

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



September 2020

La Mesa - Spring Valley School District
Extended School Services Program

Help your middle schooler become a responsible student

Middle school differs from elementary school in many ways. One big difference is that students are expected to take increased responsibility for their own learning. The challenges of responding to the pandemic make helping your child develop this initiative more important. This year, encourage him to:



- **Do more than memorize.** Help him really think about the material. For example, he should ask himself, "How does this relate to something I have learned or experienced before?"
- **Participate in learning.** Your child should ask questions and express opinions. This will give him a better understanding of the material.
- **Cooperate with teachers** and classmates. Respectful behavior makes it easier for everyone to learn.
- **Get help at the first sign** of a problem. Have your child find out about his teachers' availability and other resources for extra help.
- **Speak up for himself** and his education. He should think about what he needs to be successful and ask for it.
- **Take challenging classes.** If your child's classes are all easy, he may not be in the right ones. Together, consult his counselor about his options.



Bolster your child's emotional balance

Your child will need more than school supplies to do her best this year. To succeed academically, middle schoolers need emotional resources as well.

To give your child the best chance of thriving, it's important to:

- **Support her emotional** well-being. Adolescents are notoriously filled with self-doubt, and this year's unprecedented events may have your child feeling unusually anxious. Help her reinforce her sense of self. Spend time together and show an interest in the things that interest her. Encourage healthy friendships. And if you
- **Help her understand** her changing body. Talk to your child about changes she'll likely experience. Let her know they happen to different people at different times. If she knows this is normal, she may feel less out of step.

Source: C. Francis, "Surviving Middle School: Tips for Parents from a Middle School Counselor," American School Counselor Association, niswc.com/counselor_middle.

Be positive about this year

After last year's school closures, you may be worrying that your child won't be ready for this year's classes. But teachers are expecting students to return with a varying range of abilities—and they are professionals at handling learning differences.

Tell your child you want him to give his best effort. It's OK to say that things won't always be fun or easy (he may appreciate your honesty), but assure him that you and the teachers will help him achieve.

Equip your child with tools for staying organized

To help your child keep her studies on track, teach her to use these organizational tools:

- **To-do lists.** Have your child make lists of tasks to complete daily, weekly, monthly, etc.
- **A calendar.** Your child should use it to write down due dates and schedule study time. Remind her to check it often.
- **Sticky notes.** She can tag items she'll need for assignments, or mark her place in a book with a summary of the plot so far.



Encourage regular exercise

Research has long shown that physical fitness activities can enhance school performance. Not only can exercise reduce stress and put students in a better mood for learning, studies link regular physical activity with:

- **Improved thinking,** ability to focus and impulse control.
- **Improved math** performance.



Source: S. Sneek and others, "Effects of school-based physical activity on mathematics performance in children: a systematic review," *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, BMC, niswc.com/PA.



How can I ease my child's worries about fitting in?

Q: My child started middle school last year and had a tough time finding friends. Social distancing and school closures made things worse. Now she's dreading the new school year. What can I do to support her?

A: Last year took its toll on many students. But a new year is a fresh start, and a difficult time last year does not mean this one will be the same. To help your child flourish:

- **Listen to her.** Let your child talk about last year's issues. Don't dismiss her worries by simply telling her things will get better. Make her feel heard.
- **Help her pinpoint the problem.** "You felt like you had nothing in common with the other kids. Is that right?" The more clearly she can define the issue, the better.
- **Brainstorm solutions** together. Ask, "How can you connect with people you do share interests with?" Possibilities might include clubs (school-based or not) and volunteer groups, and even online group chats among classmates.
- **Help her take action.** "You like interior design. Why don't you reach out to your counselor to find out how to start a design club? Members could share their designs." This may not solve all her problems, but it should help her feel she has the power to improve the situation.



Are you off to a strong start?

The start of the school year brings a lot of new beginnings, and some may be challenging for your child. Are you doing all you can to see him through the first few weeks of school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you know** the names of your child's teachers and how to contact them?
- ___ **2. Do you tell** your child that you care more that he is learning and doing his best than you do about his grades?
- ___ **3. Do you ask** your child if he has questions or concerns about school and help him address them?
- ___ **4. Do you make** an effort to be patient with your child—whether he is acting needy or independent?

- ___ **5. Do you offer** stability by continuing familiar routines at home?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child make a smooth transition. For each no, try that idea.

*"And so each venture
is a new beginning."
—T.S. Eliot*

Keep your child's social media use under control

Social media use by middle schoolers is on the rise, and it can be a useful way to maintain friendships. But kids need guidance to learn to use it safely. Before allowing it:

- **Learn the sites** your child wants to use. Find out how they work.
- **Review privacy settings.** Discuss the need to keep personal data private.
- **Set standards** for online behavior. Your child shouldn't post things she wouldn't share with parents and teachers or say to someone's face. Remind her that nothing online ever really goes away.
- **Enforce digital downtime,** and plan safe, screen-free social interactions.

Source: "What are the basic social media rules for middle schoolers?" Common Sense Media, niswc.com/socialsense.

Involvement boosts success

Staying involved in your middle schooler's education won't just help him today—it can help him have a brighter future. Family engagement leads to better test scores, higher graduation rates and lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse. Show your child you care about what he's learning. Help him establish study routines. And inspire him to strive by modeling perseverance yourself.

Help your child turn math skills into life skills

To give your child a lesson in real-world math, include her when you are paying bills or working on your budget.

You don't have to share all your financial details, but let her see



what budgeting looks like. "I'd love to order take-out for dinner tonight, but it will have to wait. It's not in our budget right now."

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