

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Red Creek School District

MIDDLE SCHOOL



April 2023

Share strategies that help your middle schooler retain learning

The time students spend learning, in class and at home, is only effective if they can remember and use what they learn. This can be challenging, because the human brain is wired to forget.

To improve recall of learned information, encourage your middle schooler to:

- **Verify understanding.** It's tough to memorize something if you don't know what it means in the first place.
- **Restate the material.** Putting topics into your child's own words can help the concepts stick.
- **Set facts to music.** Suggest that your child make up a tune or simple rhyme to remember names, dates or math formulas.
- **Draw a diagram or picture** about the material.
- **Dive into entertainment media** on the subject. Is your child studying a particular history topic? Suggest submerging in books, movies and songs on the topic. Your child can also search online for videos that explain difficult concepts.
- **Sleep on it.** The brain processes and stores information while people sleep. Suggest that your child review key facts one more time right before going to bed.



Source: L. Gravitz, "The Forgotten Part of Memory," *Nature*.



Self-respect leads to respect for others

Self-respect is not only vital for students' mental well-being, it also paves the way for respect for others. A self-respecting child feels worthy of fair treatment, and sees that it would be out of character to treat others differently.

To nurture your child's sense of self-respect:

- **Help strengthen resistance** to negative peer pressure. Discuss ways to avoid situations your child knows are not right.
- **Look for the positive.** Everyone experiences setbacks. Reinforce that these are temporary, and that your child can make a fresh start and succeed.
- **Highlight your child's** strengths. Explain that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. This helps children control feelings of jealousy.
- **Set an example.** Speak positively about yourself, and forgive your mistakes. Be honest and follow through with commitments.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside.

Watch water climb upward

Help your child discover *capillary action* with this colorful science experiment. Together, line up five clear cups, then:

1. **Fill cups 1, 3 and 5** halfway with water, and add a few drops of food dye to each (red in 1, yellow in 3 and blue in 5).
2. **Twist four paper towels** into snakes.
3. **Put one end** of a towel into cup 1, and the other end into cup 2. Repeat with a towel going from cup 2 to 3, and so on.
4. **Wait a day.** What happens?

The empty cups now contain orange and green water! *Capillary action* draws the water molecules up the towels and into the next cup. This is the same process that roots use to draw water up into plants.



Source: "Capillary Action and Water," U.S. Geological Survey.

Learning math is a process

When middle schoolers are learning something new in math, it can often be hard at first. In those times, talk about the process. Math builds on itself, step by step. Talk about how far your child has come, and how the new skills your child is developing will make the next step make sense.

Encourage a contest entry

Want to spur your child to develop talents and interests? Suggest entering a contest. Contests can:

- **Motivate excellence.** Competition may drive your child to deliver a "personal best."
- **Boost self-image.** Win or lose, your child will have taken a healthy risk.



To find a suitable contest, ask the school or a librarian. Be sure to research sponsors and rules—you should not have to pay or provide personal financial information.

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How can I enrich my child's stay-at-home spring break?

Q: Our budget won't stretch to travel over spring break and my child is disappointed. How can we make the most of the week at home without breaking the bank?

A: Don't worry. Travel is only one way to provide interesting learning experiences for your child. You can plan a few entertaining and educational things to do together at home during the break.

Here are some low-cost ideas:

- **Visit local attractions.** What draws visitors to your area? Are there historic sites, state parks or distinctive geographical features nearby? Explore together and help your child see your hometown with fresh eyes.
- **Help your child "shadow"** a person working in a career of interest. See if you can arrange a day when your child can volunteer or observe.
- **Tour a nearby college.** You don't have to schedule anything formal—just walk around campus. Or spend some time looking at college websites to see what courses, locations and sizes appeal to your child.
- **Host a movie night.** If possible, invite a school friend of your child's over for popcorn and a movie based on a book. Then challenge your child to read the book and tell you which was better.



Are you on board to reduce absences?

Absences from school contribute to learning gaps, and they increase the chances that students who fall behind will stay behind. Are you doing all you can to ensure regular, on-time attendance? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- ___ **1. Do you make** school attendance a family priority?
- ___ **2. Do you have** your child take steps that help with timely arrival, such as using an alarm clock?
- ___ **3. Do you emphasize** that you won't tolerate your child skipping classes?
- ___ **4. Do you schedule** appointments and activities for times when school is not in session?
- ___ **5. Do you work** with the school to make sure you are

alerted if your middle schooler is not in class?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are reinforcing the importance of attendance all year long. For each no, try that idea.

"Resetting daily attendance habits is essential to recovery."

—Attendance Works

Help your child move beyond discouragement

Low grades can drain your child's confidence and motivation to keep trying. If your middle schooler is discouraged about grades:

- 1. Make it clear** that while grades matter, they don't measure your child's worth.
- 2. Help consider causes.** Ask what your child thinks the problem is. Sometimes it's not academic ability, but poor study habits or test anxiety.
- 3. Contact teachers** for their views about what's happening.
- 4. Set realistic goals** for improvement.

It's OK to ask for help

School counselors support students' overall well-being—emotional and physical wellness as well as academic needs. You and your child can ask counselor for help:



- **Developing study skills.**
- **Planning an academic path** to prepare for future classes.
- **Strengthening coping skills** for dealing with bullies, grief or other crises.
- **Locating additional professionals** for academic, personal and family support.

Help your child volunteer

Participating in volunteer and community service activities can improve your child's self-image—and maybe grades, too. Research shows that students who volunteer:

- **Are more likely to** stay in school and perform well.
- **Are more responsible** and feel more connected to their community.
- **Are less likely to** take dangerous risks.

Source: "Civic Engagement: Benefits for Youth," Youth.gov.

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