

# Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



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

## 'Academic buoyancy' helps your child rise above setbacks

In middle school, students often face high academic expectations. And it's not unusual for them to experience a setback—a struggle to understand a concept, or even a failing grade. But a setback doesn't have to knock your child out of commission. Help her develop what some experts call "academic buoyancy"—the ability to get back up and keep trying.

Here's how:

- **Be alert for signs** that your child is anxious or struggling. If you hear self-defeating language, like "I just can't do it," or see that she is avoiding a subject or seems stressed, find ways to gently start a conversation.
- **Bolster your child's courage.** Let her know that a setback doesn't mean she can't achieve her goals. Tell her you know she has what it takes to overcome this challenge.
- **Help her see a setback as an opportunity** to learn. A failure is a sign that she is trying something that isn't easy. But it is also a chance to review what went wrong and figure out how to do it better next time.
- **Model buoyancy.** Share stories about times when you made mistakes, or felt like a failure, and how you bounced back. Make it clear that no one is perfect, and progress rarely happens in a straight line.

Source: M. Smith, "Has the resilience ship sailed?" *tes*, TES Global, Ltd.



## Activities knit ties to school

Students with ties to school beyond academics are more likely to stay in school and go on to graduate. Encourage your child to explore interests and have fun in an extracurricular activity at school this spring.



## Thinking improves reading

What does your child understand about the material he reads? Whether he's reading a short passage or a novel, encourage him to think about:

- **The author's purpose.** Is it to inform? Entertain? Influence readers?
- **The main idea.** What details support it?
- **The order of events** in the text.
- **The relationships** between events in the text and the eventual outcome.
- **The meaning** of descriptive language. "My heart sang," means that the author was happy, not that he made a sound.

Source: ACT, "For Middle Schoolers: Activities to Build College-Level Reading Skills," AdLit.org, [nswc.com/read-comp](http://nswc.com/read-comp).



## Help your child benefit from class notes

Students who take good class notes have two advantages. They are more likely to remember information they have written down themselves, and they have class-specific information they can review when studying for tests.

Share these tips with your child:

- **Don't try** to write everything. Your child should listen for dates, names, events and other key facts.
- **Use clues** to determine what's important. If the teacher writes it on the board, your child should write it down. The same goes for things the teacher repeats.
- **Review notes** each evening. Your child should rewrite them

if they are sloppy and clarify anything that doesn't make sense, or make a note to ask about it.

- **Compare notes** with a classmate. Someone else may have picked up on something your child missed.
- **Stay organized.** Your child should date his notes and keep them in a binder for that class.

Source: "Note-taking Tips," TeensHealth, Nemours, [nswc.com/mid\\_notes](http://nswc.com/mid_notes).

## In this game, math makes the choices clear

To make math personal for your child, play a game of Would You Rather. Ask her to use math to justify her choice between two options. For example, would she 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? (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 ... ?" [nswc.com/wyr](http://nswc.com/wyr).



## How can I get my child to stop butting heads with me?

**Q:** My son seems to take great pleasure in annoying me. He doesn't listen when I talk, and he loves to take the opposite side in every discussion. He's doing well enough in school, but he won't if he treats his teachers this way. What can I do?

**A:** Your frustration may come more from how you view your child's behavior than from his intent. He may not be trying to upset you at all.

Some experts divide parents into two groups:

- **Positive thinkers.** When their kids "zone out," for example, they chalk it up to distraction, not misbehavior. They are more likely to react to contrary behavior calmly.
- **Negative thinkers.** When their children misbehave, they take their behavior personally and are more likely to get angry.

Dealing with your child's misbehavior in positive ways at home can improve his outlook at school. If you assume that your son's actions are a function of his development, rather than his feelings about you, you can address just the misbehavior—without the added layer of deliberate offense. And that may be easier on both of you.



## Are you a steady source of support?

When your middle schooler's classes, responsibilities and even her body seem to be constantly changing, are you a steadying presence she can rely on when she wants to talk? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you make** it a point to have regular conversations with your child?
2. **Do you make** an effort to speak to your child calmly, even during disagreements?
3. **Do you listen** with respect to your child's point of view, and expect her to do the same for you?
4. **Do you ask** questions to help her figure out for herself what she should do?
5. **Do you use** encouraging non-verbal cues with your

child, such as smiles, private signals and hugs?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are communicating your support for your child. For each no, try that idea.*

"Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable."

—Fred Rogers

## Routines help when kids must be home alone

If you are at work when your middle schooler gets home from school, help him establish a productive after-school routine. If the bus drops him off at 4 p.m. and you get home at 6 p.m. for example, he could call you to check in, take 30 minutes to relax, and then tackle homework until you arrive.

## Request reasons in writing

Your child wants something from you—a later bedtime or a trip to a theme park. The next time she makes a request, don't say *yes* or *no*. Instead, ask her to make a persuasive argument in writing. She can choose the format—a letter, a slide presentation, a script for an ad, etc. Your child should state:

1. **What** she wants.
2. **Why** she wants it.
3. **Why** she thinks she should get it.
4. **Her replies** to the objections she thinks you may have.



Tell her a well-reasoned argument has a better chance of getting a positive response.

## Watch out for alcohol ads

One study of middle schoolers found that kids aged 11 to 14 saw ads for alcohol multiple times a day—on billboards and signs, on TV and in print. Research suggests that exposure to alcohol advertising may increase underage drinking. Parents should:

- **Be aware** that middle schoolers notice alcohol advertising.
- **Talk about the dangers** of underage drinking frequently with your child.

Source: R.L. Collins and others, "Alcohol Advertising Exposure Among Middle School-Age Youth: An Assessment Across All Media and Venues," *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, Alcohol Research Documentation, Inc., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, [niscw.com/drinkads](http://niscw.com/drinkads).

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