

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

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

## Four things will give your child a boost in school and beyond

These days, more and more employers are looking for applicants with technological skills. It's hard to know which specific computer skills today's middle schoolers will need years from now. But tech industry experts point to other skills and traits they think will be equally critical for future job seekers. These include:

- 1. Communication skills.** Your child will need to organize his ideas and express himself clearly—verbally and in writing. Encourage him to write stories, journal entries and even directions for doing tasks. He could also join a debate or drama club.
- 2. Problem solving skills.** The ability to identify problems, develop and test strategies, and keep trying after a failure will benefit your child in any career. Help him look at obstacles as puzzles to be solved.
- 3. Motivation to learn.** In a world of rapid change, workers must continue to gain new skills. Help your child find ways to learn more and think deeply about topics that interest him. This can build a habit of curiosity, and motivate him to keep learning.
- 4. Self-confidence about STEM subjects.** Help your child believe in his ability to learn science, technology, engineering and math concepts. Encourage him to challenge himself in these subjects throughout his school career—with STEM, there is always more to learn.



Source: M.B. Cortez, "4 Skills Tech Industry Employees Say Today's Students Need to Succeed," EdTech Focus on K-12, [niswc.com/futureskills](http://niswc.com/futureskills).



## Share tips for taking standardized tests

Springtime brings showers, flowers ... and standardized tests. A few basic strategies can help your middle schooler do her best on these important assessments. Remind her to:

- Read questions carefully.** Your child should take time to read the whole question before trying to decide on the right answer.
  - Pay attention to key words.** Words like *infer*, *always*, *except* and *best* can make a difference in what is being asked.
  - Consider all the choices.** On multiple choice tests, it is possible
- that while one answer may fit, another answer may be stronger.
- Make an informed guess** if there is no penalty for doing so. If your child doesn't know the right answer, she should eliminate the choices she knows are wrong and select one of the remaining options.

Source: G.E. Tompkins, "Preparing for Standardized Tests," Education.com, [niswc.com/standardized](http://niswc.com/standardized).

## Rekindle a love of reading

Has reading dropped from your child's list of priorities? To help her put it back:

- **Set an example.** Make reading part of your daily life.
- **Share interesting articles** you read.
- **Respect that her interests** may have changed. If all the books on her shelf are for younger kids, head to the library.

## There's no place like home

Earth Day is April 22. Have your child check out these sites to learn more about our planet and its needs:



- **Eyes on the Earth,** <https://eyes.jpl.nasa.gov/eyes-on-the-earth.html>. Your child can download an app and access current NASA satellite data to monitor the Earth's vital signs—such as temperature, sea level height and more.
- **Blue Planet Biomes,** [www.blueplanetbiomes.org](http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org). Your child can discover more about the world's ecosystems and the things they depend on.

## Connect new freedoms to responsibilities

As middle schoolers become more capable, many push for more independence. Make sure your child understands that freedoms must be earned. Tell him you expect him to:



- **Keep his word.** Trustworthiness is essential to receiving freedom.
- **Stick to routines** for studying, chores, etc.—without constant reminders.
- **Maintain self-control.**
- **Show effort** in all tasks—not just the fun ones.



## How can parents teach kids to use good judgment?

**Q:** I know I tend to make too many decisions for my child, but I don't want her to have to handle the results that come from choosing poorly. How can I teach her to make her own choices and still protect her?

**A:** Learning to make good decisions often involves learning from bad ones. While there are some areas where middle schoolers should not be allowed to decide things themselves—such as drug and alcohol use and school attendance—there are many other areas where your child can safely learn from her choices. For example:

- **Her study routine.** She has to do her homework. But you can allow your child to make choices about when and where she does it. Her grades will be a good indication of whether her choices are working.
- **Her personal space.** You may not like it when her room is a mess, but as long as it is reasonably sanitary, let her keep it the way she wants it. When she can't find what she needs, let her learn from the consequences.
- **Her bedtime.** Let your child weigh in on what she thinks is an appropriate bedtime. As long as she gets at least nine hours of sleep every 24 hours, allow her to try it. If she's too tired to function during the day, have her rethink her choice.



## Are you helping your child concentrate?

This time of year, even a glance out the window can distract students when they should be concentrating. Are you helping your child stay focused on schoolwork? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you keep** interruptions to a minimum when your child is doing homework?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you discourage** multi-tasking? Your child can't concentrate on homework if he's texting friends while he's doing it.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you expect** your child to finish tasks, and praise him for doing so?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to do a focus-building activity he enjoys, such as reading or sports?

- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to set small goals for each study session?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child focus on the task at hand. For each no, try that idea.*

*"The one prudence in life is concentration."  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson*

## Legal doesn't mean safe

Adolescent abuse of prescription and over-the-counter drugs is an all-too-common problem. Kids often view these drugs as "safer" than illegal drugs, but when misused, they can cause serious health problems and even death. To guard against abuse:

- **Monitor all drugs** your family uses, particularly drugs for ADHD and pain. Keep all drugs, including over-the-counter drugs, in a locked cabinet. Be concerned if any are missing.
- **Explain to your child** that taking drugs prescribed for someone else won't help him and can really hurt him.

## Encourage communication

Talking with middle schoolers can be tricky. It's hard to know what will set them off, or make them clam up. To keep the lines of communication open:

- **Be available.** If your child wants to talk, you want to listen!
- **Ask open-ended questions.** "What are you working on in math class?"
- **Take problems seriously.** Things that may seem minor to you are major to her.
- **Offer alternatives.** If your child won't confide in you, urge her to turn to another trusted adult.

## Keep screens under control

How can you limit screen time when your child does more and more homework



online? Start by finding out how he is using his screen time. Does an assignment really require him to be online for 90 minutes, or is he playing games and scrolling through Instagram for much of that time? Insist that your child turn devices off unless they are needed for a particular assignment.

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