

# Helping Children Learn®

Tips Families Can Use to Help Children Do Better in School



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

December 2022

## Q&A What should I do about a bad attitude toward school?

**Q:** My child has been complaining about school. I've heard "I hate it" more than once. I'm not sure how seriously to take this. How should I respond?

**A:** Sometimes, kids say they hate school when they are really looking for attention or a chance to vent or put off doing work. The feeling is temporary, and they don't actually hate school. However, since your child has said this more than once, it's important to figure out why.

Here are five steps to take:

1. **Choose a time** when you and your child are both calm to start a conversation. "You've said you hate school a couple of times. What's making you feel that way?"
2. **Listen closely** to your child's answers. Don't try to change them. Ask follow-up questions if your child can't identify the problem. Is a subject very challenging? Are kids being mean on the bus?
3. **Help your child think of possible actions to take.** For example, if math is a struggle, your child could spend more time studying it each day and write down questions to ask the teacher.
4. **Remind your child** that nearly every situation has positives and negatives. Ask what your child likes about school.
5. **Talk to your child's teacher.** Explain how your child is feeling and ask for suggestions and support. Plan to follow up to see what's working.



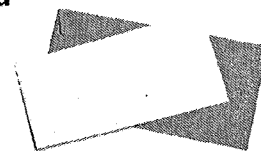
## Set learning goals for 2023

What areas would your child like to improve in during the second half of the year? What can your student do to make that happen? Help your child establish some specific, realistic, measurable goals. Then, be supportive. If your child slips up, say "Falling short once doesn't mean you can't get back on track."

## Offer fun ways to read

Students strengthen their reading skills when they read often. Encourage frequent reading with enjoyable reading activities. You can:

- **Follow current events.** Is there a developing news story that interests your child? Read the latest reports together.
- **Sign your child** up for a pen pal. Ask a teacher or librarian how to get involved.
- **Listen to audiobooks.** Have your child follow along in a printed book while listening.
- **Give reading coupons.** Some might be for 30 minutes of reading with you. Others might be good for a new book.



## Plan on family meetings

Family meetings encourage communication and help your child learn key school and life skills like responsibility, negotiation and cooperation. For effective meetings:

- **Meet regularly**—every week or two.
- **Create an agenda.** Ask what ideas and issues family members want to discuss. Include time to talk about successes.
- **Brainstorm solutions** together. Make sure everyone has a chance to be heard. Parents should have the final say.
- **Write down decisions.** Evaluate how they are working at future meetings.

## Parent Quiz

### Are you teaching time management?

It takes time for students to develop the time management skills that support success in school and life. Elementary schoolers are the right age to start! Are you helping your child learn to use time wisely? Answer *yes* or *no* below:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you help** your child create study schedules and adjust them as necessary?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you show** your child how to use a calendar to keep track of due dates and commitments?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you maintain** a balance in your child's schedule? Kids need time for exercise, sleep, and family time.
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you encourage** your child to get an early start on long-term projects, and break them down into small pieces?

- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you have** your child time how long tasks take?

#### How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are demonstrating techniques for making the most of time. For each no, try that idea.

"A plan is what, a schedule is when. It takes both a plan and a schedule to get things done."  
—Peter Turla

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# Helping Students Learn®

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MIDDLE SCHOOL



## What can I say about a poor report card that will help?

**Q:** Report card time always causes tension between me and my middle schooler. How can I keep a talk about my child's not-so-great grades from turning into a fight?

**A:** Try not to see a report card simply as evidence of your child's performance in a completed marking period. Instead, view it as a chance to think together about your student's overall progress and how to move it forward.

For a more productive discussion:

- **Keep your emotions under control.** Does a low grade make you feel worried, disappointed or angry? Your child may react to your feelings by getting defensive. Staying calm lets you both focus on solutions.
- **Consider your expectations.** Do you automatically assume a C+ is an awful grade? It's important to consider the context. Are the grades based on mastery for the whole year? Is this a tough class? Has your child been going through a rough patch emotionally? These things matter when determining whether a poor grade is due to lack of effort.
- **Get your child's input.** Ask questions like: *How do you feel about this grade? Does it reflect what you've learned and the effort you've put in? What do you think you could do to improve it?* Then help your child set learning goals and plan steps to take to reach them.



