

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

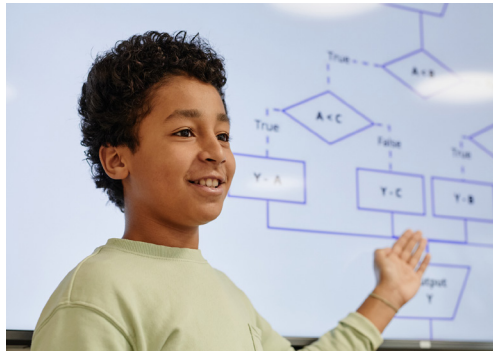
Live Oak Middle School



February 2024

Teach your child that learning is what really counts in school

Grades matter. But ultimately, it's the learning students do that prepares them for higher-level classes—and life. To help your child understand that the real goal of education is learning, have conversations together about school that go far beyond the grade on the most recent assignment.



Ask your child about:

- **Non-grade accomplishments.** How did your middle schooler handle the challenging question on the science assignment? What was it like to give a presentation in front of the whole class?
- **Ideas and experiences** that have changed your child's way of thinking. Share experiences from your life that have had a similar effect on you.
- **Materials your student is reading.** What questions do the books, articles and texts raise? Can your child relate to the fictional characters? Does any current reading remind your child of previous reading?
- **A recent test.** Did it seem like an effective way to measure what your child has learned about the topic? What else does your student wish had been covered?

Questions like these show that you care what your middle schooler is thinking and learning about, and that education is about much more than test scores and grades.



Revive your child's drive to learn

It's easy for students to lose momentum when they feel like they have been doing the same things forever and summer is still months away. To help your middle schooler get over a mid-year slump:

- **Think short-term.** The last thing your child wants to hear is "It will be June before you know it." Instead, try, "It's Thursday. Just one more quiz and you can relax on the weekend."
- **Remind your child** of previous successes. Say things like, "Yes, this is a demanding class. But you did so well on the last test because of all the study time you put in. I know you can do that again on the next one."
- **Make an ordinary day** special. "I got the ingredients for your favorite dinner. Finish your schoolwork and then come help me make it."
- **Suggest helping others.** Could your child tutor another student, or set up a study group and recruit several classmates?

Encourage daily exercise

Studies show that students who get regular exercise perform better in school than those who don't. Daily exercise can:

- **Help** your child stay alert.
- **Increase** your child's stamina.
- **Support** your child's well-being.
- **Reinforce** school success skills, such as diligence, self-control and practice.



Source: A. Barbosa and others, "Physical Activity and Academic Achievement: An Umbrella Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Think about what works

Middle schoolers often admire others who seem to succeed without effort. So being praised for working hard may feel like a put down to them. Instead, help your child notice improvement and think about specific things that have led to it. If something goes wrong, help your child brainstorm what can be learned from it.



Rule out substance abuse

To help prevent substance abuse, make it unmistakably clear that it is not OK for your child to use drugs or alcohol. Provide answers to questions kids often have, like:

- **If drinking is so bad,** why do adults do it? Adults can safely consume limited amounts of alcohol. There is no safe amount for a growing brain.
- **Can trying it once** really hurt? Studies show that young brains are especially vulnerable to addiction. And some drugs, like fentanyl, can kill in tiny amounts.
- **Why is it a big deal** as long as no one is driving? Alcohol and drug use is illegal for middle schoolers. Use can lead to an arrest record, suspension or expulsion.



How can I help with math that I'm not good at?

Q: I never got very far with math when I was in school. Now my middle schooler is struggling with math assignments I don't really understand. How can I help?

A: There are several effective ways to support your child's efforts with math homework—even if you don't know how to solve the problems. Here's are just a few:

- **Model a positive attitude.** Studies show that parents' attitudes about math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in the subject. So instead of saying things like, "I didn't like math, either," try, "That looks tough, but I bet you can figure it out. Then it'll get easier."
- **Ask your child to explain** the steps for solving a type of problem that's proving difficult. While talking, kids often realize they forgot a step.
- **Suggest that your child write** down each step next to the problem (subtracted 3 from both sides of the equation, etc.). Then your child can show the work to the teacher. If the final answer is wrong, the teacher will be able to see and explain where your student went off track.
- **Discuss all the ways you use math** during your day. Whether you are managing your finances, doubling a recipe or doing math on the job, help your child see how necessary math is to life beyond school.



Are you encouraging concentration?

Is your child easily distracted when doing schoolwork? Maintaining concentration can be a challenge for middle schoolers. Are you helping your child stay focused? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you say** *no* to multitasking? Have your child turn off or put away devices and items not needed for schoolwork.
- ___ **2. Do you recommend** that your child set goals for each study session?
- ___ **4. Do you suggest** that your child jot down distracting thoughts and save them to think about after schoolwork is complete?
- ___ **5. Do you avoid** interrupting when your child is working?

- ___ **5. Do you praise** your child for persisting and seeing tasks through?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your student concentrate on learning. For each no, try that idea.

"Focus is a matter of deciding what things you're not going to do."
—John Carmack

Foster teamwork skills at family meetings

Family meetings are an effective way to help your child learn to communicate, listen, cooperate and solve problems with others. For productive meetings:

- **Meet at the same time** every week and keep meetings brief.
- **Set ground rules**, such as "no devices" and "everyone gets a chance to talk."
- **Highlight family members'** accomplishments and positive news.
- **Brainstorm solutions** to family members' concerns.
- **Discuss expectations** and weekly goals.

After a few meetings, have family members take turns being the meeting leader.

Instill smart digital habits

Adopting several habits will help your child keep the digital world and the real world in balance. Encourage your middle schooler to:

- **Talk to friends** and family face to face.
- **Try to find answers** independently before asking a digital assistant.
- **Wait 24 hours** before responding to a text or post that makes your child mad.
- **Face boring situations** without reaching for a phone.

Source: L. Kolb, "6 Ways to Help Students Manage Their Smartphones," ISTE.

Let yourself be wowed

When learning seems exciting, students are motivated to do more of it. So when your child tells you about what is going on in a class, respond with interest. A fact or concept may not be new to you, but if it's new to your child, be enthusiastic. "Your science teacher froze a rose in liquid nitrogen and then shattered it? How cool!"



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

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