

Homework 101

Middle school means more classes to juggle—and more homework assignments to manage. Help your youngster learn more and be successful in school by getting into a good homework routine from the start. Here's how.

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1. Make homework a habit

One of the best ways to make something a habit is to do it at the same time every day. Help your middle grader pick a homework time slot that works for him. It could be after dinner or right after he gets home from school. Have him experiment to find the best time and then stick with it daily—even if he has no assignments due the next day. He can use the time to review notes or textbook chapters for a test or to work on a long-term project.

2. Get focused

Encourage your youngster to pick a homework spot where she won't be distracted by siblings or television. She might work best sitting at a desk, spreading her work out on the kitchen table, or lying on her bedroom floor. Being comfortable with her work environment will let her focus on her assignments. *Idea:* Consider making homework time a “quiet period” in your house. If you're reading or doing paperwork and your other children are doing their homework or playing quietly, it will be easier for your middle grader to concentrate.

3. Keep supplies nearby

A handy stash of school supplies will keep homework time moving along smoothly. Have your child fill a box or basket with everything he needs (paper, pencils, scissors, glue, ruler, graph paper, colored pencils, calculator). He might also keep poster board and other materials for projects nearby, as well as reference books like a dictionary, a thesaurus, and an atlas. Remind him to monitor supplies and arrange a time to shop with you for ones that are running low.



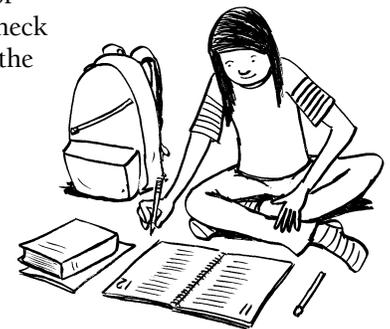
4. Stay organized

In middle school, your youngster has a lot more books and papers to keep straight, so she needs good organization skills.



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Encourage her to use her student planner to keep track of homework due dates, quizzes and tests, and meetings for group projects. She can check her planner at the end of the day and quickly spot the items she needs to bring home for each assignment. Using a different-colored folder or binder for every subject is another way to make it easy for her to find what she needs.



5. Manage assignments

Your youngster's workload might be easier to handle if he starts homework time by putting assignments in order. Some children do better knocking out the easiest assignment first and feeling like they have gotten something done. Others manage better by tackling the hardest work first, when they are most alert. Have your youngster try both ways to see which is more successful. Then, suggest that he put each assignment in his planner in the order he will do it. As he completes a task, he can mark it off—and enjoy a sense of accomplishment.

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6. Create study guides

Worksheets, textbook questions, and other assignments contain information your youngster will need to know for tests. He can stay ahead of the game by making study guides as he does his homework, instead of waiting until just before an exam to study. While working on history, he might keep a running time line that shows dates of important events like battles or presidential elections. For algebra, he could write step-by-step instructions for solving different kinds of equations. Suggest that he keep the guides in a binder or computer folder.

7. Build in breaks

Avoid homework burnout by having your middle schooler take regular breaks. For example, she might spend 45 minutes reading her novel for English class and then stop for a 10-minute break before studying for her science quiz. She'll get a chance to step away from her assignments while she walks around the block, strums her guitar, or eats a healthy snack. And clearing her head can help her feel refreshed when she sits back down to work.



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8. Plan ahead for projects

Teach your child to tackle a large project by breaking it down into individual steps. For a science fair, tasks might include coming up with an experiment, writing a hypothesis,

conducting the experiment, tabulating results, and making a display board. He can spread the steps out over several weeks in his planner or on a calendar. The project will get done on time—and it won't seem as overwhelming.

9. Be creative

Your child can add some fun to homework time by finding creative ways to complete assignments. For instance, instead of using flash cards, she might replace the question cards in a game of Trivial Pursuit with questions from her history textbook. Then, she can play the game with you to study for her test. Or if she's allowed to approach a book report any way she wants, she could make a scrapbook based on the characters.



Homework is not complete until it's handed in! Encourage your youngster to develop a routine for getting assignments to school and turning them in on the day they're due. While he does homework, he might keep everything in his backpack except the assignment he's working on. When he finishes, and before taking out the next one, he should put the finished work in his bag. If it's big (a poster or a model that he built), he might put it right by the front door. Or he could tape a sign to the inside of the front door saying, "Take Spanish project!"

10. Turn it in

Tip: Be supportive of your child's efforts. Let him know that you expect him to do his homework and that you're proud of him for working hard and finishing.

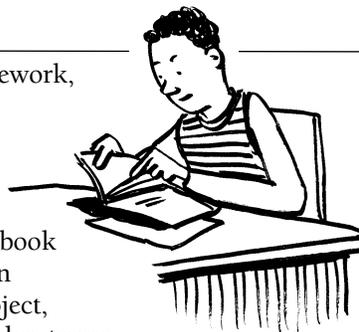
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"Help! I'm stuck!"

When your child asks you for help with homework, what should you do? Instead of finding the answer for him, suggest these ideas that may help him get "unstuck."

- **Look it up.** If he needs help in math, he can work sample problems or flip to the back of the book to see if there are extra practice problems with an answer key. When he's doing a social studies project, he might look through old worksheets to remember terms or facts.

- **Skip ahead.** Have him try the next problem or question. Sometimes, moving forward is enough to help him to remember



forgotten instructions or to find an answer that he overlooked. Then, he can go back and finish the item he skipped.

- **Get outside help.** He could call his school homework line or a friend who is strong in the subject. Also, encourage him to keep a list of helpful websites such as discoveryeducation.com/students and bjpinchbeck.com. The school or public library website might have homework resources, too.

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Note: If your middle grader regularly struggles with assignments, contact his teacher for advice.

Middle Years