## Give your child the support that middle schoolers want

Family love and support helps motivate students to do well in school. When asked in a survey, students said it helps when their families:

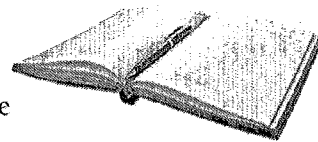
- **Take an interest** in their schoolwork.
- **Avoid comparing** them to others.
- **Offer guidance**, without lecturing about mistakes.
- **Notice when** they do things right.
- **Spend time** with them.

Source: A Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others*, Teachers' College Press.

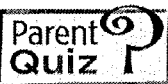
## Suggest a values journal

Researchers asked middle schoolers to write several times about a value (such as *honesty*) that mattered to them, why they chose it and how it affected the ways they acted and felt. Many at-risk students improved their grades, and the next year, they signed up for more challenging classes.

To try a similar exercise at home, have your child make a list of important values. Then from time to time, have your student write about them in a journal.



Source: M. Martinovich, "Self-affirmation plays role in minority students' college success," *Phys.org*.



## Are you promoting community service?

Middle schoolers are more motivated when they understand that they can make meaningful contributions in the world. Are you encouraging your child to contribute by volunteering? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you teach** your child about the responsibility to help the less fortunate?
2. **Do you encourage** volunteering to help causes that your child cares about?
3. **Do you help** your child find ways to get involved?
4. **Do you support** your child's efforts in ways you can, such as by providing or arranging a ride?
5. **Do you discuss** ways that small efforts combine to make a big difference?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your child feel capable of changing things for the better. For each no, try that idea from the quiz.*

"Believe with all your heart that how you live your life makes a difference."  
—Colin Brown

## Activities foster friendships

Forming friendships with other students can help your child feel more connected to school. To help your child find classmates with similar interests, suggest checking out clubs and extracurricular activities. It may be hard for your child to spot a child who likes the same things when walking in the halls, but a student in chess club probably enjoys playing chess, too.

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HIGH SCHOOL



## How can I get my teen to accept more responsibility?

**Q:** I don't know how my junior will ever be responsible enough to leave home after high school. My teen doesn't do assignments on time, or forgets to turn them in. I get regular calls for a ride because "I ran out of gas again." How can I instill a sense of responsibility at this age?



**A:** Your student is in for a rude awakening in college or the workplace. Presumably you won't be driving for hours if your teen runs out of gas at college halfway across the state. And employers are not likely to look kindly on a worker who doesn't do the work.

To ease your teen into taking responsibility:

- **Don't be too quick jump to the rescue.** If your teen doesn't turn in an assignment, a zero in the grade book may be a more effective lesson than a reminder from you. Having to call a friend or missing activities may teach your teen to check the gas tank before heading out.
- **Review ways to stay organized.** Encourage your teen to use a planner to schedule study time and keep track of assignments. Suggest creating daily checklists to remember tasks. Then help your teen establish routines that will turn responsibilities into habits.

Your teen *can* learn to be responsible for work and behavior. With some practice, it will become second nature.

## Proofreading pays off

Researching and writing are important steps in producing a paper for school. But students shouldn't stop there. Proofreading is essential for quality work. Remind your teen to:

- **Proofread** slowly. Your student will catch more errors.
- **Look** for frequently-made mistakes. Does your teen often misspell a certain word or forget to close quotes?
- **Read** in different ways. Your teen can read the paper aloud, or read from back to front. Both can help errors stand out.



## Give resilience a boost

Things in school and in life won't always go the way your teen planned. To help your student bounce back from disappointment:

- **Ask how your teen** is feeling.
- **Be sympathetic.** "I'm sorry. I know you are disappointed." But don't try to fix things for your teen.
- **Model resilience.** Show your teen how you cope with your disappointments. "I didn't get that promotion, but I'm going to keep trying."

