

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

MIDDLE SCHOOL



October 2022

Help your child take four steps to turn mistakes into learning

When students learn from their mistakes, they get smarter. But sometimes, the learning doesn't happen and kids keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

In order to really learn from mistakes, students need to think about them. Teach your child this four-step process for benefitting from an error:

1. Recognize what is working.

If your child earns a disappointing grade on a test, for example, you could say, "You made some mistakes, but let's take a look at all the questions you answered correctly." Pointing out that your child *can* learn can provide the motivation to take the next step.

2. Analyze what went wrong. It's hard to learn from a mistake if you don't know what caused it. Sometimes, the answer is easy: Your child didn't follow the directions. Other times, it takes a little more figuring out.

3. Correct the problem. Perhaps your child hasn't mastered the content. Help your student make a plan for what to do next: Ask the teacher for help, write summaries or work extra problems for practice, etc.

4. Apply the knowledge to a new situation. Have your child try answering a similar question. Encourage your student to stop at the point where the mistake occurred and make a better choice. When that happens, your child will understand how to avoid that mistake in the future.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.



Nurture your influential relationship

Positive adult influence is critical to children's success, in school and in life. Studies show that children who have healthy adult role models:

- **Are more likely** to earn top grades than students without such support.
- **Have a stronger sense** of security and optimism.
- **Are more likely to be** academically honest.
- **Are more likely to believe** in their own capability to succeed.
- **Take time to find out** what makes your student tick. Avoid making snap judgments about your child's character.
- **Offer specific praise.** When your child does something great, say so!
- **Listen carefully** when your child tells you something. Take your student's opinions seriously.

Here are some simple but important ways to be a supportive influence:

Source: "Healthy Parent-Child Relationships," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Talk about expectations

Clear expectations motivate and guide kids to achieve. To use expectations effectively:

- **Say what you expect** rather than giving orders. "I expect you to complete homework before leaving the house."
- **Discuss teacher's** expectations. "When Mrs. Moffat says on Monday that there's a test on Friday, she expects you to start reviewing right away."



Set a reading example

Your reading habits can have a huge impact on your child's reading habits. So let your child see that you value reading!

Set aside a short period of quiet time each day when the music, TV, computer and other devices are turned off. Suggest that your child use the time to read, but don't force it. Instead, kick back with your own book and see if your child follows your lead.



Curb media multitasking

It's no surprise that students often use their digital devices to text, scroll through social media or watch videos while they do schoolwork. But research shows that the more time students say they digitally multitask, the lower their grades are. To help your student stay focused on the task at hand:

- **Explain that digital multitasking** doesn't work. Studies also show that the more time students spend multitasking, the longer their studies take and the more mistakes they make.
- **Limit the use of devices** during work time. Have your child "park" unneeded devices in a different room.

Source: R. Rettner, "Is Digital Multitasking Good for Teens?" Live Science.



My child is anxious all the time. What can I do?

Q: Anxiety is becoming an issue for my seventh grader. Everything from homework to current events is a source of worry. How can I help my child manage these feelings and continue to learn?

A: It's normal for middle schoolers to feel anxious from time to time. However, if the feelings themselves—rather than what set them off—are becoming too much for your child, it's time to step in.



To help your child learn to cope:

- **Discuss the early warning signs.** Does your child start clenching teeth or biting nails when anxiety strikes? Explain that these are signals that your child needs to take action.
- **Create an action plan together.** Turning off notifications on your child's phone and limiting exposure to news reports until you can read or watch them together may make current events seem less overwhelming. Scheduling homework time and breaking big assignments into smaller parts will help your child experience success in getting things done.
- **Suggest ways to blow off steam.** Exercise, reading or pursuing a hobby may help your child calm down.
- **Say that you will help** your child find ways to manage these feelings. If anxiety continues to affect your child's life and schoolwork, seek help from a school counselor or doctor.



Is your child learning respect at home?

Students learn best in an environment where classmates and teachers behave respectfully toward one another. Are you modeling the respectful behavior you want to see from your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Do you demonstrate** respect by treating your child and others respectfully?
- ___ **2. Do you hear** your child out and make it clear that you expect your child to do the same for you?
- ___ **3. Do you discuss** the fact that people can have different points of view that are all valid?
- ___ **4. Do you talk** with your child about respectful ways to disagree?

- ___ **5. Do you say** that you expect your child to follow rules for conduct at school?

How well are you doing?

More yes answers mean you are teaching respect by example. For each no, try that idea.

"Never lose sight of the fact that the most important yardstick of your success is how you treat other people."

—Barbara Bush

Help your child develop leadership qualities

The qualities that make leaders effective can also help children be better students. Leaders do more than give directions. They also listen, learn and set an example. To instill leadership skills, encourage your child to be:

- **Organized.** Leaders plan ahead.
- **Open-minded.** Leaders know they don't know it all. They listen to others.
- **Flexible.** Leaders are willing to negotiate.
- **Resilient.** Leaders know how to handle losses and move forward.
- **Optimistic.** Leaders are enthusiastic and trust the people they work with.

Source: B.A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Share tips for math success

Learning math doesn't mean memorizing a concept long enough to pass a test. It means knowing it well enough to be able to use it to solve problems in the future. Top math students:



- **Practice** solving similar problems.
- **Avoid** distractions while studying math.
- **Persist.** If one approach doesn't work, they try another.

Source: L. Loewus, "Survey: Habits of Talented Math Students," *Education Week*.

Connect at a conference

Parent-teacher conferences may not happen automatically in middle school, but they are still worthwhile and you can ask for one at any time. For a productive conference:

- **Ask your child beforehand** to tell you about any concerns or questions.
- **Make a list** of topics you want to cover, so you don't have to remember them all.
- **Discuss specific examples** of issues and strategies for addressing them.

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