Building Math Skills

Encourage your child to experiment with graphs

Graphing data can produce a lot of information. It’s a valuable skill—one your child will need as he progresses in math. Here’s a fun way to practice: Work on a food budget by graphing what family members eat during a week. For example:

- **How much cereal** does each person use?
- **How much milk** does each person drink?
- **How much cheese** does each person eat?
- **How much fruit** does each person need?
- **How much salad** does each person consume?
- **How many slices of bread** does each person eat?
- **How many cups of popcorn** does each person consume?
- **How many slices of bread** does each person eat?
- **How many cups of popcorn** does each person finish?

Once your child has results, he can answer all sorts of questions, such as:

- **Who enjoys bread** the most?
- **Who likes cheese** the least?
- **Are you buying enough** food to suit family members’ tastes?
- **Which foods**, if any, are you overbuying?
- **Are certain foods** family favorites?

Use the results next time you go shopping. It’s a good way to show the everyday uses of math!

Wellness

Make a family commitment to exercise

School “works out” your child’s mind, but what about her body? Even if your child has recess and physical education, it’s important to help her stay fit and burn off stress. Some tips include:

- **Do activities she enjoys**. Join her in sports she likes, but avoid becoming too competitive. If she’s not very athletic, try something like biking or walking.
- **Don’t compare her to others**. Kids grow at different rates. If your child is bigger, smaller, faster or slower than her friends, don’t point it out. She already knows.
- **Set a good example**. If you want physical fitness to be part of your child’s life, also make it part of yours. Add exercise to your routine—especially with your child.


Building Character

Promote volunteering

Have you ever wondered why schools stress the importance of community service? When they do, research shows that it:

- **Helps** kids feel responsible.
- **Reduces** misbehavior.
- **Is linked** to student success.


Working With Your School

Keep your child’s brain active over winter break

Your child is looking forward to a rest during winter break, but she can still keep her mind sharp. Have her:

- **Catch up** on pleasure reading.
- **Write** a letter to a relative.
- **Play** board games that require higher-level thinking.
- **Ask** teachers for suggestions, too.

Encouraging Reading

Suggest strategies to improve comprehension

Research shows that many middle schoolers have difficulty with reading comprehension. You can help. For textbooks, have your child:

- **Read** titles, headings, captions, graphs and questions at the end of a chapter.
- **Look up** new terms before reading so they will be familiar.
- **Ask** himself, “Do I understand this, or am I already confused?” If he’s confused, he can ask for help.

How can parents survive adolescence?

Q: I am so worried about adolescence! How will I help my child cope with all the changes ahead?

A: Adolescence is intimidating for parents and kids. That’s why it’s important to prepare! You should:

- **Remember.** How did you feel about adults when you were a preteen or teen? What was important to you? What did you want to avoid at all costs? Keep your experiences in mind when trying to understand your child.
- **Read.** Some things haven’t changed since you were young. Others may be different. Ask your child’s teacher or school librarian to recommend books about parenting young teens. Learn about current teen trends as well.
- **Reassure.** Explain normal changes that are part of growing up. Tell your child that she can come to you with questions. Consider getting her a book, too, about adolescence.
- **Respect.** Your child has new needs now—including a need for privacy. You still have to make sure she’s safe, of course, and look out for signs of trouble, such as sleeping difficulties and falling grades.
- **Recognize.** Yes, adolescence is challenging. But it’s rewarding too. Your child is becoming an adult, and you get to help her through it, believing in her no matter what. Now that’s a parenting accomplishment!


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**PARENT QUIZ**

Are you promoting responsibility?

Responsibility is an important trait for middle schoolers to develop—both at home and in school. Answer the following questions yes or no to see if you are helping your child assume more responsibility.

1. **Do you encourage** your child to think about what needs to be done, and then do it?
2. **Do you let** your child know that being reliable and dependable are important qualities?
3. **Do you teach** your child to be accountable—not to make excuses or blame others?
4. **Do you give** your child additional freedom for displaying more responsibility?
5. **Do you encourage** your child to think before taking action? How did you do? Each yes answer means you are fostering responsibility in your child. For each no answer, consider using that idea from the quiz to change your answer to yes.

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**AFTER SCHOOL**

Should you allow your child to stay home alone?

Your child is probably legally old enough to stay home alone after school. But is he really ready? Your child may be ready if he:

- **Feels comfortable.** If your child is anxious, have him stay with a friend, relative or after-school program.
- **Shows responsibility.** If your child follows directions and safety rules he may be ready.
- **Can reach you** or another trusted adult at all times.

**DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS**

Promote independence

In middle school, students are often expected to work independently. To help your child build this skill:

- **Ask** questions instead of lecturing. “What might help you remember to feed the dog?”
- **Describe** instead of accusing. “I’m afraid these wet towels might get moldy.”
- **Give** choices instead of commands. “Would you like to sweep the porch now or when you get home later?”


Consider scrapbooking

Scrapbooking is a good way to reminisce with your child and build her writing skills. Here are some things you can do together:

- **Make** a family tree.
- **Include** an essay about your family.
- **Write** captions under photos.


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Helping Students Learn

Published in English and Spanish, September through May. Published: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
