

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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Grand Erie District School Board
Growing Excellence ... Inspiring Success

Memory boosting strategies help middle schoolers study smart

Your child uses his memory in two ways in order to learn: first, to absorb the material, and second, to recall it on demand—during a test, for example. Several strategies can help your child improve both aspects of his memory.



When your child has some memorizing to do, encourage him to:

- **Verify understanding.** Can he use the formula he's memorizing to do a sample problem, or use the vocabulary word in a sentence? It's easier for your child to memorize something he understands.
- **Surround himself with the material.** If he's studying a particular period of history, help him find books, movies and songs about that era.
- **Set the material to music.** He can make up a rhyme or set the names, dates and facts he is studying to the rhythm of a popular song. Singing the song to himself can help him recall the facts later.
- **Make a mental image.** For the branches of government, for example, he could imagine a pie divided into three pieces, with *executive*, *judicial* and *legislative* written on them in frosting.
- **Explain the material in his own words.** Have him tell you about the topic. Teaching someone else is one of the best ways to learn!



The future is right around the corner

It may seem as though your middle schooler has plenty of time before she has to think about careers. But there are lots of things you can help her do now that will give her the best possible start toward a satisfying career:

- **Encourage her to explore** her interests by participating in a variety of activities—from school clubs to volunteering.
- **Have her take** self-assessments that will reveal her strengths and possible career matches. Find some online or ask the school counselor.
- **Check out helpful resources.** Help your child learn the specifics of jobs that interest her, such as educational requirements, skills needed and salaries. One place to start is the Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook, at www.bls.gov/ooh.
- **Help her establish** positive work habits, including promptness, respect and responsibility.

Source: *College & Career Readiness: What Parents and Students Need to Know and Do Now*, The Parent Institute.

Help without taking over

Just how much help should you give your child with homework? It's never OK to do his work for him. But if you understand something he is confused about, it's fine to talk with him about it and help him solve sample problems. If the assignment confuses you, too, encourage your child to review it with his teacher.



Discuss important choices

Taking responsibility involves making good decisions. Your child's choices will have consequences that can affect her education and her life. Help her consider the serious decisions she will face. Discuss:

- **School.** Will your child take work seriously, or just do the minimum to scrape by? What outcomes does she expect?
- **Friends.** Do they share values? Does your child feel comfortable bringing friends home? Why or why not?
- **Health.** Does your child understand the risks of experimenting with alcohol, drugs and sex? Does she believe in her own self-worth?

Source: S. Covey, *The 6 Most Important Decisions You'll Ever Make, A Guide for Teens: Updated for the Digital Age*, Touchstone.

Consider the whole picture

When signing up for activities, make sure that your child has enough time in his schedule for schoolwork, family, reading and relaxation, too. To strike a balance:

- **Set basic rules,** like "one sport at a time."
- **Prioritize.** Ask your child to list activities in order of importance to him.
- **Know the commitment.** If your child wants to be in the play, he needs to find out what's required: rehearsals, shows, etc.





How can I help my child overcome writer's block?

Q: My daughter hates writing. She doesn't seem to know where to begin with writing assignments. Now she thinks she "can't" write. How can I help her?

A: Middle schoolers worry a lot about other people's opinions of them. When it comes to writing, many worry so much that what they write won't be any good—or that they'll be made fun of—that they freeze.

To thaw your child's writing abilities:

- **Let her know** that even professional writers struggle sometimes.
- **Encourage** her to write down her ideas just as they come. She can write anything that comes to mind, no matter how silly. Later she can decide what to use.
- **Criticize carefully.** If she asks you to read what she's written, discuss what you like first. Focus on what she's trying to say, not on the mechanics of her writing.
- **Help her plan** time to edit. No one writes perfectly from the start. She should edit for flow, grammar and spelling. Don't fix her mistakes for her—that sends the message that you don't think she's capable.
- **Listen.** Allow your child to express her frustration. It takes time to become a good writer.



Are you helping your child handle anger?

Anger is a normal human emotion. But left uncontrolled, anger can destroy relationships, hinder learning and worse. Are you showing your child how to manage this strong emotion in positive ways? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about positive ways to vent anger, like exercise and talking it out?
- ___ **2. Do you model** these ways of handling your emotions when you are angry?
- ___ **3. Do you make** it clear to your child that physical violence is never acceptable?
- ___ **4. Do you wait** to discuss a conflict with your child until you are both calm?
- ___ **5. Do you make** an effort to listen more than you talk

when you disagree, especially when you are upset?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean that you are teaching your child to keep anger under control. For each no, try that idea.

"Don't point your finger to the heights your children should go. Start climbing and they will follow."
—Wilfred A. Peterson

Talk about report cards

Your child's report card is one of the ways the school communicates with you. It should also be a tool for you to talk with your child about his progress. When discussing a report card with your child:

- **Notice the positives first.** Ask him what he is most proud of. Talk about what he did to produce a good result.
- **Get to the root of poor grades.** Ask your child what he thinks the problem is. Sometimes, it isn't academic ability as much as poor study habits or test anxiety.
- **Set realistic goals** for improvement.

If your child doesn't understand why he earned the grades he did, ask the teachers for their view of what is happening.

Encourage volunteer spirit

Students who volunteer in the community are more likely to stay in school, and less likely to engage in risky behaviors than kids who don't volunteer. They can also gain valuable skills, such as organizing a group, writing a letter or working with people.

Help your child check with libraries, religious organizations and community service groups, such as *DoSomething.org*, for information about ways to get involved.

Family meals nourish body and mind

Eating a nutritious diet will help your child perform in school. And when your family eats meals together, it helps even more. Studies link frequent family meals to healthier eating patterns and better grades. So toss a salad and gather your family around the table. Turn off the devices and turn on the conversation. And if you can't eat dinner together, try breakfast!



Source: "The Benefits of the Family Table," American College of Pediatricians, niswc.com/nourish.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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