

Parents Make the Difference!



Use blogs & texting to build your child's writing skills

The school year is already almost half over. Your middle schooler may prefer communicating via texts and short social-media bursts. But don't let him abandon the art of writing. Writing is too vital a skill to be tossed aside in favor of short 140-character posts!

To keep your middle schooler's writing skills sharp, despite the lure of texting acronyms and choppy online communication:

- Help him start a blog. Don't run from technology. Embrace it. Help your child start a family blog. Remind him to update it frequently and invite out-of-state relatives and longtime friends to follow it. (Tell him to make his blog invitation-only if he wants to keep it private.)
If he seems unsure what to write about, prompt him every so often. "Remember what a mess we made when we were making those Valentine's Day cookies? I bet Uncle Jim would love to hear about it."
- Demand proper grammar. If your child uses maddening "e-shorthand" whenever he texts or emails you, insist he stop. Say, "I'm finished trying to decipher your scattered words and weird abbreviations. The next time you need a ride to the mall or want me to pick something up on the way home from work, text me an actual sentence. Yes, with punctuation, correct spelling and everything."

You can support your middle schooler in math

In middle school, math lessons become more complex and abstract. So unless you are in a math or science field yourself, you may feel you are no longer able to help your child.

Not true. There are still many things you can do. You can:

- Be positive about math. If you look at your child's work and say "Ugh, I never had a clue about this stuff," your attitude will rub off on her. Instead, try, "This is challenging. But I know you can handle it."
- Start at the beginning. Offer to read the directions with your child. Talk about what the problem is asking for. Then, discuss where your child can find more information.
- Continue to use math at home. Everyday math reinforces the fact that math is an important and useful subject. Cook and measure with your child; shop with your child; ask your child to compare prices and suggest a better deal.

Find ways to motivate your underachiever

It's frustrating for you as a parent, and for others who care about your child, when you know he has the ability to succeed, but seems not to want to. This is the trap of underachievement. Here are some ways out of it:

- Show your child you care about him as a person, not just a student. If a rousing lecture about getting better grades was the trick to motivation, there would be no such thing as an underachiever. Instead, focus on something your child does want to do--talk to him about his friends, go with him to see a favorite movie, even play a video game. This helps your child feel valued--a step toward getting him motivated.
- Recognize improvements. It might not thrill you if your child brings home a low C. But if the last grade was a D, that's real progress. Say something simple like, "You brought your grade up. I want you to know I believe in you."
- Harness the power of friends. If your child doesn't want your help, consider a friend. Tell your child, "Maybe the homework would go better if Michael were here doing his, too. I can make a pizza if you want to have him over on Friday."