

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Mannheim Middle School
District 83

November 2008

BUILDING RESPECT

Tolerance is a sign of respect

Respect is about more than being polite or behaving in a certain way. It's also about tolerance. Tolerant preteens respect people's differences—they don't judge them. There are many ways to encourage this. For example:

- **Walk the talk.** When you respect others' differences, you are a role model for your child. Do not make ethnic jokes or racial comments. Expect the best from yourself—and your preteen.
- **Stand up for what's right.** If someone makes a disrespectful remark about another person, don't laugh or ignore it. Show disapproval. Your preteen will remember what you do (or don't do).
- **Address stereotypes.** Talk about prejudice with your preteen. Are certain groups picked on at school? Has your child been singled out for any reason? Discuss this problem—and how tolerance makes a difference.
- **Learn about cultures.** Visit museums. Make a diverse group of friends. Try new ways of doing things, such as cooking or decorating. Read books about different countries.
- **Share your history.** For example, tell your preteen about immigrant ancestors. Imagine what it was like to arrive in a new country. How could people show respect? Tolerance? Why is this so important?



Source: American School Counselor Association, "How to Open Your Preteen's Mind," FamilyEducation.com, <http://life.familyeducation.com/race/communications/36406.html>.

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

You are your child's greatest motivator

Studies show that positive adult influence is critical to a preteen's success. You can motivate your preteen just by being there with positive support. There are no secrets to being a solid role model for your preteen—just some commonsense ways to keep her motivated. For example:

- **Get to know your child.** Avoid snap judgments about her character. Your preteen is more than the clothes she likes to wear or the music she listens to.
 - **Sing her praises.** Preteens are sometimes seen as troublemakers. Don't let that perception stand.
- When your child does something terrific, say so!
- **Listen to her.** Don't dismiss your preteen's opinions because she's "just a kid." Pay attention when she tells you something. This everyday respect may be the biggest motivator of all.

Source: Anthony W. Jackson, ed., *Making the Most of Middle School*, ISBN: 978-08077-44765 (Teachers College Press, 1-800-575-6566, www.teacherscollegepress.com).

ENCOURAGING READING

Avid reading gets results

Children who are always reading books on their own (in addition to those assigned by teachers) are "different" from kids who rarely read. Avid readers:

- **Concentrate** better.
- **Are** stronger writers.
- **Learn** new things with less effort.
- **Score** higher on standardized tests.
- **Enjoy** learning more.

Encourage your child to read outside of school. Take frequent trips to the library or bookstore. Give books as gifts. And allow your child to choose appropriate books that reflect his interests.

Source: Mary Leonhardt, *Keeping Kids Reading*, ISBN: 0-5178-8849-1 (Three Rivers Press, 1-800-733-3000, www.randomhouse.com/crown/trp.html).

WELLNESS

Food & screens don't mix

What's worse than staring vacantly at a screen or gorging on junk food? Putting the two together! Researchers at the University of Michigan found that eating in front of a screen makes children (and adults!) less aware of what they are putting into their mouths. Because they are less aware, they do not feel full as quickly. So they eat more.



Source: "How Parents Can Fight the Obesity Epidemic," University of Michigan Health System, www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/fightobesity.htm.

IMPORTANCE OF ATTENDANCE

Every minute counts

Attendance at school is more than just showing up. It's showing up *on time* and being productive from the beginning of class until the end. The first few minutes of class can set the tone for being successful or unsuccessful that day.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can parents help children cope with school anxiety?

Q: My child started middle school this year. She's already been in school two months, but she still seems to have some "back-to-school anxieties." Is this normal?

A: Yes. In middle school, every day can feel like the first day. It's a time of huge change: new academic responsibilities, new social pressures and ever-shifting emotions.

Of course, you don't want your child to become overly anxious about school. Here are some ways you can help her through these early months:

- **Be available.** Don't grill your child when she gets off the bus, but do make sure you're around if she wants to talk. As much as she's trying to be independent, she still needs—and wants—your love and support.
- **Empathize.** Talk about your own life. "Ever since I moved to a different department at work, I've had a hard time getting to know my coworkers. Sometimes it's really tough being the new person." Let her see that nervousness is normal, manageable and not fatal.
- **Seek help.** If your child's nerves are overtaking her, ask her guidance counselor for help. Anxiety feeds on itself, so it's critical to stop it before it gets out of hand.



PARENT QUIZ

Is your child learning to be kind?

Promote kindness in your home to teach your child that being a bully isn't the way to succeed in school or in life. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're emphasizing the value of kindness in your child:

1. **Do you model** kindness for your child by treating him and others with respect?
2. **Do you tell** your child that treating others as he would like to be treated is an important family value?
3. **Do you encourage** your preteen to put himself in other people's shoes?
4. **Do you praise** your child when you see him acting kindly?
5. **Do you suggest** that your child befriend people outside of his "group"?

How did you do? Each *yes* answer means you're raising a kind middle schooler. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

*"There is always a moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in."
—Graham Greene*

Make honesty a way of life

Honesty is a bedrock of good character. As you stress and practice honesty with your child every day, share with your preteen these reasons for being honest:

- **Honest people have** self-respect and never have to worry about being "caught" in a lie. Being honest almost always keeps you out of trouble.
- **Honest people have** the respect of others. Teachers and peers know they can count on you.
- **Honest people admit** their mistakes and try to fix them. This is a huge part of being responsible.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, ISBN: 1-57542-063-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

HOMEWORK

Avoid using homework as punishment for preteens

Don't make homework seem like a penalty. ("I'm sick of listening to that video game! Turn it off and go do your homework!") Instead, set aside a specific time for schoolwork and treat that time like a normal part of every day.

PEER PRESSURE

Prepare responses to common pressures

Negative peer pressure works in part because of the element of surprise. When your child is caught off guard, she may forget to "do the right thing." She'll have a better chance if she has some idea of what to expect—and how to respond.

Help your child practice a forceful, definite "no." If her "no" is hesitant, her peer is hearing, "talk me into it."



Helping Students Learn[®]

Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Managing Editor: Patricia Hodgdon.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern. Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Susan O'Brien & Erika Beasley. Editorial Assistant:

Pat Carter. Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.

Copyright © 2008, The Parent Institute[®], a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021