

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Albert Leonard Middle School  
John Barnes, Principal

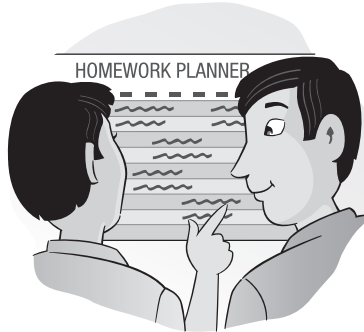


January 2016

## Revisit the routines that make homework time productive

Students heading back to school in January often need a little help getting back into “homework mode” after the freedom of winter break. If this is true of your child, you can help by reestablishing the homework routines that worked in the fall. For a start, you and your child should:

- **Set a time and place** for homework.
- **Check his homework planner** each day so you are both aware of all his assignments. Look over the homework when he finishes.



If you find that your child is having trouble finishing his work:

- **Forbid social time** (including TV, computer and phone use) until homework is finished.
- **Help him create** a daily homework schedule. For example: Math, 10-minute break. Social studies, 10-minute break. Spanish vocabulary. Taking breaks between tasks may help him feel less overwhelmed.

If your child always “finishes” his homework but does a slapdash job:

- **Emphasize the importance** of doing his best.
- **Ask him to explain** the homework to you, so you can see if he truly did what he was assigned to do.

Source: S. Zentall, Ph.D. and S. Goldstein, Ph.D., *Seven Steps to Homework Success: A Family Guide to Solving Common Homework Problems*, Specialty Press, Inc.



## Trade screen time for real-life relaxation

Smartphones, tablets, computers, TV—middle schoolers love their screens. But experts recommend limiting kids’ daily recreational screen time to under two hours. To get your child’s screen time under control:

- **Determine how much** time she actually spends “plugged in.”
- **Tell her why** you’re concerned. “Doctors say too much time with screens leads to attention and sleep problems. Let’s find some healthier ways to relax.”
- **Set limits.** Set a goal with your child to reduce screen time week by week until she reaches an appropriate level.
- **Banish bedroom screens.** Studies show that kids with TVs, computers or tablets in their rooms watch screens for 90 more minutes a day than those without.
- **Offer alternatives.** Go biking. Play cards. Show your child that there are plenty of screenless ways to engage her brain and have fun.

Source: “Media and Children,” American Academy of Pediatrics, [nswc.com/screentime](http://nswc.com/screentime).

## A study group can add interest to learning

Many kids enjoy exchanging knowledge with friends. That’s why a study group can be a great addition to your child’s study efforts.

Help your child choose four to six group members who are devoted to doing well in school. All should agree that the group’s purpose is studying, not socializing.

Source: R. Fry, *How to Study*, Cengage Learning.

## Variety boosts reading skills

The list of worthwhile middle school reading goes way beyond “classic” novels. Your child can learn from all sorts of reading material:



- **Magazines** reinforce the value of reading for pleasure and interest.
- **Sports scores** teach her how to read for information.
- **Nonfiction** builds her fluency, comprehension and vocabulary.
- **Instruction books** teach that reading can be used to gain practical skills.

Source: D. Booth, *Reading Doesn’t Matter Anymore: Shattering the Myths of Literacy*, Stenhouse Publishers.

## Was it a mistake or neglect?

To increase responsibility, help your child learn the difference between a *mistake* (adding too much detergent to the laundry) and *neglect* (leaving his dirty clothes on the floor). If he makes a mistake:



- **Help your child** fix it or clean it up.
  - **Show him** how to do the job correctly.
- If your child neglects responsibilities:
- **Tell him** where he fell short and why.
  - **Remind him** that his contributions to the family are important.
  - **Enforce a consequence** that relates to the neglected responsibility.



## How do I convince my child that she is doing fine?

**Q:** My eighth grader is so hard on herself! She complains that she can't do anything right, which isn't true at all. How can I help her see that she's a smart and capable person?

**A:** Self-doubt is a common issue for middle schoolers. They are discovering the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel they are falling short. To help your child begin to understand that she is smart and competent:



- **Find the right outlets.** Let her experience success by putting her into situations where she's most likely to succeed. If sports are her thing, sign her up for a recreational league. If she enjoys math, encourage her to tutor another student.
- **Give her responsibilities.** She may gripe about having to clean the garage or empty the dishwasher, but make her do it anyway. Chores are a great way to make your child feel capable and needed because doing them helps the whole family. They may make her more responsible, too.
- **Praise her effort and accomplishments.** Did your child do something well? Congratulate her! Show her that you noticed her achievement, whether it was earning a good grade on a quiz or organizing a closet.

With a little help from you, your daughter will soon see herself as the accomplished, wonderful person she is.

## Parent Quiz

### Do you encourage thorough work?

The problem for many students who earn poor grades isn't a lack of knowledge—it's careless mistakes. Are you teaching your child to produce careful, accurate work? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you check** your child's assignment notebook to see what homework he has?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you urge** your child to pay attention to details, like writing his name on papers?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you tell** your child that neatness counts, and that sloppy work may be marked down?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you tell** your child to check his answers before turning work in?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you review** your child's work to ensure it is complete?

#### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are instilling the value of neat, complete work. For each no, try that idea.*

*"If you want your children to turn out well, spend twice as much time with them and half as much money."  
—Abigail Van Buren*

## Translate physics into life

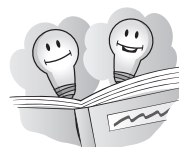
Thinking about a science like physics in real-life terms can help your child learn the subject. It helps to translate physics terms into middle schooler language. For example:

- **Rest** is the state of the object your child has dropped on the floor—motionless.
- **Inertia** is what she feels as she resists changing her state from lying on the bed to moving to pick the item up.
- **Force** is the energy she uses to pick the item up.
- **Mass** determines how easy a thing is to pick up. Light things have less mass, heavy things, more.

Source: D. and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes, Grades 6–8: It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's Done!* Kaplan Publishing.

## Read, think & communicate

Your child is not too old for reading aloud. And he is better able to carry on conversations with you about the reading than ever before.



So take turns reading to each other and discussing what you read. You might say, "I was surprised the main character did that. What do you think?"

Source: "Advice & Tips: Tips for Reading Aloud with Preteens and Teens," Reading is Fundamental, [niswc.com/midread](http://niswc.com/midread).

## Help your child be a friend

In middle school, being liked is a big deal. To build your child's friendship skills:

- **Discuss** what it takes to be a good friend—things like honesty, generosity and listening.
- **Teach her to be a good sport**—gracious whether she wins or loses.
- **Help her practice cooperation** and compromise. Make a family dinner together. "If we make your favorite pasta, let's let your brother choose the dessert."

### Helping Students Learn®

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