## Include time for learning over winter break

Sticking to a schedule helps students keep learning over winter break. In addition to time for relaxation, have your teen plan time each day for:

- **Schoolwork.** If there is no assigned work, your teen can review or read ahead.
- **Writing.** Ask your teen to spend a few minutes writing in a journal.
- **Reading.** Encourage pleasure reading for at least 30 minutes a day.

## Parent Quiz

### Do you stand your ground with your teen?

Sometimes it seems as though pushing back against parent authority is what teens do best. Do you respond with firm, fair consistency, or are you a parent pushover? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

1. **Do you understand** that your teen needs you to be a parent more than a friend?
2. **Do you talk** with your teen about the reasons for your rules?
3. **Do you stand** firm on your rules, even if your teen is upset with you?
4. **Do you impose** consequences when you say you will?
5. **Do you adjust** rules when your teen shows maturity and responsibility?

### How well are you doing?

*More yes answers mean you are helping your teen understand and live within boundaries. For each no, try that idea.*

"Caring for children is a dance between setting appropriate limits as caretakers and avoiding unnecessary power struggles..."  
—Charlotte Sophia Kasl

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# Daily Learning Planner

*Ideas families can use to help children  
do well in school*

Title I-Educational Service Unit 10



THE  
**PARENT**  
INSTITUTE

**December • January • February 2022-2023**

## December 2022

## Daily Learning Planner: Ideas Families Can Use to Help Children Do Well in School—Try a New Idea Every Day!

- ☐ 1. Make a 31-link paper chain with your child. Tear off a link each day to count down the days until January 1.
- ☐ 2. Set aside time today to work on a project with your child. Choose something your student could give as a gift.
- ☐ 3. Make a meal together. Explain why you do some steps before others.
- ☐ 4. Have your child blow bubbles in freezing weather. How does the cold affect them? Look for ice forming on the bubbles.
- ☐ 5. Pick a word from the dictionary and draw a picture of it. See if your child can guess the word. Then let your child pick a word.
- ☐ 6. Make paper snowflakes with your child. Decorate your windows.
- ☐ 7. Have your child use a news source (in print or online) to check weather around the world. Where is it coldest?
- ☐ 8. Look for a community service project your family can do together.
- ☐ 9. Have your child teach you about something the class is learning. It's a great way to reinforce learning.
- ☐ 10. Talk to your child about holiday traditions in other cultures. Find a book about holidays to read together.
- ☐ 11. Give your child a flashlight to use to read in bed tonight.
- ☐ 12. Pick a word and challenge your child to put its letters in alphabetical order.
- ☐ 13. Find pictures of people in various situations. Ask your child to write captions.
- ☐ 14. Have your child compare the prices of two sizes of the same product at the grocery store. Which is the better buy?
- ☐ 15. Take a walk with your child and look at trees. Which trees are evergreen? Which ones are *deciduous* (lose their leaves in winter)?
- ☐ 16. Talk to your child about the importance of thanking people for gifts and kindnesses.
- ☐ 17. Set aside some time this month to do something seasonal together that you enjoyed when you were a child.
- ☐ 18. Watch the news on TV with your child. Choose one story and compare it with a print news article about the same event.
- ☐ 19. Review spelling or vocabulary words with your child tonight.
- ☐ 20. Have your child predict the results of flipping a coin 10 times. Then try it. Was your child's prediction close?
- ☐ 21. Talk with your child about the link between rights and responsibilities.
- ☐ 22. Have your child listen to different types of music and describe the feelings each one inspires.
- ☐ 23. Have your child make a list of things to do when there's nothing to do.
- ☐ 24. Read a story to your child and use a different voice for each character.
- ☐ 25. Hum a popular song and see if your child can guess its name.
- ☐ 26. With your child, estimate how many bowls of cereal you can pour from one box. Keep track until the box is empty.
- ☐ 27. Look for a show or video about history and historical figures. Watch with your child.
- ☐ 28. Challenge your child to do a secret good deed for a friend or neighbor.
- ☐ 29. Make a puzzle with your child. Glue a picture onto cardboard. Cut it into puzzle-piece shapes.
- ☐ 30. Have your child write directions for making a sandwich, then follow them exactly. How does it turn out?
- ☐ 31. Help your child create a time line of 2022.

