BUILDING CHARACTER

Make family morals clear and consistent

Imagine a school in which students don’t have a sense of right and wrong. It’s a scary thought. The fact is that kids need to learn morals from parents. It’s the school’s job to reinforce these values. While raising a moral child, remember:

- **It doesn’t just happen.** You need to specifically instruct your child in the morals important to your family. And you have to model them, because your child will be watching.

- **It is ongoing.** You may hear things like, “If they haven’t learned it by now, they never will.” Not true! Yes, it’s good to build habits when children are young, but it’s never too late. Keep trying. Believe that your child’s morals can be shaped right through the school years and beyond.

- **Peers are not more important.** Peers are a big influence on children, but parents’ power is amazing. No one is closer to kids every day than parents. Parents are a child’s first and most influential teachers. For example, if your child has heard often enough that she should never take anything that isn’t hers, she may resist the temptation to cheat on a test.


Parent involvement is a top influence

Want your child to succeed in school? Stay involved! Research shows that parent involvement is the biggest factor in whether kids do well in school. And remember, you can be involved at home. Here’s how:

- **Make your home educational.** Keep things on hand to stimulate your child’s mind, such as art supplies and books.

- **Encourage reading.** Kids learn a great deal from reading at school. So build your child’s reading skills at home, too—especially with materials he likes.

- **Maintain homework routines.** Insist on a set time for studying each day. Offer a quiet, distraction-free place to work. Do some work quietly yourself at this time.

- **Talk about school.** Ask questions and listen carefully to the answers. Make yourself available to chat often.


MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Feel connected to school

When kids care about their school, they do better there. To help your child bond with—and feel supported by—the school:

- **Encourage** participation in after-school activities.

- **Post** school bulletins in your home.

- **Attend** school events as a family.

- **Wear** school t-shirts and caps.


TESTING TIPS

Improve test-taking skills

Your child will have a better chance of success on tests if he:

- **Quizzes** himself. If he can’t answer every practice question, he needs to study more.

- **Gets** a good night’s sleep before a test. A nutritious breakfast is a must, too.

- **Answers** the questions on the test he’s most confident about first.


Reflect more on behavior

Middle schoolers are more capable of abstract thinking than they were in elementary school. To help your child think more deeply about her behavior:

- **Calmly discuss actions.** What led to her choices? Have her name various ways she could have acted.

- **Review the results.** Were anyone’s feelings affected? Help your child put herself in others’ shoes.

How can parents help children handle long-term assignments?

Q: My child does fine on day-to-day assignments, but long-term projects like research papers send him into a panic. How can I help him tackle big assignments?

A: The keys are organization and moral support. Have your child turn a big goal into several smaller ones. This may keep him from getting overwhelmed. To start:

- **Talk it through.** Remind your child that he has the skills needed to handle each step. If he's intimidated by a research paper, say something like, “Let’s turn it into little jobs. First you’ll find information. Then you’ll organize it. Then you’ll write it down.”

- **Teach him to use an assignment calendar.** Purchase one just for schoolwork. Hang it in his room. Have him mark down dates of upcoming projects. Then have him backtrack and add reminders, such as “Go to the library,” “Write first draft” and “Edit book report.” Build in some extra time at the end.

- **Provide support.** Your child should have basic supplies on hand, such as paper, pens, poster board and report covers. Purchase necessities ahead of time. Meanwhile, assure him that while schoolwork is his responsibility, you’re there as a cheerleader and guide.

**Are you ready for the ‘tween’ years?**

She’s not quite a teen, and no longer a child. Your middle schooler is now a “tween.” Answer the following questions yes or no to see if you’re helping her cope during this time:

1. **Do you check** on where your child is and who she is with?
2. **Do you know** your child’s friends and their parents?
3. **Do you set** limits and enforce them?
4. **Do you keep** the lines of communication open?
5. **Do you give** her “real” responsibilities, such as keeping track of when she’s due for a dental checkup?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you’re helping your child during this tricky time. For each no answer, try that idea.

**Cope with divorce jointly**

Kids whose parents divorce may struggle with schoolwork. To make sure your child is able to focus in class:

- **Be a team.** Break the news to your child together.
- **Be clear.** Tell your child it is not his fault.
- **Be loving.** Remind your child that you still love him.
- **Be the adult.** Don’t drag your child into your battle.


**Get creative with writing**

For middle schoolers, writing and fun don’t go together. Ask a relative to be your child’s pen pal. Have this person and your child write to each other (no email or instant messaging) every month or two. This way, your child will build writing skills and bond with a relative.

**BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY**

Promote responsibility through problem solving

Allowing your child to make decisions and take risks builds responsibility. To do this:

- **Include** your child in household decisions that affect her.
- **Shift** the focus from how you will react to what your child thinks of herself. She can now consider others’ feelings and whether something is right—not just if she’ll get in trouble.


**DEALING WITH TOUGH ISSUES**

**ENCOURAGING WRITING**