

Inspire your middle schooler’s interest in science and math

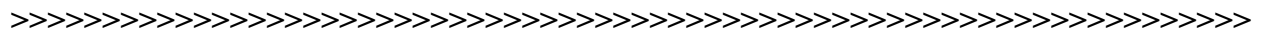
Science and math sometimes get a bad reputation among students. Many believe they’re “just not good” in these subjects.

However, when middle school students engage in activities related to science, technology, engineering and math (the STEM subjects), they often change their minds.

If your middle schooler thinks science or math is too challenging:

- Enjoy science and technology media together. Search on YouTube or Common Sense Media to find science shows and games for kids of all ages.
- Head to the kitchen. Cooking involves both math and chemistry. And you get to eat the results! As you cook together, ask your child questions, such as: “Why do you think water boils when it gets hot?” “What happened when we forgot to add baking powder to the cookies?” “How much flour will we need if we double this recipe?”
- Visit a natural history museum or science center in person or online. Your child can look for STEM exhibits, learn about the history of technology and discover how things work.
- Praise the process. When your middle schooler is learning something new in a class, it’s often hard at first. So rather than focusing on grades earned, talk about what your child is learning and the new skills your child is developing.

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Learn about the different types of peer pressure

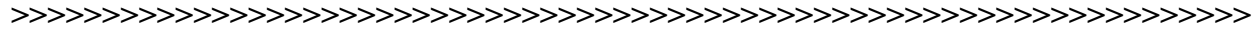
Middle schoolers can be easily influenced by their peers—and that’s not always a bad thing. Get to know the types of peer pressure and learn how to respond to each.

Peer pressure can be:

- Positive. Your child’s friends volunteer for a good cause. They want good grades on the next history project. They enjoy participating in fitness challenges. Your response: Encourage these activities. Compliment your child for hanging out with great people.
- Neutral. Your child copies a friend’s hairstyle or way of dressing. Your response: Do nothing. Imitating friends’ styles is an innocent and harmless behavior.
- Negative. Your child got caught helping a friend cheat. You find a vape hidden in a dresser drawer. Your response: Steer your child toward positive activities and keep your eyes open. Don’t allow unsupervised hangouts with friends who spell trouble. Encourage

friendships with more responsible peers. When your child earns back your trust, allow more freedom.

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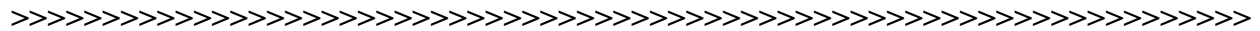
Three strategies can help you motivate your middle schooler

What happened to your once-enthusiastic student? Adolescence! Suddenly, motivating your middle schooler to do just about anything can feel like pulling teeth.

Don't despair. To boost motivation:

1. Talk before your child plugs in. It's tough dragging a child away from a favorite show or game. So, if there's something you need your child to do, ask before the TV or computer is turned on. Your child may be more compliant.
2. Stick to routines. Routines are critical when it comes to keeping order at home. A child who knows exactly what times to feed the dog and get ready for bed is less likely to procrastinate doing those things.
3. Support interests. Ask what your middle schooler likes to do and support those activities. When kids feel supported doing something they love, they are more inspired to work hard at other things—like school!

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Don't let digital devices derail your middle schooler's studies

Sometimes it seems that middle schoolers are permanently attached to their phones, tablets and other devices. They text from the minute they wake up until they go to bed. They share funny videos and memes with their friends. They scroll through social media.

So it's no surprise that students often try to use their phones while they're doing schoolwork. But several research studies show that the more time students say that they text, use social media or surf online while they work, the lower their grades are.

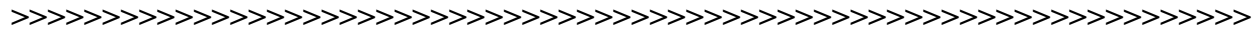
Students often think their digital devices can help with their work. After all, they can watch a video about Jamestown while studying American history. They can check their answer to a math problem.

One big problem with this is that students seldom stay focused on the work they are doing. Pretty soon, they click from the history video to the latest viral TikTok. From then on, history is not their focus.

What can you do to help your child stay focused on work and avoid digital distraction? Here are some tips:

- Talk about multitasking—and how research shows it doesn't work. Students need to focus while studying or they won't learn.
- Limit the use of devices during work times. Studies show that the more time students spend multitasking, the longer their studies take. Have your child "park" the phone or tablet in a different room.

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Do you encourage your child to spend time reading?

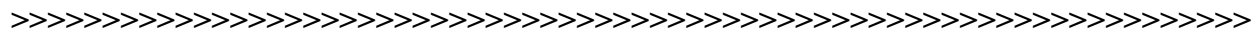
Reading for pleasure helps students build valuable comprehension and vocabulary skills. But many middle schoolers say they just don't have time to read. Are you encouraging your child to make time for reading? Answer yes or no to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. Do you keep all types of reading material around the house? Include magazines, newspapers, books, manuals, catalogs—anything with words!
- ___ 2. Do you visit your local library regularly together and ask the librarian to suggest titles other middle schoolers are reading?
- ___ 3. Do you link reading to your child's interests by sharing books and articles related to those interests?
- ___ 4. Do you set a good example by reading in front of your child and talking about the things you read?
- ___ 5. Do you have a regular time for family reading?

How well are you doing?

Mostly yes answers mean you are strongly encouraging your middle schooler to read. For no answers, try those ideas.

