

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Linden Public Schools



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## Refocus attention on respect for a positive effect on learning

By the middle of the school year, students are usually feeling more comfortable and relaxed in their classes. That's great! Unfortunately, however, a "relaxed" attitude toward respectful behavior often goes along with this.

In a class of many people, each student's actions affect the others. It's difficult for teachers to create a productive learning environment in the absence of respect.

Talk with your child about the importance of being respectful to others in school. Expect your student to:

- **Practice self-respect.** Explain that this means acting in ways that make your child feel proud of doing what's right.
- **Be on time.** Promptness shows respect for other people's time.
- **Listen and speak courteously.** This means hearing others out, and using civil language to express ideas and opinions.
- **Use polite body language.** Raising hands, sitting properly on furniture, and smiling, nodding and making eye-contact with others shows respect.
- **Take learning seriously.** Your child should pay attention in class and participate.
- **Understand that it is possible** to learn something from almost everyone—even while disagreeing with them.



## Discuss rewards of reading

If your child doesn't read for pleasure often, explain the advantages. Reading for fun is a great way for your middle schooler to:

- **Visit** exciting places.
- **Become** an expert in an area of interest.
- **Have** a laugh.
- **Encounter** people with similar characteristics, interests, ideas and problems.



## Consistency gets results

Discipline works best when it is consistent. So while you may adapt some rules as your child grows, maintain a consistent approach. Keep these guidelines in mind:

- **Wait until you are calm.** Regain control of your emotions before addressing misbehavior with your child. If your child is upset, help calm things down before imposing a consequence.
- **Listen to your child.** Don't let your middle schooler talk you out of imposing a consequence. But hear your child out even as you enforce the rule.
- **Hold firm** in non-negotiable areas, such as rules about safety and substance use.



## Foster traits that boost school success

Academic skills aren't the only things that lead to achievement in school. Students who develop certain personal characteristics and apply them to their studies do better than those who don't. Encourage your child to be:

- **Curious.** Nothing drives learning like wanting to know things. To stoke curiosity, expose your middle schooler to new ideas and experiences.
- **Confident.** Show your love, and make it clear you believe your child is capable of working hard, learning and succeeding.
- **Organized.** Give your child folders and calendars to help keep track of schoolwork and time. Schedule weekly time for organizing together.
- **Persistent.** When successful students face learning challenges, they keep trying. They look for different approaches.
- **Resilient.** Setbacks happen. Teach your child to take responsibility for actions, and to create a plan for improvement.

## Attendance always counts

Some families think that poor attendance doesn't matter if their child earns good grades. This isn't true! Absent students miss activities and demonstrations that make classes interesting. They fall behind and have increasing difficulty catching up. Some lose interest in school altogether. Making attendance a priority is a critical way to ensure that your child continues on the path to academic achievement.





## How can I prevent problems if my child chooses wrong?

**Q:** How can families help middle schoolers learn to make good choices without letting them make bad ones? What should I do?

**A:** Learning to make good decisions—and learning lessons from the poor ones, is part of growing up. When you allow your child make a poor choice, you create a situation your child can learn from.

Balance is the key. There are areas when you must make the decisions. These include things like safety, school attendance and drug and alcohol use. But in other areas, you can set boundaries and let your child make choices within them.

Here are three:

- 1. Schoolwork.** Doing assignments is non-negotiable. But you can let your child decide how to do them—sprawled on the floor, sitting at a table, before dinner, after dinner, etc. Your middle schooler's grades will reveal whether the decisions are working, or need to be reconsidered.
- 2. Sleep.** If you've insisted on the same bedtime and wake time for years, ask what times your child thinks are reasonable. If they allow your middle schooler to get at least nine hours of sleep every 24 hours, try it.
- 3. Bedroom space.** Your child may choose to be OK with a messy room. As long as it is sanitary, don't argue. If your child can't find a needed item when it's time to leave for school, experiencing the consequences may be the lesson your student needs to make a better choice next time.



## Do you encourage working with teachers?

Your child may not like every teacher. That's normal. But it is important for students to learn to work productively with all teachers. Are you helping your child establish effective working relationships? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- 1. Do you make** it your child's responsibility to be polite to teachers?
- 2. Do you remind** your child that it isn't necessary to like a teacher in order to learn in that class?
- 3. Do you help** identify likely causes if your student is having an issue in a class?
- 4. Do you urge** your child to talk to teachers and work with them to resolve issues?
- 5. Do you contact** teachers if your child is unable to work

through an issue with them and ask for a parent-teacher-student conference?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your student interact with teachers in positive ways. For each no, try that idea.*

*"I'm not telling you it's going to be easy. I'm telling you it's going to be worth it."*

—Art Williams

## Which math option would your child rather have?

Boost your child's interest in math with a game that makes it personal. Ask your middle schooler to choose between two options, and justify the choice with math. For example, would your student rather:

- **Have 23 hundred-dollar bills**, 48 ten-dollar bills and 9 one-dollar bills, or 26 hundreds, 17 tens and 22 ones?
- **Have 500 pounds** of pennies or 40 pounds of quarters? (Help your child check the coins' weights at [www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/coin-specifications](http://www.usmint.gov/learn/coin-and-medal-programs/coin-specifications)).

Source: J. Stevens, Would You Rather Math.

## Jump-start motivation by recognizing progress

It may not thrill you if your child brings home a low C on a history quiz. But if the previous quiz grade was a D, your child is making progress. Recognizing the improvement can motivate your student to keep up the momentum. "You brought your grade up. You have what it takes!" Avoid adding a negative spin—this isn't the time to say that your child still has a long way to go.



## Talk about accountability

Being talented or smart only goes so far. For success in school and beyond, students must also be able to be counted on. Explain to your child that *accountability* involves:

- **Living up to commitments.** Your child should turn work in on time and do a fair share on group projects.
- **Working cheerfully**, rather than being so unpleasant about it that no one will want to work with your child again.
- **Correcting errors** and apologizing if your student has let someone down.

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