

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Torrance Unified School District



January 2019

Teach your child strategies for improving reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is much more than being able to recognize the words in a passage. It means understanding the meaning of the passage as a whole. In middle school, your child's ability to comprehend and think about what he reads has a significant effect on his academic success.



To strengthen your child's reading comprehension, encourage him to:

- **Read often.** The more your child reads, the easier reading will become for him. And the easier it becomes, the more energy and interest he'll have left over to focus on the meaning of what he reads.
- **Create links to things he already knows.** When your child reads something that reminds him of something he has learned, seen or done, the material has meaning. To reinforce these links, suggest that your child mark the passages with a sticky note saying what they remind him of.
- **Ask thinking questions** before, during and after he reads. For example, he might ask: *What do I hope to learn from this? What kind of personality does the main character have? What do I think will happen? How is this different from what I expected?* As he comes across passages that relate to his questions, he can add more sticky notes with thoughts about his answers.

Source: J. Willis, "Aiding Reading Comprehension With Post-its," Edutopia, niswc.com/stickyread.



Coach your child to school success

By January, most middle schoolers can use some guidance, encouragement and inspiration to keep doing their best in school. Think of yourself as your child's academic coach. To support and motivate her:

- **Talk** about what she is learning. Grades are important, but the real point of education is knowledge. Emphasize the learning process. This includes responsible effort, persistence and improvement.
- **Act** as a resource. When your child studies, be available whenever you can to answer questions and offer suggestions on where to find the information she needs, such as in her textbook.
- **Accept** that there will be times when you can't answer your child's questions. It's OK to say, "I don't know. Are there any hints on the class website?"
- **Understand** that your child has strengths and weaknesses. Support and encourage her in every subject, but don't expect the same results in every class.

Source: K.T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent*, Teachers College Press.

Foster school friendships

Forming friendships with other kids at school can help your child feel more connected to school. The strongest friendships, however, often involve spending time together outside of school. If your child has been eating lunch with the same four boys for the last month, encourage him to ask them to your home to hang out. Or perhaps you could offer to drive them to the movies.



Translate science into life

Science is all around us all the time. To encourage your child to notice, help her translate science terms into middle school experience. In physics, for example:

- **Rest** is the state of the book your child has dropped on the floor—not moving.
- **Inertia** is what's keeping her from moving to pick the book up.
- **Force** is the energy it will take for her to get up and put the book away.



Source: D. and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes, Grades 6-8*, Kaplan Publishing.

Give your child a blueprint for better paragraphs

Paragraphs are the basic structural elements of writing. Once a student knows how to build paragraphs, writing a paper isn't quite as overwhelming. To construct a strong paragraph, your child should:

1. **Write a topic sentence** that says what the paragraph will be about.
2. **Include details** that support the topic sentence.
3. **Read the paragraph** out loud to see if all the sentences relate to the topic and make sense together.
4. **Proofread** spelling and grammar.



Q&A What can I do to help my child get back on track?

Q: The first half of the school year didn't go very well for my seventh grader. Her grades were lower than we both would have liked. How can I make sure she does better in the second half?

A: Encourage your daughter to look at the new calendar year as a fresh start. To promote positive school habits:

• **Help her set appropriate goals.**

You can't expect your child to turn the year around overnight. For goals to be motivating, they should be attainable. For example, if she slacked off on finishing assignments, she can strive to complete them all on time.

• **Insist on a regular homework time.** If your child is freshest right after school, then make that her work time. If she needs a little downtime first, give her an hour before having her crack open the books.

• **Monitor her progress.** Don't wait until your child fails a quiz to discover she's struggling in a class. Talk often with your child about what she's learning, and stay in contact with her teachers.

• **Recognize signs of improvement.** Is your daughter more organized? Is she making schoolwork a priority? Congratulate her. When you do, avoid bringing up her past habits. She already knows she made mistakes; there's no reason to remind her of them.



Parent Quiz

Are you encouraging careful work?

Careless mistakes are the downfall of many middle school students. Are you emphasizing the importance of doing thorough, accurate work? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

___ **1. Do you remind** your child to pay attention to details, such as putting his name and the correct date on papers?

___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to double-check his answers before submitting work?

___ **3. Do you reinforce** the concept that "neatness counts," both at home and at school?

___ **4. Do you suggest** that your child include time for editing and proofreading when he plans his time for projects?

___ **5. Do you review** your child's finished work with him to ensure it is neat and complete?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are helping your child produce work he can be proud of. For each no, try that idea.

"It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen."

—John Wooden

Snuff out inhalant abuse

According to a national survey, abuse of inhalants is on the rise again after years of decline. Inhalants—including household products like glue, nail polish remover and canned whipped cream—are abused by eighth graders more than any other group. To deter your child from abusing inhalants:

- **Talk about the dangers.** Fewer eighth graders now see inhalant use as very risky. But these drugs can cause serious health problems, including death—even the first time they are used.
- **Make healthy living** a family priority.
- **Switch to non-aerosol products,** and keep paints, solvents and similar items locked up.

Source: L.D. Johnston and others, "Monitoring the Future: Key Findings on Adolescent Drug Use," National Institute on Drug Abuse, niswc.com/noinhale.

Reward conduct with praise

When your child earns a good grade or makes a great play on the sports field, it's appropriate to praise his accomplishment. But be sure you also praise your child for demonstrating good character. Compliment his kindness and his sense of responsibility. Applaud him for not giving up, even when the going gets tough.



Bolster vocabulary growth

The greater your child's vocabulary, the more she will understand higher-level reading, conversation and thinking. Encourage your child to:

- **Read** something a little above her level every so often.
- **Practice.** New words your child encounters won't stick if she doesn't use them.
- **Speak** with adults. Be careful not to do the talking for her!

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Published in English and Spanish, September through May.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Alison McLean.

Staff Editors: Rebecca Miyares & Erika Beasley.

Production Manager: Sara Amon.

Translations Editor: Victoria Gaviola.

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