

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Mannheim Middle School  
District 83

February 2009

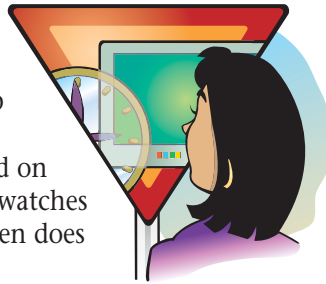
## HEALTHY HABITS

### Set limits on screen time

Experts agree: Kids should spend no more than two hours each day in front of the computer or TV. By limiting your preteen's so-called "screen time," you'll promote a healthier lifestyle. To keep screen time under control:

- **Keep track.** How long does your preteen spend on the computer each day? Are you sure she only watches "a couple of TV shows" each evening? How often does she play video games?
- **Communicate.** Tell your preteen why you're concerned about screen time. "TV is entertaining, but it's not healthy to sit around this much. Let's figure out better ways to relax and have fun."
- **Set limits.** If your preteen doesn't manage her screen time well, do it for her. "Okay, it's time for a rule change. From now on, nobody—including me—gets more than two hours of screen time each day."
- **Remove TVs.** Kids with televisions in their bedrooms are likely to watch 90 more minutes of TV each day than kids without their own sets. The computer should be in a central location, too.
- **Offer alternatives.** When you watch TV, be creative—or even silly. Stretch during shows or have jumping-jack contests during commercials.

Source: "Helpful Ways to Reduce Screen Time," We Can! [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/screen-time.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/screen-time.htm).



## ENCOURAGING READING

### Support your struggling reader

By the time he reaches middle school, your child is expected to have mastered basic reading skills. If a student can't read well, all his grades suffer. A child with reading problems:

- **Doesn't read** for fun.
- **Dislikes** reading homework.
- **Avoids** everyday reading activities, such as reading instructions.
- **Has** trouble reading aloud and may skip or mix up words.

Source: Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D. and Ann Levine, *You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10-20*, ISBN: 978-0062734617 (HarperCollins, 1-800-242-7737, [www.harpercollins.com](http://www.harpercollins.com)).

Reading problems have many causes, including hearing or vision impairment. Some students are simply not motivated. Whatever the problem, if your child is struggling, ask the school for advice on ways to improve his reading skills.

Meanwhile, make your home "reading friendly." Enforce a daily reading time without distractions. Read books and articles aloud to capture your child's interest.

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Parents do matter!

Who's the biggest influence on your child? Is it his best friend? His funny soccer coach? The cool kid in science class? The answer is *no, no and no*. The biggest influence on your preteen is *you*. But helping your preteen grow into a responsible young adult doesn't just happen. It takes commitment. Be a role-model of responsible and respectful behavior and, with time, he will adopt it.

Source: Gary Direnfeld, MSW, RSW, "Raising Responsible Teens," [NewsforParents.org](http://NewsforParents.org), [www.newsforparents.org/expert\\_raising\\_responsible\\_teens.html](http://www.newsforparents.org/expert_raising_responsible_teens.html).

## COPING WITH MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

### Encourage thinking ahead

Middle schoolers tend to focus on the present. This can leave them unprepared for anything beyond the routine. Encourage your middle schooler to think about the unexpected:

"What if you missed the bus after school?" or "What will you need in case it snows?"

Source: Judith Baenen, *More H.E.L.P.: How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent*, National Middle School Association, [www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org).



## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Entertain your preteen with an 'egg challenge'

Is there any way your child could drop a raw egg without breaking it? Challenge her to find out. She'll need to test supportive containers, like an egg carton filled with cotton balls or a tissue box with a newspaper parachute. She can try them with other (less messy) objects first. Compliment her scientific efforts!

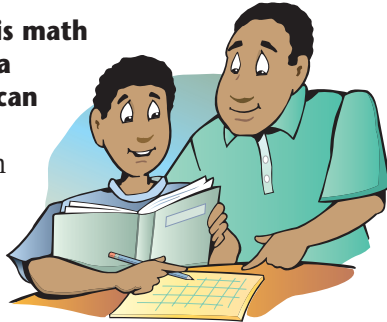


## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents help students with math homework?

**Q: I would like to help my child with his math homework, but math has always been a mystery to me. How can I help when I can barely make sense of it myself?**

**A:** You are not alone. But remember: When it comes to your child's math homework, you don't have to know the material in order to be helpful. You can still support and encourage him, whether or not you can tell a numerator from a denominator. Here's how:



- **Create a learning environment.** When your child sits down to his math homework, make sure he has all the materials he needs—such as pencils or graph paper. Keep the area free from distractions.
- **Be supportive.** If he's struggling, offer to sit with him while he works (or at least check in on him from time to time). Surprise him with a snack or something to drink if he's been studying for a while.
- **Learn together.** Don't pretend to know more than you do. Instead, tackle the material with your child. "I really don't get negative numbers, either, but maybe we can figure them out together. Let's go over some of the examples from your book."

## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your preteen prepared for tests?

Standardized tests are designed to measure how much students are learning from year to year. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your middle schooler prepare for upcoming tests:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you require** your child to review if it is assigned as homework?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage** your child to participate in extra review sessions if her teachers think they would help her?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you let** your child know that a test is not the only measure of her success?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you avoid** granting or taking away privileges based on how you child scores?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you make** sure your child gets enough sleep and eats breakfast before tests?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you're using great strategies for helping your child prepare for tests. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz to change your answer to *yes*.

*"What a child doesn't receive he can seldom later give."*

—P.D. James

## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### Follow motivation rules

Is your child's motivation to succeed in school as strong as you'd like it to be? It may improve if you follow these rules:

- **Set realistic** expectations for your child's school performance.
- **Communicate** your expectations. Tell your child through actions *and* words that school is her top responsibility.
- **Help** your child identify her *own* school goals, not just goals you choose.
- **Tell** your child you love her, whether or not she meets her goals. That will give her the courage to keep trying.

## TALKING AND LISTENING

### Give your child time to unwind after school

Is your child reluctant to talk about the school day? These tips can help:

- **Hold off.** Give him time to relax before you ask questions.
- **Share.** Mention something about your day to break the ice.
- **Be specific.** Instead of, "How was school?" you might say, "What was asked on your science test?"

Source: Roberta Kirshbaum with Robin Dellabough, *Parent Power*, ISBN: 0-7868-8329-4 (Hyperion, 1-800-759-0190, [www.hyperionpress.com](http://www.hyperionpress.com)).

## BUILDING RESPECT

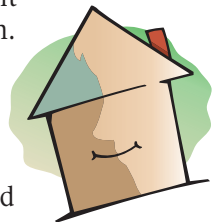
### Expect respect at home

"No respect" is a complaint adults have about children.

Teach, practice and insist on respectful behavior.

When your preteen greets an adult, she should smile, say hello and look the person in the eye.

Is the person a guest? Have her offer to take the visitor's coat.



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