknowledge the problem.** Don't pretend there's no reason for your child to feel stressed. Instead, say something like, "I understand how hard you work to do well in all of your classes. It's really challenging to balance everything, isn't it?"
- **Set reasonable goals.** Is your child striving to be a straight-A student, a star soccer player and everyone's best friend? Offer a reminder: Your child can't be all things to all people.
- **Be there for your child.** Tell your child to come to you when felling overwhelmed or unable to cope.
- **Scale back the schedule.** Your child may not be able to limit school-related responsibilities, but you can help your student rein in extracurricular and social activities.

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It Matters: Building Character

Community service benefits middle schoolers

Studies show that students who participate in community service tend to achieve better grades and demonstrate a greater interest in school than their peers. When middle schoolers volunteer, they also develop a strong, positive sense of self and a clearer understanding of their important role in society.

Students who volunteer:

- **Have higher self-esteem,** are more responsible and feel more connected to their community.
- **Are more likely to stay in school.** Volunteers tend to have regular attendance and perform well.
- **Have improved mental health.** Volunteering reduces stress, strengthens the immune system and increases happiness.
- **Develop strong social skills,** as they learn how to work with different types of people.
- **Build skills that help in school** and life in general, such as leadership, time management, problem solving, communication and dependability.
- **Meet mentors**, such as the heads of agencies or businesses, who can serve as references.
- **Are less likely** to take negative risks, such as doing drugs.

To find local volunteer opportunities, encourage your middle schooler to contact the school counselor, local libraries, and community service groups.

Source: "Middle Schoolers May Benefit Academically from Extracurricular Activities," NYU Steinhardt News.

Show your child how to become a person of strong character

Children may be born with certain personality traits, but middle schoolers' characters are works in progress. In other words, the kind of person your child will eventually become is still being shaped.

To reinforce strong character:

- **Be a solid role model.** Make sure your behavior demonstrates the values you're promoting.
- **Talk about responsibility.** Offer subtle prompts, such as: "I won't remind you to finish your schoolwork. I know you're responsible enough to do it on your own."
- **Focus on growth.** When mistakes happen, focus on what your child can learn from the situation. Emphasize that mistakes are opportunities for growth.
- **Promote a positive attitude.** Empower your middle schooler to take steps to move on after disappointments.
- **Give positive feedback.** When your child demonstrates strong character, talk about it and offer praise!

Model and enforce the three C's to teach your child respect

Respect centers on the three C's: consideration, communication and courtesy. Model these for your child and expect the same in return:

- **Communication.** Show your child that respectful people ask others about their feelings and opinions, and listen attentively. They accept that they may not agree, but that the other person's ideas and needs deserve attention.
- **Consideration.** Explain that being respectful means more than just hearing what someone says—it means thinking about their feelings and showing through your actions that you truly care. When you give your child downtime after a hard day, that's consideration, and shows respect. Likewise, if your child makes breakfast so you can sleep in on a Saturday, your child is showing respect for you.
- **Courtesy.** Manners count, and *please* and *thank you* really are magic words. Tone of voice matters, too. Explain that *how* a person says something is as important as *what* they say.