

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Boaz City Schools
Leland Dishman, Superintendent

February 2006

BUILDING CHARACTER

Help your child cope with teasing

If your child never comes home from middle school upset because a peer teased him, he'll have had a rare middle school experience indeed. Middle schoolers can be cruel, and learning to deal with that is important. For example, your child might:

- **Practice standing up for himself.** It's hard to be teased without getting visibly angry or sad. But these emotions are exactly what the teaser hopes to see. Instead, have your child practice looking someone in the eye and saying something like, "You can talk, but I don't have to listen." Then your child should walk away.
- **Choose friends carefully.** Not everyone is a teaser. In fact, most kids look down on those who pick on others. Sticking with a couple of supportive friends should protect your child from some of the meanness.
- **Be a friend.** Sometimes kids who get teased turn around and tease others. Let your child know you won't tolerate that. Being kind and friendly will eventually earn him a lot of respect.

If these ideas don't seem to be helping your child deal with teasing, talk with his teacher to see if you can resolve the problem together.

Source: Gary Fisher and Rhoda Cummings, *The Survival Guide for Kids With LD*, ISBN: 0-915793-18-0 (Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).



TALKING AND LISTENING

Emphasize listening to boost learning

Students spend most of their class time listening. Here are some ways to build your child's listening skills:

- **Ask questions** like, "What stood out to you?" Good listeners remember the most important points. After your child reads or listens to something at home, see if she can recall key ideas. Encourage her to do this in class, too.
- **Paraphrase** together during dinner. Take turns describing what happened that day. Or talk about something in the news. Each listener must correctly restate the speaker's ideas before the conversation continues.
- **Write one-fact note cards.** Read a paragraph or so aloud from your child's textbook. On a note card, have her write down one important detail she heard. As she learns to recognize main ideas, she'll create a set of helpful flashcards.

Source: Michele Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference*, ISBN: 0-7879-4605-2 (Jossey-Bass, 1-800-956-7739, www.JosseyBass.com).

MAKING DECISIONS

Foster good decisions

You can help your child avoid hasty decisions. Encourage him to ask himself questions, such as: "Why did that happen?" "What can I learn from it?" "What do I know about this subject?" "What are the pros and cons?" "What are the possible results of decisions?"

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Contact busy teachers

Middle school teachers have large numbers of students (and parents) to work with. It can be hard to reach them. Try these ideas:

- **Offer** several ways to contact you. Give home, work and cell numbers—plus an email address if available.
- **Explain** exactly what you need. For example, "I'd love to get your feedback on Sarah's class participation this quarter."
- **Have** your calendar handy. Then if the teacher needs to schedule another discussion, you can do it easily.



Source: Dorothy Rich, *What do we say? What do we do?*, ISBN: 0-312-854331 (Forge Books, 1-800-288-2131, www.tor.com/forge.html).

DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

Talk to your child about your reasons for rules

Explanations often work better than simple commands. For example, your middle schooler might not react well to, "Wear your bike helmet because I said so." Try, "I read that wearing a bike helmet can save your life if you fall. I'm asking because I care about you so much."



Source: Elisa Medhus, *Raising Children Who Think for Themselves*, ISBN: 1-58270-047-8 (Beyond Words Publishing, 503/531-8700, www.beyondword.com).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can you avoid peer pressure problems in middle school?

Q: I hear a lot about “peer pressure” in middle school. How can I help my child make friends who won’t push her in the wrong direction?

A: It’s common to associate peer pressure with destructive behavior. But peers can be a positive influence too. They can help your daughter stay safe, do well in school and be kind to others. To increase the chance of this:



- **Get to know** kids at school. Seize opportunities to be involved, such as by chaperoning field trips and attending school events. Encourage friendships that seem healthy.
- **Let your child** invite friends to your house. If she’s shy, being at home can make her more comfortable. Provide kid-friendly snacks and entertainment.
- **Support your child’s** interest in after-school activities. Clubs and teams are good places to make friends with similar interests.
- **Meet the parents** of other students. Introduce yourself on the phone or at school functions. Coordinate similar ground rules for kids to follow.
- **Provide high-quality supervision** after school. Your daughter will be less likely to succumb to negative influences if she is monitored and happy.

PARENT QUIZ

Do you use sound discipline methods?

When parents use good discipline at home, the benefits show at school too. Answer the following questions yes or no to see if you’re using effective discipline practices:

1. **Do you choose** fair rules and consequences?
2. **Do you enforce** rules consistently so your child knows what to expect?
3. **Do you use** natural and logical consequences?
4. **Do you show** respect for your child at all times?
5. **Do you compliment** your child’s good behavior often?

How did you do? Each yes answer is a sign you’re disciplining well. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your response to yes.

“Don’t point your finger to the heights your children should go. Start climbing and they will follow.”

—Wilfred A. Peterson

TRANSITIONS

Keep up with your child!

As your child moves through middle school, she may seem quite “adult.” But she isn’t. Experts say kids this age require just as much parent involvement—if not more—than ever. Your child is becoming more independent, but she still needs help developing responsibility.

Source: “Moving up to middle school,” FamilyEducation.com, <http://familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,69-16526,00.html>.

REINFORCING LEARNING

Nourish learning at home

Children learn a lot at school. But they learn even more at home—especially when you help. Try some of these simple, fun activities:

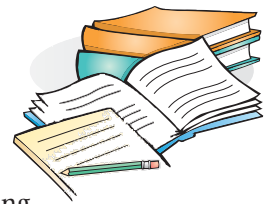
- **Introduce your child** to a favorite hobby of yours.
- **Give your child** a private journal.
- **Create a special place** in your home for reading.
- **Tell your child his family history.**
- **Teach your child a fun skill**, such as how to cook something.
- **Take something apart** with your child and try to put it back together.
- **Ask open-ended questions**, such as, “What would happen if ... ?”

HOMEWORK

Help your middle schooler prepare for compositions

When kids struggle with writing, it’s often because they haven’t prepared.

They may need to think about the topic, do research, discuss ideas and make an outline. You can help by listening and offering guidance (and a ride to the library!).



Helping Students Learn[®]

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Managing Editor: Patricia Hodgdon.
Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Staff Editor: Amanda Blyth. Writer: Susan O’Brien.
Editorial Assistant: Pat Carter.

Head of Translations: Michelle Beal-García.

Layout & Illustrations: Maher & Mignella, Cherry Hill, NJ.
Copyright © 2006, The Parent Institute[®], a division of NIS, Inc.

P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474
1-800-756-5525 • www.parent-institute.com • ISSN 1527-1021