# January 2023

## Daily Learning Planner: Ideas Families Can Use to Help Students Do Well in School—Try a New Idea Every Day!

- 1. Start a family journal for 2023. Record highlights and accomplishments.
- 2. Post a favorite motivating quotation on your teen's mirror.
- 3. At the library, help your teen find books about interesting careers.
- 4. Talk with your teen about how you appreciate your education. Or talk about why you wish you'd learned more.
- 5. Make it clear that your rules apply when your teen is at a friend's house as well as at home.
- 6. Talk with your teen about what makes a good friendship.
- 7. When you disagree with your teen, try to listen more than you talk.
- 8. Is your teen getting enough exercise? Take a brisk walk together today.
- 9. Check with a school counselor. Is your teen on track to graduate and apply to colleges? If not, what needs to happen?
- 10. Introduce your teen to historical fiction. It's a great way to put a human face on history.
- 11. Encourage your teen to form a study group.
- 12. Ask your teen: "Do you think honesty is always the best policy? Why or why not?"
- 13. Teens who start drinking under age 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who begin after age 21.
- 14. Remind your teen to use you as a scapegoat if necessary: "I can't. My mom wants me home tonight. Sorry."
- 15. Talk to your teen about the difference between *courage* and *recklessness*.
- 16. Ask your teen to tell you about this week's assignments.
- 17. Help your teen start a file to keep track of volunteer jobs and other work experiences.

- 18. Set a digital curfew. All devices must be turned off for the night at a certain time.
- 19. Brainstorm with your teen about ways to conserve energy.
- 20. Avoid criticizing or correcting your teen in front of peers.
- 21. Check on your teen's mid-year grades. There's still time to get help if grades are slipping.
- 22. Today, talk to your teen as you would to a friend or co-worker. How does your teen respond?
- 23. Listen to your teen's point of view. Say, "You might be right. I need to think that over and get back to you."
- 24. When your teen overreacts, it's important for you not to. Set a time to talk later when you are both calm.
- 25. If your teen is confused in a class, suggest asking the teacher for help right away.
- 26. Help your teen make a to-do list. Organization is a stepping stone to independence.
- 27. Learn about your teen's music or slang—but don't adopt them yourself. Teens want parents to be grownups.
- 28. If your teen is faced with a big decision, talk about it within the context of your family's values or faith.
- 29. Build time-management skills by helping your teen learn to set priorities.
- 30. Ask about the similarities and differences between your teen's classes. In your teen's opinion, what aspects encourage learning?
- 31. Chat with your teen about goals for the next five years.

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# February 2023

## Daily Learning Planner: Ideas Families Can Use to Help Students Do Well in School—Try a New Idea Every Day!

- 1. Replace pessimistic phrases with positive ones. Exchange "It won't work" for "Why not try it?"
- 2. Make an appointment to spend time with your teen this month. Write it on your calendar and don't cancel.
- 3. Emphasize the importance of regular school attendance. Learning builds day by day, and attendance is important in every job.
- 4. Bring up a sticky situation before it occurs. Ask what your teen might do. Listen and ask questions.
- 5. Watch a travel program together. Discuss a place your teen would like to visit.
- 6. Encourage your teen to review class notes every day—while what the teacher said is fresh in mind.
- 7. On a day without homework, have your teen use study time read ahead.
- 8. Talk with your teen about mistakes. How can people learn from their mistakes?
- 9. Mail your teen a valentine so it will arrive by the 14th.
- 10. Look at the class catalog of a local college together. Which courses interest your teen?
- 11. Use an article about a controversial issue as a springboard for a discussion with your teen.
- 12. Spend a few minutes talking with your teen at bedtime. This is a relaxing time for conversation.
- 13. Tell your teen about something you did in high school that you would do differently now.
- 14. Compliment one specific thing you love about your teen today. Try to do this every day.

