MIDDLE SCHOOL

Helping Students Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

November 2017

Grand Erie District School Board
Growing Excellence ... Inspiring Success

Help your child find books that make reading a pleasure



Reading for pleasure is one of the most important things your child can do to build her reading fluency, her vocabulary and her understanding of the world. Yet in one recent survey, 44% of middle school students reported having trouble finding books that they like. And only 39% of them thought their parents provided great ideas for specific books.

To help your middle schooler find titles she'll love:

- **Guide her to helpful sources,** such as teachers and librarians, and friends whose who love to read. Casually ask your child what her friends are reading, or what books her teachers are recommending.
- **Look for websites** that list and review titles for middle schoolers. Some sites to start with are Goodreads (*www.goodreads.com*), Kirkus Reviews (*www.kirkusreviews.com*) and the School Library Journal (*www.slj.com*). Don't forget your local library's website!
- **Build on your child's interests.** If she's navigating tricky personal relationships, she might enjoy a book about a circle of friends.
- **Don't forget the fun.** Graphic novels and other "light" materials lure many reluctant middle schoolers into the world of books and reading.

Source: "Kids & Family Reading Report: Reading Books for Fun," Scholastic, niswc.com/midbooks.

Put your child in charge of homework

For your student to get the most out of homework, he needs to take over the responsibility for completing it. Middle schoolers often prefer to:

- **Do homework** somewhere other than home.
- **Do homework** with friends.
- **Have their parents** be less involved with homework.

So, what can you do to support your child's daily efforts with homework? You can:

- **Monitor his performance** in school. If he is doing fairly well, consider allowing him to choose when and where he does his homework. If his grades slip, you can return to a more structured homework time.
- **Host study sessions** for your child and a friend.
- **Encourage him.** Say things like, "I see you working hard on your homework. That will pay off!"

Source: H.Z. Kackar and others, "Age and gender differences in adolescents' homework experiences," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Elsevier.

Share tips for writing well

Your child can improve his writing by using three simple strategies:

1. **Read it out loud.** Listen for clunky passages that need fixing.
2. **Revise it.** Rearrange, tighten, expand or clarify points where needed.
3. **Seek advice.** Teachers can recommend reputable websites about writing.

Ask your child to imagine

"Imagine" questions are great for starting interesting family conversations and encouraging your child to think creatively. And almost all children like to answer them! You might say:



- **Imagine** you are famous. What would it be for? What would the downside of fame be?
- **Imagine** you could go anywhere. How would you get there? What would you do?
- **Imagine** you are the principal. What would you do to encourage students to give their best efforts in school?

Talk about cybercheating



Technology has made cheating easier than ever. Students download papers and pass them off as their own. Kids in one class period use phones to take pictures of tests, then text them to kids in later periods. They use apps to solve math problems.

Discuss cheating, and let your child know:

- **Cheating is always wrong**—even if "everyone" is doing it.
- **You value honesty** more than grades, and you expect it from her at all times.

Source: J. Rogalski, "The high-tech tricks kids use to cheat in school," WLBZ-TV, niswc.com/cybercheat.

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Q&A How can I help my child regain self-confidence?



Q: My seventh grader has never cared what people think of him. But recently, he's been saying "I'm just weird," and "I'm not like the other kids." He has some friends and he's doing OK in his classes. What can I do to help him get his confidence back?

A: Kids this age can change personalities like they change clothes as they grow and discover themselves. Your child feels different, but that's not necessarily bad. If he isn't being bullied or isolated at school, and he's not struggling with schoolwork, let him become his own unique person.

To support your child:

- **Ask for his opinions.** You don't need to agree with him, but show him respect and listen to his views.
- **Be tolerant.** He may choose entertainment or a hairstyle that's not what you would choose, but as long as it isn't inappropriate or offensive, give him some room to express himself.
- **Look for activities you can both enjoy.** Recognize that your child is growing up, and consider new ways to have fun together.
- **Help him recover from mistakes.** Everyone makes them! Missteps are opportunities for growth.

Parent Quiz Are you teaching stress management?

Stress is a part of most people's lives. But too much stress can cause your child's schoolwork to suffer. Are you helping your child cope with stress? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___**1. Do you help** your child set realistic learning goals?

___**2. Do you help** your child set priorities and stick to them?

___**3. Do you brainstorm** with your child about changes she could make if she is feeling overloaded?

___**4. Do you encourage** your child to set aside regular time for exercise and relaxation?

___**5. Do you let** your child know that you are always available to listen?

How well are you doing?

More yes *answers mean you are actively helping your child control her stress level. For each* no, *try that idea.*

"The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice."
—Peggy O'Mara

Planning prevents panic over long-term projects

The due dates for long-term projects can seem very far away to middle schoolers. They may think they have plenty of time before they have to start. Then before they know it, there is too much to do and not enough time to do it in.

As soon as your child is assigned a long-term project, help him:

1. **Break it down** into smaller steps. Be specific about what each step involves.
2. **Assign a deadline** for each step.
3. **Schedule time** each day to work on the project. Write it on the calendar.

Source: "Time Management on Long Term Projects," Student Academic Services, Cal Poly, niswc.com/ltp.

Urge positive challenges



Research says that students benefit more from taking rigorous courses than easier ones. Even if your middle schooler isn't making top grades, encourage her to keep challenging herself and to take the most ambitious courses she can handle.

Source: S.L. Christenson, Ph.D. and C. Peterson, "Research on the Factors for School Success," University of Minnesota Extension, niswc.com/challenge.

Promote learning at home

There are lots of concepts and skills your child can learn outside of school that will help him succeed in it. To foster learning, give your child:

- **Meaningful responsibilities.** If you have a pet, ask him to help with its care. Teach him to shop for ingredients and prepare meals, and to do other chores that benefit the family.
- **Meaningful experiences.** Check out nearby cultural attractions and events. Establish family traditions. Meet people from other places.

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