

Helping Students Learn[®]

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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La Mesa-Spring Valley School District
Extended School Services Program

Empower your child to move forward after disappointments

What does your middle schooler do when he faces a setback? Some students recover quickly. They examine what went wrong and resolve to do things differently next time. Others are still stuck in their disappointment weeks later.

Learning how to move on after setbacks can enhance your child's achievement in school and his overall happiness—and it's a skill that can be taught. Here's how:

- **Remind your child** that a setback doesn't mean that he can't succeed. Everyone faces setbacks.
- **Allow him to solve** his own problems. Let him develop his own plan for responding to a low grade, for example. You can help him practice what he will say to the teacher, but expect *him* to say it.
- **Encourage him to set** realistic goals for improvement. Then help him design plans to achieve them.
- **Teach your child** that life has its ups and downs. Kids who spend time on social media often think that everyone else has a perfect life. Tell your child, "Don't compare the reality of your daily life with their highlights."
- **Set an example.** Your child is always watching you. If you handle disappointments with grace, he'll learn healthy coping skills.



Source: "How Self-Regulation Can Help Young People Overcome Setbacks," ScienceDaily, nswc.com/mid_bounceback.



Why foreign language study matters

Research shows the benefits of learning a foreign language go far beyond knowledge of the language itself. Language learning can develop your child's:

- **Memory.** The more students learn and recall new vocabulary the stronger their memory gets.
- **Understanding** of her first language. Seeing how the two languages are alike and how they differ helps improve reading, writing, and even testing skills.
- **Problem-solving skills.** Studies show that students who speak two languages also tend to do better in math and science.
- **Awareness** of other cultures and global changes.
- **Ability to get a job.** The majority of U.S. employers report an increasing need for workers with foreign language skills.
- **Sense of achievement.** Mastering a language shows students they can take on challenges.

Source: "What Does Research Show About the Benefits of Language Learning?" American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, nswc.com/mid_language.

Discuss tough situations before they happen

Doing the right thing takes judgment. To help your child make wise choices, discuss possible thorny situations with him in advance.

What would he do if a friend asked to copy his homework? Role-playing things he could say in response prepares him to use good judgment when it really counts.



Have conversations that encourage thinking

Thinking critically about a topic deepens students' understanding of it. To give your child chances to practice critical thinking:

- **Discuss current events.** Encourage your child to ask questions about things she sees online or hears at school.
- **Read a news article** aloud. Ask what she thinks about specific topics in it.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** "What have you learned that has changed your opinion about something?"

Establish effective limits

It's normal for middle schoolers to test limits and press for more freedom. But they haven't outgrown a need for clear boundaries. When setting limits for your child:



- **Be specific.** "No gaming until your homework is done."
- **Explain your reasoning.** "School is your top priority."
- **Get your child's input.** You may not follow his suggestions, but hear him out.
- **Set reasonable consequences,** then avoid nagging about rules. If he doesn't obey them, enforce the consequences.



How can I help my child have more self-confidence?

Q: I'm worried that my eighth grader lacks self-confidence. She hunches her shoulders and seems uncomfortable when talking to other kids and adults. Sometimes she says she can't do something before she tries. What should I do?

A: Middle schoolers are a self-conscious bunch. They often feel as if the whole world is watching them. They avoid talking and doing things for fear they'll say or do something that will embarrass them. But a poor self-image and lack of confidence can affect grades and friendships and make kids vulnerable to negative peer pressure.

To boost your child's belief in herself:

- **Provide unconditional love.** Let your child know you will always love her—no matter what she does or doesn't do.
- **Notice things she does right** more than things she does wrong. Give specific praise: "That's a good point. You've really thought this through."
- **Share your experiences.** Your child may be relieved to learn that you have also had to overcome self-doubt.
- **Give your child opportunities** to make decisions for herself.
- **Support her strengths.** Encourage your child to pursue things she loves and is good at.



Are you helping your child volunteer?

Participating in community service teaches kids about the needs of others. At the same time, they learn that they can make a difference in the world. Are you encouraging your middle schooler to volunteer? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

1. **Do you discuss** with your child the responsibility to help others who are less fortunate?
2. **Do you suggest** that your child volunteer for causes that are meaningful to him?
3. **Do you help** your child find ways to get involved?
4. **Do you support** your child's service in ways you can, such as by giving him a ride or arranging a carpool?
5. **Do you join** your child in volunteering when you can?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child learn and grow by helping others. For each no, try that idea.

"What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make."
—Jane Goodall

Apply math skills to life

Show your child that math is more than abstract concepts—it's an essential everyday skill! To help her put math into practice:

- **Give your child** a grocery receipt. Ask her to add up how much your family spent on snack foods.
- **Have your child** handle measurements around the house, such as room area and furniture sizes when you want to rearrange your space.
- **Encourage your child** to read and interpret graphs. Look for them in the newspaper, in print or online.

Source: "Math Matters in Everyday Life," Northern Illinois University, niswc.com/mathforlife.

Look into attendance issues

By mid year, some students' attendance has begun to slip. If you find out that your child has been arriving late to a particular class—or skipping it altogether—make an appointment to speak to his teacher. There could be something going on that's causing your child to stay away. The sooner you figure out what the problem is, the more quickly you can begin to address it.

Don't let your child take a vacation from reading

Maintain your middle schooler's momentum over winter break by setting aside 20 minutes every day for reading. To motivate her:

- **Give her a reason** to read. If she enjoys cooking, she could read cookbooks to find a recipe to try.
- **Give books, magazines** or bookstore gift cards to your child as holiday gifts.
- **Let your child choose** a movie to watch that is based on a book. But encourage her to read the book first!



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