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Encourage your child to make these New Year resolutions

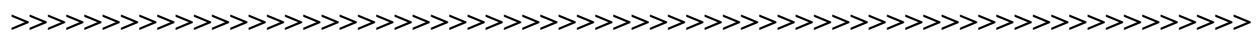
Middle schoolers start the school year with the best of intentions. But as the year goes on, things sometimes get off track. Students begin missing assignments. They start waiting until the last minute to get things done.

Students this age often need a “reboot” in the middle of the school year. Making a few New Year’s resolutions is one way for your child to get back on the path to success.

Suggest that your child resolve to:

- Get organized. Let’s face it—middle schoolers are not always organized. Have your child use helpful tools to keep track of activities and school assignments—such as a calendar, sticky notes, to-do lists and an assignment notebook. Recommend your middle schooler clean out school notebooks regularly.
- Set a schedule. By January, many students have abandoned their schoolwork routines. Help your child reestablish a work time, and then make sure to enforce it. It won’t take long for it to become a habit.
- Use time wisely. Encourage your middle schooler to estimate how long tasks will take and then block out time for each task. Your child should prioritize tasks and complete the most important ones first. Also suggest your child take short study breaks to improve focus and retention.
- Set a new goal. Would your child like to raise a class grade? Ask what it will take to reach that goal. When students are clear about the steps they must take to reach a goal, it’s easier to make the choices that will help them achieve it!

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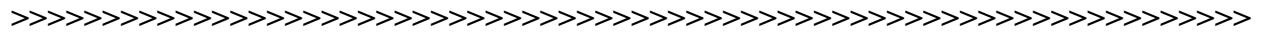
Preparation can reduce your middle schooler’s test anxiety

When students feel prepared for tests, they tend to be less nervous about them. Share these simple strategies with your child:

- Don’t cram. One frantic night of studying won’t pay off on test day. Instead, your student should begin preparing several days in advance. That way, if your child doesn’t understand something, there will be time to get help before the test.
- Practice recalling information. Are there practice tests in the book? Encourage your child to take them in preparation for the exam. If there aren’t any, see if you can help your child create a practice quiz by using class notes.
- Ask for clarification. If your child is unsure of what’s going to be covered on the test, suggest asking the teacher. Few things are scarier than the unknown. Having details about the test beforehand will boost your child’s confidence.
- Try some relaxation techniques. Calming exercises such as yoga, deep breathing and meditation can calm students’ nerves. Encourage your child to do these daily, and not just on test day.

- Make healthy choices. Encourage your middle schooler to get enough sleep every night (not just the night before a test). Recommend your child eat a nutritious breakfast in the morning, too.

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Questions & Answers

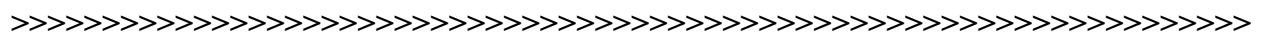
Q: My child is in eighth grade. I’ve always tried to be involved with my student’s education. But frankly, I can’t help with a lot of schoolwork anymore. And my child doesn’t want me to come to school. Is there still a point to my being involved?

A: You bet. Studies show that family engagement is just as important when kids are in middle school. In fact, engaging during these years can be even more important than it was when your student was younger.

You point out some of the challenges with staying engaged. Helping with difficult schoolwork is tough—especially in subjects that might not be your strongest. But you can support your student in many other important ways:

- Make sure your middle schooler sets and sticks to a regular time for studying. Falling behind by even one day can be costly.
- Find quiet work of your own to do nearby during study time. Your child will sense your support even if you can’t help with specific subjects.
- Talk together about what your child is learning and would like to learn more about. Help your student set specific learning goals.
- Reach out to your middle schooler’s teachers. Let them know that you want to support them and your child. Ask for specific ways you can support your child’s learning.
- Get involved with the school community. Meet the families of classmates. Join the parent-teacher organization and stay current on what is going on and how families can help.

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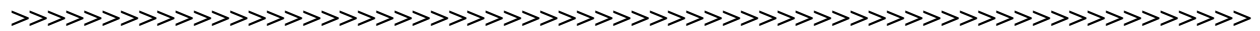
Explore service opportunities with your child

Community service is enriching for middle schoolers because it helps them develop a sense of responsibility, empathy and social awareness. It also develops skills such as time management, organization and communication—skills that contribute to academic success.

Here are a few age-appropriate ideas for your middle schooler:

- Collect canned foods for a food bank or shelter that accepts food donations.
- Offer tutoring for a younger student in math or reading.
- Collect personal essentials, such as socks, toothbrushes, shampoo and soap, and donate them to a shelter.
- Help a neighborhood family by offering free dog-walking or snow removal services.
- Make cards for seniors in a retirement or assisted living communities to let them know they are loved. Or, visit a senior center and spend time talking to the residents.
- Collect and send letters of thanks to military personnel.
- Organize a collection of pet food, old towels and blankets for donation to an animal shelter.
- Organize a book drive for children in your neighborhood and spread the word on social media.
- Organize a neighborhood clean-up of local streets, sidewalks and public spaces.
- Collect gently used clothing and toys to donate to local shelters.

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Instill the character traits that support success in school & life

Children may be born with certain personality traits, but middle schoolers' characters are works in progress. In other words, the kind of person your child will eventually become is still being shaped.

To reinforce good character:

- Talk about responsibility. Give your child low-key prompts, such as: "I won't worry about reminding you to finish your schoolwork. I know you're responsible enough to do it on your own."
- Promote a positive attitude. Show your child how to find the bright side of disappointing situations.
- Expect respect. Encourage your child to use manners, show up on time and listen to other's ideas and opinions.
- Notice positive behavior. When you see your child demonstrating good character, talk about it and offer praise!

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