Create the best study conditions

A few lucky students can plop down anywhere with schoolwork and learn well. But most people study best under the “right” conditions. If your child seems unfocused, her environment may need a change. Experiment with these issues and ideas:

- **General location.** Many children work well in their rooms. Some focus best at the kitchen table. Still others prefer the library.
- **Lighting.** Everyone needs enough light to read without eyestrain. But preferences can vary from bright light to soft illumination.
- **Calm.** Classical music or a whirring fan is fine for some kids. A TV is never okay. Easily distracted kids need quiet places to work—away from family hubbub.
- **Temperature.** Most kids can’t study if they’re too hot or too cold. Can’t change the room’s temperature? A warm or cool drink can help.
- **Organization.** Children need to know that when they sit down, they will have the supplies they need—and be able to find them.

Providing the right study conditions for your child may be a family job. But homework is a priority in the school years. Making the most of homework time is more than worthwhile.

Is your child adjusted to middle school?

By this point in the year, your child has probably settled in well to his middle-school surroundings. Still, your involvement remains as important as ever. Check on things like:

- **Homework.** Is your child on top of assignments? Does he write them down, make a plan for completion and finish on time? Does he have everything he needs to finish his assignments?
- **Study time.** How long is it taking? Does your child feel comfortable and productive in the area where he works?
- **Social issues.** Does your child have some peers he can count on? Or does he need help making friends?
- **Wellness.** Is your child eating right? Does he manage stress by exercising regularly?


Try to relate to teachers

Some of the most important relationships are the ones you forge with your child’s teachers. Talk to your child’s teachers about their expectations for the year. Let them know yours. If those expectations differ, look for common ground. Make the effort to communicate. It’ll pay off for everyone.

Teach tolerance at home

According to a survey of middle- and high-school students, 40 percent said they’d rejected someone from a group outside their own. To help your child become more tolerant:

- **Set a good example.** Don’t make prejudiced remarks or tell racist jokes.
- **Talk about it.** Ask your child how he’d feel if someone judged him without even knowing him.
- **Embrace diversity.** Enjoy multicultural books, artwork and music at home.


Make the most of meals

Where’s the best place to connect with your middle-schooler? It may be during conversation at the dinner table. Make her part of the mealtime talk. Instead of talking **over** your child, talk **with** her. And instead of the standard “How was school?” be more specific. Ask, “What’s one interesting thing that happened at school?”

**MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD**

**Persistence can lead to more academic success**

The ability to stick with a tough job is a skill that leads to success. Here are some ways to encourage your child:

- **Notice your child’s progress.** Say things like, “That wasn’t easy, but you kept at it. Well done!”
- **Be a role model.** Say, “Today, I am going to work until I get this done.” Then keep your word.


**Building Responsibility**

**Experience the value of shared work**

Are there certain chores that no one in the family wants to do, such as putting away laundry or washing the car? Teach that “Many hands make light work.” Everyone could put away their own clothes. Washing the car could be a group project. This lesson in teamwork can apply at school, too.

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**PARENT QUIZ**

**Are you teaching stress reduction?**

All children experience some stress. They must learn to deal with it so it does not overwhelm them. Answer the following questions yes or no to see if you’re helping your middle schooler learn to cope with stress:

1. **Do you teach** your child to avoid stress at the last minute by allowing enough time to get things done?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to have a relaxing hobby?
3. **Do you let** your child know that she can come to you with any problems?
4. **Do you tell** your child to speak with a teacher, counselor or doctor if stress is becoming overwhelming?
5. **Do you suggest** that your child get plenty of exercise?

**How are you doing?** Each yes answer means you’re helping your child learn to deal with stress. For each no answer, try using that idea from the quiz.

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**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**When is ‘another chance’ one too many for your child?**

**Q:** When I use consequences with my child, sometimes he begs for another chance. I can tell he’s sorry. Should I give in?

**A:** “It will never happen again.” “Next time, I’ll call. I really will!” Statements like these, coming from a child, sound familiar to nearly every parent. Many kids will talk and beg for hours rather than accept the results of their actions. But children respect parents who mean what they say and follow through. Remember to:

- **Keep it real.** Are you really going to ground him for a month? If you know in your heart that “a month” really means “the next two weekends,” then just make it the next two weekends. Realistic consequences are better than harsh, empty threats.

- **Take the heat.** Your child may get angry with you. This is a last resort when parents won’t back down. Stay calm, and give him a chance to calm down, too.

- **Skip the guilt.** Your child may describe you as the “bad guy.” For example, “You’re the worst parent ever!” But others try a tactic that can feel even worse to parents. They turn it on themselves. (“Oh, I’m a terrible person!”) Reply that no, he isn’t terrible, but his behavior was out of bounds. You are still going to enforce the consequence.


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**EMPLOY KNOWLEDGE IN EVERYDAY SITUATIONS**

To bolster your middle schooler’s learning, have her help in real situations. Here are some ideas:

- **Have her navigate.** Did you take a wrong turn? Have her read the map while you drive.

- **Respect her intelligence.** Crossword puzzle have you stumped? See if she can solve it.

- **Ask for her input.** Whether it’s de-bugging the computer or unclogging a drain, invite her to pitch in.

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**Failure is only the opportunity to begin intelligently again.**

—Henry Ford