

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Paxon Hollow Middle School
Have you read a good book lately?

May 2008

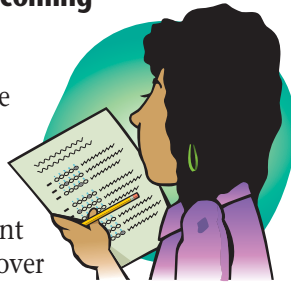
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Prepare for standardized tests

Q: My middle schooler has a standardized test coming up. How can I help her prepare?

A: Your child has probably invested a big chunk of time getting ready at school. But parents have a role to play at home, too. For example, you can:

- **Review practice tests** that teachers have given your child. Talk about how they went.
- **Discuss ways to memorize.** Your child may want to write down information a few times or say it over and over. She might also come up with pictures in her mind to match information. Another idea: Group related information using charts or diagrams.
- **Suggest that your child use her own learning style.** For example, a visual learner often benefits from applying lots of color to notes.
- **Review test-taking tips.** Remind your child to look over the test before she answers any questions. She should also begin with the easiest questions and tackle the hardest questions last.
- **Help your child fight test anxiety.** Practice relaxing techniques, such as closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. Tell your child you believe in her. Never focus on a certain score. Say, "You're prepared. You can do it."



Source: Lawrence J. Greene, *The Resistant Learner: Helping Your Child Knock Down the Barriers to School Success*, ISBN: 0-312-31919-3 (St. Martin's Griffin, 1-888-330-8847, www.stmartins.com).

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Promote optimism with action

No matter what the past year was like, your child can get a "jump start" on next year's school success. Help him think about his options. He can:

- **Attend** summer school to catch up in challenging areas. Also think about his classes for next year. Which ones interest him the most? Can he sign up for them now? He can talk with school staff about his ideas.
- **Study** with a peer helper or high school student. Middle schoolers often accept more help from someone close in age than from an adult. Perhaps the school can suggest a good match.
- **Work** out a summer-long incentive program. To earn extra privileges over the summer, such as staying up a little later, your child could read a book each week or spend 15 minutes a day on math problems.

Source: Neil I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do if You Can't*, ISBN: 0-7611-1570-6 (Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 212-254-5900, www.workman.com).

PEER PRESSURE

Be aware of the signs of possible gang activity

Gangs are in all types of communities. It's important to be alert to some of these signs of gang membership:

- **Changing** friends suddenly.
- **Unusual** new haircut, tattoo or marking.
- **Wearing** certain clothing all the time.
- **Withdrawing** from family.

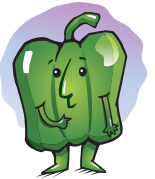
Source: "Protecting Our Youth from Gang Involvement," Safe and Drug-Free Youth Section, Fairfax County Public Schools, www.fcps.edu/ss/SDFY.

WELLNESS

Good nutrition is the key

Your eighth grader just announced that he's a vegetarian. Now what? Scrap the chicken and serve only sprouts?

No. Instead, respect his decision, but spend time educating yourself—and him—about what a healthful meat-free diet looks like. (After all, chips and doughnuts are meatless!) Make sure your vegetarian gets the nutrients he needs.



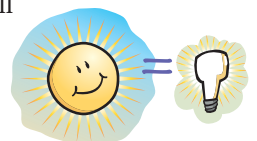
Source: Reed Mangels, Ph.D., R.D., "Vegetarian Nutrition for Teenagers," The Vegetarian Resource Group, www.vrg.org/nutrition/teennutrition.htm.

REINFORCING LEARNING

Summertime fun can lead to summertime learning

Before hitting the beach, commit to a summer break rich in learning. Here's how:

- **Hone math skills.** Planning a vacation? Have your child figure out how much spending money she'll have each day.
- **Bring a favorite lesson to life.** What was the coolest thing she learned about this year? How stars are classified? Visit a planetarium or stargaze together.



AFTER SCHOOL

Play word games to reinforce your child's language skills

During the summer, make sure to help your child practice his language arts skills. Here are some fun games to play with your child that reinforce these important skills:



- **Take turns thinking of adjectives that describe something**, such as a rainy day. You might choose *wet, misty, gray, foggy, damp* or *overcast*. How many can you think of?
- **Use the pronouns *I, me, we* and *us*** in sentences. Have one person say a sentence. The other should guess if it's grammatically correct. For example, "My friends and *I* will go together" is proper. "*Me* and my friends will go together" is not.
- **Define prefixes and suffixes** (the beginnings and ends of words). For example, the prefix "non" means "not," as in *nonstop*. The suffix "ful" means "having," as in *healthful*. Here are some others to try: *preschool, heartless, unfaithful, remake, taller*.
- **Think of antonyms (opposite words)**, synonyms (words that mean almost the same thing) and homonyms (words that sound the same but mean different things). *Courageous* and *cowardly* are antonyms. *Enormous* and *giant* are synonyms. *Piece* and *peace* are homonyms.

Source: Vito Perrone, *101 Educational Conversations With Your 5th Grader*, ISBN: 0-7910-1921-7 (Chelsea House Publishers, 1-800-322-8755, <http://chelseahouse.infobasepublishing.com>).

PARENT QUIZ

Are you promoting self-discipline?

It's important for middle schoolers to be self-disciplined. Longer assignments mean your child will have to work hard. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're promoting self-discipline at home:

- ___ **1. Do you avoid** rewarding your child for impulsive behavior? (Don't drop what you're doing just because she interrupts.)
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to weigh pros and cons when making decisions?
- ___ **3. Do you expect** your child to live with the consequences of her decisions (unless she'd be in danger)?
- ___ **4. Do you teach** your child strategies to remind herself of responsibilities (like writing a note)?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you place a high priority on self-control for your child. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

"Failure is only the opportunity to begin intelligently again."
—Henry Ford

BUILDING CHARACTER

Help your preteen build good character every day

To build your middle schooler's character:

- **Boost** her awareness of moral obligations.
- **Teach** her to *want* to do what's right.
- **Help** her see how her choices affect others.
- **Find** teachable, character-building moments. Discuss movie characters, public corruption, etc.

Source: "Parenting (with character-building in mind)," Character Counts! www.charactercounts.org/parents.htm.

MAKING TIME COUNT

Keep up communication with middle schoolers

As children get older, they may talk less about their personal lives—at least with parents. But that doesn't mean you should stop communicating. Ask about things your child cares about. Even if he doesn't say much, he'll be reminded that you care.

ENCOURAGING READING

Urge your child to spend this summer reading

There's no greater joy than summer reading—on a beach, beside a lake, on the porch or under a tree. This summer, encourage your child to:

- **Bring a book on trips** and family outings.
- **Read during quiet times** at home. Before bed is always a perfect time.
- **Read to learn a skill**—cooking, caring for animals, playing chess, changing the oil in a car.



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