

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Mannheim Middle School  
District 83

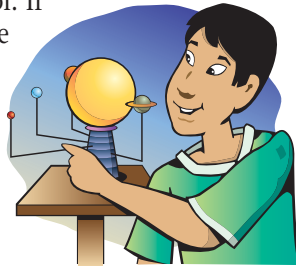
March 2009

## BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

### Be supportive in social challenges

Problems with peers are common in middle school. If your child has a problem making friends, there are many ways you can help. For example:

- **Identify your preteen's strengths.** What is he good at? What does he enjoy most? Chances are, there is some kind of club or group centered around it—filled with other kids who share the same interest. A teacher or counselor may have a suggestion.
- **Look for a structured activity.** Even if it's not your child's top choice, consider a recreational team, a group at a house of worship, or a club at a local community center. When adults plan and supervise, it helps less socially skilled children.
- **Nurture your preteen's friendships.** Allow your child to invite a friend over to watch a movie or show they both enjoy. Serve a snack. Make your home a safe, fun place for kids his age.
- **Be watchful.** Students who struggle socially can be targets for other kids who want to use them for unfriendly purposes. Review rules with your child and continue setting important limits. Help him understand the meaning of true friendship.



Source: Perri Klass, M.D. and Eileen Costello, M.D., *Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In—When to Worry and When Not to Worry*, ISBN: 0-345-45142-2 (Ballantine Books, 1-800-726-0600, [www.randomhouse.com](http://www.randomhouse.com)).

## BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

### Make sure Internet surfing is safe

Your preteen uses the Internet to do homework, chat with friends and just have fun. But do you know what else she's doing online? It's vital that you keep tabs on her Internet use, and know what she's doing in cyberspace. To keep your preteen from getting into serious trouble online:

- **Talk to her** about online dangers.
- **Keep the family computer** out in the open, not in her bedroom.
- **Use filtering software** to prevent her from visiting inappropriate sites.
- **Limit her computer usage.**
- **Spend time with her online.** Get to know her favorite sites.
- **Teach her never to give out** personal information online.
- **Insist that chat rooms** be kid-friendly if you allow her to visit them.

Source: "A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety," Federal Bureau of Investigation, [www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm](http://www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm).

## YOUR CHILD AND YOU

### Aim for balance between family time and privacy

You want your child to do things with the family. Yet she craves alone time more than ever. Talk about priorities for family time. For example, everyone is home for dinner three nights a week. Then allow her to make alternate plans for lower-priority family time, such as running errands with you.

Source: Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, *Talking to Tweens*, ISBN: 0-7382-1019-6 (Da Capo Press, 1-800-255-1514, [www.dacapopress.com](http://www.dacapopress.com)).

## ENCOURAGING READING

### Give reason, time to read

To promote reading, suggest options for your middle schooler. Focus your efforts on making sure he has time to read and finds reading worth his while. Try to:

- **Let him** stay up a bit later to read.
- **Ask him** to read to a younger sibling or older relative.
- **Suggest that** he offer an opinion. Have him write a book review, perhaps online.



Source: Family Matters, "Quick Click: 17 Ways to Keep Your Middle-Schooler Turning the Pages," Scholastic, <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=1548>.

## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Share practical math skills

Your preteen isn't just doing math problems in school. She's also gaining practical knowledge that can be applied outside the classroom.

It's nearly tax time, so enlist your preteen's help on your return. Don't give her anything too confusing (and be sure to check her work), but do let her experience what it's like to apply math in an important, real-life situation.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## How can parents get preteens to focus on homework?

**Q:** My child usually does well when it comes to tests and quizzes, but she tends to slack off when it comes to daily homework. How can I get her to take these assignments seriously?

**A:** Homework boosts knowledge on a daily basis. So, it's critical that your child learn to take her assignments seriously. To help her focus:

- **Spell it out.** "I've noticed that you've been ignoring your homework lately. Let's figure out some ways to change the situation."
- **Find a time that works for her—and stick to it.** "Okay, your half-hour work session starts at five o'clock sharp. No arguments." No assignments? She can use the time to review class notes or read.
- **Play hardball if you must.** "Each afternoon you don't do your homework, you will not be allowed to watch TV or play basketball after dinner." To show her you're serious, be sure to check her work before taking her word for it that she's finished with everything.
- **Get teachers involved.** If your home strategies don't work, warn your child that you'll be checking with teachers each week to see whether she's turning in completed assignments. If she isn't, be sure to enforce immediate, appropriate consequences.
- **Talk with the teacher** about your child's lack of motivation for doing homework. It could be that she is gifted or advanced. She may find the homework too easy. The fact that she gets good grades on tests and quizzes suggests that this may be something to discuss with the teacher.



PARENT QUIZ

## Are you preventing substance abuse?

Even middle schoolers can be exposed to drugs and alcohol. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're preparing your child to stay drug-free:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you keep** close tabs on your child's activities?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you make sure** your child is supervised at all times?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you share** your family's views about alcohol and drugs with your child?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Are you aware** of how your child spends money?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you help** your child practice ways to say *no*, such as by walking away?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you're preventing substance abuse. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

"There is no friendship, no love, like that of a parent for a child."  
—Henry Ward Beecher

## Create a good learning environment at home

Students who are well-behaved in class come from homes where parents promote respect for teachers and support education. To create a home environment that fosters good behavior at school:

- **Insist** that your child follow school rules.
- **Model** respectful behavior.
- **Remain** calm when problems arise.

Source: Kansas National Education Association, "Discipline doesn't have to mean 'Bad,'" <http://ks.nea.org/parents/discipline.html>.

MAKING TIME COUNT

## Share interests and fun

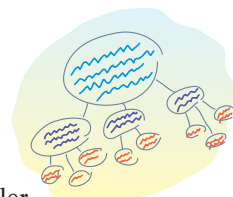
Older children often spend less time with parents. This is natural. But family time is still important. Try to find interests you share with your child, such as playing a sport. Conversation during such activities is usually more relaxed and fun.

ENCOURAGING WRITING

## Use the 'write' strategies

One of the hardest tasks in writing is getting started. Suggest that your child try using a "mind map." To help your child begin, have him:

- **Jot down his main idea.** Surround it with a circle.
- **Note the most important points.** Have him put a smaller circle around each one. Draw lines between the main idea and the points.
- **List details.** Draw even smaller circles around them. Connect each detail to a main point.



Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan Publishing, 1-800-223-2336, [www.kaplanpublishing.com](http://www.kaplanpublishing.com)).

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