- 15. Have your teen teach you a "tech trick" with an app or website.
- 16. Help your teen view small chunks of time as opportunities to study.
- 17. If your teen is reading a "classic" for English, see if there's a movie version. Watch it together and compare.
- 18. Brainstorm together about the snacks your teen eats. What would make it easier to make healthier choices?
- 19. Criticism can be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Give your teen positive messages whenever you can.
- 20. Remind your teen that there are no stupid questions. If your student is confused, chances are someone else in the class is, too.
- 21. Review online safety with your teen: Never give out personal information; never meet online friends in person without you.
- 22. Ask about your teen's plans for life after graduation. Discuss your expectations.
- 23. Parenting a teen can be tough. Carve out some time to take care of yourself.
- 24. Discuss an international news event with your teen. How is it affecting your country?
- 25. When your teen sets a goal, suggest saying it aloud. This helps students believe they can reach their goals.
- 26. Ask your teen to select and read a news article to you. Share opinions about it.
- 27. Keep talking about school. Every day, ask what your teen is working on and thinking about.
- 28. Teens who feel left out may turn to risky behavior. Help your teen find a place to fit in.

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## Daily Learning Planner: Ideas Families Can Use to Help Students Do Well in School—Try a New Idea Every Day!

- ☐ 1. *Presence* says more than *presents*. Spend time with your teen regularly.
- ☐ 2. Discuss your teen's commitments outside school. Do they leave your student enough time to complete schoolwork?
- ☐ 3. Encourage your teen to make flash cards. They are great for studying facts or vocabulary words.
- ☐ 4. Remind your teen to plan for some personal time. Being a teenager can be stressful!
- ☐ 5. Many teens want to give gifts, but have limited funds. Encourage your teen to look online for crafts to make and give.
- ☐ 6. Establish times when texting and other phone use is not allowed, such as during mealtimes and while driving.
- ☐ 7. Ask your teen to tell you about the issues that are important at school.
- ☐ 8. Teach your teen to use positive self-talk, such as "I can do this." When students cheer themselves on, it helps them stay motivated.
- ☐ 9. Challenge your family to learn—and use—three new words a day.
- ☐ 10. At athletic events, leave coaching to the coach. Sideline coaching is distracting and will embarrass your teen.
- ☐ 11. Read aloud as a family tonight.
- ☐ 12. Encourage your teen to ask at least one question in class every day.
- ☐ 13. Help your teen consider the pros and cons of all options before making a choice.
- ☐ 14. Don't criticize your own body in front of your teen. Instead, talk about being healthy and strong.
- ☐ 15. Talk about something you learned recently. This shows that education is a lifelong activity.
- ☐ 16. Say *no* to attending unchaperoned parties, even if "everyone's going."
- ☐ 17. With privileges come responsibilities. Teens who don't meet responsibilities should lose privileges.
- ☐ 18. Encourage your teen to take some cookies to an elderly neighbor or family friend.
- ☐ 19. Ask about your teen's favorite movies. Movie preferences can be clues to the types of books teens will like.
- ☐ 20. Share this truth with your teen: "You can't control others, but you can control how you react to others."
- ☐ 21. Tonight is the longest night of the year. Look at the stars together.
- ☐ 22. Talk with your teen about how each of you could improve your listening skills.
- ☐ 23. Leave an interesting news article out for your teen to read.
- ☐ 24. At dinner, have each family member say something nice about every person at the table.
- ☐ 25. Enjoy an outdoor activity as a family.
- ☐ 26. Teens know their shortcomings. They need you to remind them of their strengths.
- ☐ 27. Encourage your teen to write a letter to a teacher or coach who has been a positive influence.
- ☐ 28. Talk about stereotypes with your teen. Discuss why they're unfair.
- ☐ 29. Tuck a favorite treat where your teen will find it. Attach a short note.
- ☐ 30. Ask your teen: "If you could trade lives with somebody you know, who would it be? Why?"
- ☐ 31. Have an alcohol-free New Year's celebration with your teen.