Motivate with a mid-year boost

It may be a new calendar year, but the school year is getting old. The halfway point has come and gone. Meanwhile, your child’s September enthusiasm has faded like the sun on a winter afternoon. It’s time for a new helping of motivation to usher him into spring. Remember to:

- **Encourage and praise.** Look at your child as he labors over a textbook and say, “I can see how hard you’re working, and I know it will pay off.” Follow the rule of saying five positive things for every one negative.

- **Stay involved.** Back-to-School Night and first-quarter teacher conferences are in the past, but your participation should be ongoing. Attend a game or other school event with your child. Show how much you enjoy spending time together. Check in with teachers and ask how you can help.

- **Give specific suggestions.** For example, does your child need to brush up on study skills? Remind him to take notes as he reads chapters. This can help him learn key concepts. Encourage him to keep a separate list of vocabulary words and their meanings, and refer to it when reading and studying.


Language is an important part of math

Does your child understand math language? Suppose a problem says, “Megan has six apples and Josh has half as many.” Can he find out how many apples Josh has? Remind him that “half as many” means to divide by two. Practice story problems together.


Different kids study in different ways

Many kids need quiet to study well. Even small noises distract them enough to put them at risk of missing important information.

But other children, especially by middle school age, don’t like silence. They have developed enough tolerance and discipline to study with background noise. To them, a noiseless room may be distracting. If this describes your child, she probably wants to study in a busy room or with music playing. This may be okay if she:

- **Completes** her homework.
- **Does** well on tests.
- **Keeps** up with long-term projects. It may even be a benefit because people can’t always control noise levels in their work environments. Places such as college dorms and offices may be fairly loud. Success just might depend on being able to focus in these noisier places.


Problem solving teaches your child responsibility

To teach your child responsibility:

- **Define the issue.** “I’m frustrated that you leave homework on the kitchen table.”

- **Talk—and listen.** Say why it upsets you. “I can’t set the table if your books are scattered everywhere.” Hear her out.

- **Brainstorm** possible solutions—**together.** Then take time to listen to her thoughts.


Writing goals can lead to your child’s achievement

Does your middle schooler have big dreams for the future? Perhaps she wants to be an astronaut or actress. Don’t discourage her. Suggest that she write down her goals and how she might reach them. It helps her think realistically—and enjoy writing.
Making inferences promotes more productive reading

By middle school, your child needs to do more than just read. She needs to “read between the lines.” This skill—understanding a clear idea that’s not specifically printed in the text— is called making an inference.

Suppose a character gets soaked as he runs from his car to his house. What inference can be made? It’s probably raining! Your child can figure that out by thinking about what she read.

To make inferences, relate reading material to your child’s previous knowledge. She might ask herself:

- What’s different? For example, if your child reads about a “tiny dog,” she might think of dogs that are large. Now she knows the dog is unlikely to be a Great Dane or German Shepherd.

- Is it part of something? Imagine your child reads that a little girl “woke up thinking about cake and icing.” Your child might guess that it is the girl’s—or someone else’s—birthday.

- What do I already know? If your child reads that “the bathroom looked as if a seal had bathed in it,” she might picture a seal splashing. Then she knows the bathroom is probably a mess.


Do you stay involved with school?

When parents help at school, children benefit in many ways. Answer the following questions yes or no to see how involved you are:

1. Do you attend parent-teacher conferences?
2. Do you go to school events?
3. Do you keep in touch with your child’s teachers?
4. Do you volunteer at school when you have time?
5. Do you read all letters sent home by the school?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you’re doing a great job of staying involved with your child’s school. For each no answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

Let your child earn privacy

Your child wants privacy. Remind him that to earn more privacy, you expect him to:

- **Clean his room.** The less it looks like a health hazard, the less you’ll need to go in to straighten things up.
- **Communicate.** “Nothing” shouldn’t be the answer to every question.
- **Maintain good grades.** Working hard in school indicates maturity and focus.
- **Be smart about choosing friends.** Here’s a place he can demonstrate good judgment.

Spark conversation by sharing with your child

Want your middle schooler to open up? Talk about yourself. Here’s why:

- **It lets** you connect without lecturing.
- **It allows** you to share your values.
- **It helps** her get to know you better. So go ahead and share parts of your life. She really does want to know.

Encourage your child to be active at home

You may worry about how much time your child spends in front of the TV or computer. It’s essential for parents to encourage active alternatives, but how? Try to:

- **Research activities** in your community, such as exercise classes for families.
- **Be a role model.** Take a walk after dinner instead of watching television.
- **Limit screen time** to fewer than two hours daily.


DISCIPLINE

YOUR CHILD AND YOU

WELLNESS

PARENT QUIZ

All children behave as well as they are treated. —Anonymous

Helping Students Learn®

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