

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Uniontown Area School District
www.uniontown.k12.pa.us

March 2005

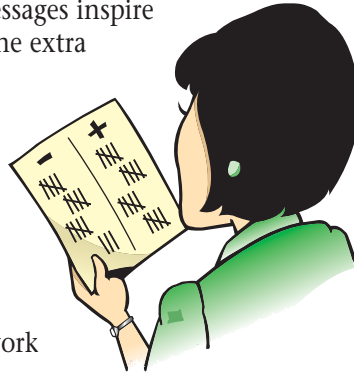
DISCIPLINE

Being positive has big benefits

Sometimes it's easier to be negative with kids. But negative words have negative effects, while positive messages inspire responsibility and reduce conflict. It's worth the extra effort to communicate kindly.

Try these ideas:

- **Take stock.** For a week, jot down each time you tell your child "No" or state something negatively. Compare this to a list of the positive statements you make.
- **Restate negative messages.** When your child asks to go to a friend's house, for instance, don't say, "Not until your homework is finished." Try, "Sure, after study time."
- **Describe what you want**—versus what you don't want. You might say, "Please get ready to go" rather than, "Don't dawdle."
- **Give your child responsibilities.** Say something like, "I know you can do this job. Maybe a checklist would help." A get-ready-for-school list might include: brush teeth, eat breakfast, put on backpack, pick up lunch.
- **Look on the bright side.** Don't blow up when your child makes a mistake. Talk about what she can learn from it. Express confidence in her ability to succeed.



Source: Marvin Marshall, *Discipline Without Stress, Punishments or Rewards*, ISBN: 0-9700606-1-0 (Piper Press, 1-800-606-6105, www.marvinmarshall.com).

HOMEWORK

A schedule can reduce project anxiety

Doing a school project is strictly your child's job. But you can help him prepare for the work. Together, make a long-term plan, complete with due dates.

Have your child:

1. **Read the assignment sheet** carefully. Make sure he understands what he is supposed to accomplish.
2. **Write the title** of the project and the due date across the top of a new piece of paper.
3. **Break down the project** into chunks. List them on the paper. Pick a due date for accomplishing each one. Aim to finish the project a day ahead of time.
4. **Check off each step** as it is completed.

Source: Kathie Weir, *A Parent's Guide to School Projects*, ISBN: 1-931199-08-6 (Parent's Guide Press, 1-800-549-6646).

REINFORCING LEARNING

Read articles for meaning

Being able to pick out main ideas and supporting details is the key to understanding readings. This activity can help:

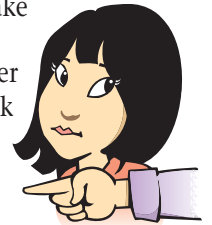
- **Read your child** a short, interesting newspaper article. Have him take notes.
- **Ask your child** to name the main point of the story. (For example, "Joe Brown won the race.")
- **Talk about supporting details** of the story. ("Brian Smith came in second.")

Source: Douglas B. Reeves, *20-Minute Learning Connection*, ISBN: 0-7432-1177-4 (Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Promote solving problems

It's important not to make every choice for your middle schooler. Give her a say in some things. Ask for her opinion. Help her consider consequences. By solving problems with you, she'll prepare for future decisions.



HEALTHY HABITS

Practice fitness for fun

Does being healthy seem like a chore to your child ("You have to get some exercise.") or like fun ("Let's go play basketball!"). Make healthy habits enjoyable with simple steps like these:

- **Let** your middle schooler join in the preparation of healthy meals.
- **Speak** positively about being active. "Your soccer skills are amazing. You'd be a great addition to the team!"

Source: Frances M. Berg, *Children and Teens Afraid to Eat*, ISBN: 0-918532-55-8 (Healthy Weight Network, 701/567-2646, www.healthyweightnetwork.com).



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Study schedules, sleep can help your child avoid test anxiety

Q: My son dreads tests. Even when he studies, he's afraid of failing. I know tests are important, and I worry, too. How can we relax?

A: Test anxiety is no fun. It affects all kinds of students, including those who prepare well. It's easy for parents to get concerned, too. Loving parents want their children to feel successful. But it's critical for families not to overemphasize tests. While exams are useful, they don't measure what people are like overall.

To make test time less stressful:

- **Tell your child** that you don't judge him on the basis of test scores. You'll love him just as much no matter what grade he gets.
- **Discuss the purpose of tests.** They help teachers see if students are keeping up. Some students (or the whole class) may need extra help. Standardized tests tell schools how well their programs are working.
- **Help your child feel good about himself.** Praise him for things he does well—in and out of school. His confidence can carry over to test situations.
- **Discourage cramming for tests.** Students feel more prepared when they space studying over several days or weeks.
- **Promote clear thinking.** A good night's sleep, regular exercise and a healthful diet can make a difference.



PARENT QUIZ

Are you monitoring media use?

Movies and videos can affect students' attitudes at school and at home. Take this quiz to see if you're keeping track of what your middle schooler views. Answer each statement with "yes" or "no."

- ___ **1. I require my child** to ask permission before seeing a movie or video.
- ___ **2. I research movies** and videos before my child sees them.
- ___ **3. I avoid letting my child** watch violent movies or videos.
- ___ **4. I talk with my child** about movies and videos she sees.

___ **5. I try to watch movies** and videos with my child.

How did you do? Each "yes" answer means you are limiting the negative impact of movies and videos on your child.

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them."
— Mark Twain

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Help your child avoid the 'middle school slouch'

If your child is in puberty, her bones may be growing ahead of her muscle system's ability to support them. The result: slouching. A heavy backpack can make the problem worse. Help your child organize what she carries around. Get rid of junk. It will be better for her back—and her grades!

Source: Leslie Garisto Pfaff, "The preteen posture problem," *Parents*, August 2002 (Gruner + Jahr USA Publishing, 1-800-777-0222, www.parents.com).

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Motivate with questions

Children are motivated by understanding what they're studying and why it's important. It helps to ask them:

- **"What are you going to do?"** For instance, "I'm going to compare two things."
- **"Why are you doing it?"** To see which is greater, for example, or to see how an unfamiliar subject is like a familiar one.

Source: Sally D. Ketchum, *Super Student, Happy Kid!* ISBN: 0-9647160-0-3 (Summer Island Press).

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Middle schoolers still need parents to be involved

Over half the school year has flown by, but it's not too late for you to get involved at your child's school. Be creative about ways to participate. Help out with the school newspaper. Volunteer to serve refreshments at a school event. Or ask teachers about their needs. There are many things you can do.

Source: Roberta Kirshbaum with Robin Dellabough, *Parent Power, 90 Winning Ways to Be Involved and Help Your Child Get the Most Out of School*, ISBN: 0-7868-8329-4 (Hyperion, 1-800-759-0190, www.hyperionbooks.com).



Helping Children Learn[®]

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Executive Editor: Jeff Peters. Senior Editor: Betsie Ridnauer.
Editor: Patricia Hodgdon. Staff Editor: Rebecca Miyares.
Writer: Susan O'Brien. Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter.
Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-Garcia.
Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.
Copyright © 2005, 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