Promote pleasure reading for better school performance

It’s true: Reading for pleasure boosts academic achievement. Studies show that children who read for pleasure have higher scores in English, math, science and history than those who rarely read outside the classroom.

To encourage your middle schooler to read for enjoyment over the winter break:

- Keep reading materials handy. Fill your home with books, magazines and other reading resources.
- Set aside time in your child’s schedule for reading every day.
- Take trips to the library or bookstore together. See what books appeal to your child.
- Talk with librarians and booksellers. Ask what books they recommend for middle schoolers.
- Get everyone in the family reading. Show that it’s fun.
- Don’t force your child to finish reading a book that’s “boring.” It’s OK for kids to stop reading something they aren’t enjoying.
- Read aloud. Middle schoolers aren’t too old for this. Take turns reading to each other. Or have your child read to a younger sibling.
- Discuss books. Tell your child about a book you liked. Or ask your child to tell you about a favorite book.

Be absolute when speaking to your child about alcohol & drugs

Now that your child is getting older, some topics—curfew, free time, chores—are open to negotiation. Others, however, are nonnegotiable. They should include vaping, alcohol use and drug abuse.

Follow these guidelines:

- Be explicit, but give reasons. “Underage drinking, illegal drug use and vaping are all unacceptable. They are harmful to your health. You are never allowed to participate in these behaviors.”
- Do not expect your child to experiment with drugs or alcohol. Yes, many young people do. But plenty of others do not! This is not a “rite of passage.” One experiment can harm your child. Say, “I expect you not to take that risk.” Do not say, “Be careful.”
- Restrict contact with friends who drink or use drugs. You can’t control who your child spends time with at school. But if you know a peer who drinks or uses drugs, don’t allow your child to socialize with this person outside of school without supervision. If your child disobeys, consequences should follow. Again, make sure your child knows that the reason is health. Experts agree that children who hang around users are more likely to become users themselves.

Reprinted with permission from the December 2022 issue of Parents Still make the difference!® (High School Edition) newsletter. Copyright © 2022 The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.
A good night’s sleep is critical for your child’s school success

One essential element in your child’s education happens far outside the classroom. It’s sleep, and it’s vital for school success.

Unfortunately, according to recent studies, an alarming 60% of middle school students do not get the recommended eight to 10 hours of sleep per night they need.

To determine whether your middle schooler is getting enough shut-eye, ask yourself:

• Does my child fall asleep within 30 minutes of going to bed?
• Can my child wake up fairly easily in the morning?
• Is my child alert all day—with no reports from school about an inability to focus in class?

If you answered yes to each question, chances are your child is getting adequate sleep. But if you answered no, it’s time to:

• Enforce a regular bedtime. Don’t let your child sleep in more than two hours past the normal wake time on the weekends.
• Keep afternoon naps under an hour. Longer naps can make falling asleep at night more difficult for your child.
• Limit caffeine intake. Watch for this stimulant in things like soda, iced tea and energy drinks.
• Set a screen curfew one hour before bedtime. Research links lights from devices to sleep problems.
• Charge cell phones and other digital devices out of your child’s room overnight to deter late night social media scrolling.
• Consult a health provider if your child has ongoing problems falling asleep or is waking up multiple times at night.

Reprinted with permission from the December 2022 issue of Parents Still make the difference!® (High School Edition) newsletter. Copyright © 2022 The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc. Source: “Sleep in Middle and High School Students,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Three strategies can eliminate rude back talk

As the parent of a middle school child, you may have days where it seems as if everything you say is wrong. Even an innocent comment may be met with a rude, arrogant or scornful reply from your child.

You may be angry and frustrated. But it’s best to avoid a big show of emotion. Instead:

1. Use “I-messages.” Anything that begins “you always” or “you never” or even just “you” may sound like an accusation to your child. And nothing will gear a middle schooler up for a fight faster than that. Instead, put the emphasis on your feelings. Say, “I get frustrated when the recycling piles up,” instead of, “You never take the recycling to the curb!”
2. Become a broken record. Don’t get into a debate about why your middle schooler can’t go to a concert without an adult. Instead, repeat yourself. “The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts.” If your child continues to complain, respond again, “The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts.”
3. Say something nice, then walk away. There are times when you just won’t be able to get any further with your child. Try, “I know you’re upset, and that makes me sad for you. But you’re being so rude to me that I can’t talk to you right now. I’ll be happy to discuss things when we are both calm.”

Reprinted with permission from the December 2022 issue of Parents Still make the difference!® (High School Edition) newsletter. Copyright © 2022 The Parent Institute®, a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.

Have a wonderful Winter Break!