

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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

## Support autonomy to promote well being and school success

*Autonomy* is the ability to think for oneself, make wise decisions and act independently. This doesn't appear overnight in a child's development. Building autonomy is a process that takes time.

Encouraging children's autonomy leads to greater academic achievement, higher self-esteem and less depression. Here are some ways to boost your middle schooler's autonomy:

- **Review the school year** with your child. What does she think went well? What does she want to do differently next year? Encourage her to ask her teachers for suggestions for the coming year.
- **Involve your child in making plans** for the summer. How does she want to spend her time? How will her ideas fit with family plans?
- **Suggest that she volunteer** for a cause she cares about. Help her research opportunities, but let her interests drive the process.
- **Set up reasonable guidelines** for her social life. Give your child the freedom to develop and navigate relationships with her peers largely on her own terms. Wait until she asks before giving advice.
- **Talk with your child** about current events. Ask for her opinions. Show that you appreciate her ideas, whether or not you agree with them.



## Solve math problems with questions

If your child gets stuck on math homework, it is helpful to think of yourself as a guide, rather than a teacher. You don't have to know the math to ask him questions that will help him figure it out for himself. Ask:

- **Which problem** is giving you trouble? Narrow your child's focus down to one problem at a time to avoid overwhelming frustration.
  - **What are you** supposed to do? Have him read the instructions out loud to you. It's possible that he missed key words the first time around.
  - **Do you understand** all of the instructions? If he doesn't, is there a classmate he could call to help him think them through?
  - **What have you** already learned that might help you? Can he apply math techniques he knows to any part of the problem?
- If your child remains stuck, suggest that he look for help online. Have him turn in as much of the work as he is able to do, and encourage him to ask the teacher for help.

## Goals help your child focus

It's never too late in the school year to establish or reinforce study habits. Instead of just saying, "Keep working hard," help your child set a specific goal. "History has been challenging for you lately. How about committing to studying your notes an extra 15 minutes each day?"



## Parents improve education

Research shows that communicating with your child and staying involved in his education makes a difference to his academic success. These efforts provide your child with "social capital" that promotes achievement. Make it a point to:

- **Take an interest** in what your child is learning. Ask specific questions about school. "What surprised you today?"
- **Encourage him to aim high.** "You are doing great in science. How about taking the honors class next year?"
- **Stay in contact** with the teachers and the school. Read the handouts that come home. Visit the school website often.

Source: M.J. Dufur and others, "Does capital at home matter more than capital at school? Social capital effects on academic achievement," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, Elsevier.

## Make time for board games

Board games are great for promoting learning and having fun as a family. In many games, your middle schooler will have to follow directions, reason logically and use strategy to make decisions. In others, she'll have to create words or read to understand questions or clues. These are all skills that will help her in school.





## My child seems to be in a slump. What can I do?

**Q:** My sixth grader is losing motivation in school. He's more disorganized, and he's also become a lot moodier. I'm worried about how he'll manage in seventh grade. How can I help?



**A:** The preteen years are a time of transition from childhood to adolescence. Your son is experiencing physical, emotional and academic changes. It's normal for him to be moody or scattered as a result.

To get him back on track and help him thrive next year:

- **Be a steadying influence.** A child in puberty may act like an adult one minute and fuss like a toddler the next. The more you can stay calm during your child's mood swings, the better.
- **Keep up effective routines.** Stick to a regular study or reading time. Have a time each week for your child to organize his study area.
- **Maintain expectations** and hold your child accountable. While it is normal for him to test boundaries, it doesn't mean misbehavior is OK. If he skips a chore or breaks a rule, enforce the consequence every time.
- **Adapt as necessary.** Lots of things change in seventh grade, including children's interests. Just because your child used to love baseball doesn't mean he can't change his mind and try out for the play instead.



## Do you show your love for your child?

Knowing that their families love them helps children feel secure. And that helps them face challenges and new situations. Are you sending your middle schooler to school confident that she is loved? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you tell** your child every day that you love her? something that makes you proud.

\_\_\_ **2. Do you let** her know that nothing she could do could make you stop loving her?

\_\_\_ **3. Do you show** you care by keeping your child's favorite healthy treats on hand?

\_\_\_ **4. Do you stop** by your child's room at night sometimes to talk for a few minutes before she goes to sleep?

\_\_\_ **5. Do you put** your positive thoughts about your child into words? Tell her when she does

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child feel secure and loved. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

*"There is no friendship, no love, like that of the parent for the child."*

*—Henry Ward Beecher*

## Keep up with daily reading

Making sure your middle schooler reads every day this summer will help him avoid the vacation learning loss that slows so many students down. Three strategies help:

- 1. Visit the library often.** Encourage your child to check out more than books—magazines or audiobooks may be just the thing for passing time in the car.
- 2. Offer a challenge.** If your child has a summer reading list for school, challenge him to read one or two extra books in order to earn a special reward from you.
- 3. Ask what other kids are reading.** If there is a popular new book out, encourage your child to read it, too!

## Set the stage for a safe summer for your child

The end of the school year usually means more freedom for students. It also means parents must provide more supervision. Establish rules with your child at the beginning of the summer. Spell out exactly where she is allowed to go, with whom and when. Let her know that any exceptions need to be discussed and approved by you in advance.

## Have fun learning together

Your child learns a lot in school. But he learns even more at home—especially from you. This summer, try some of these activities with your child:

- **Introduce him** to a hobby you enjoy.
- **Share stories** of your family's history.
- **Create** a comfy space in your home for reading.
- **Teach him a new skill**, such as how to cook a favorite dish.
- **Take an old appliance apart** and try to put it back together.



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