

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Memorial Middle School  
South Portland, ME 04106

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## SOLVING SCHOOL PROBLEMS

### Fear can cause attendance issues

It's normal for kids to grumble about going to school. But "school refusal"—actively avoiding class—is not. School refusal is caused by fear, and it often crops up after a child has been away from school for a while (such as after a vacation or illness). Signs include:

- **A literal refusal** to go to school in the morning.
- **Frequent complaints** of minor aches and pains.
- **Illnesses that crop up** in the morning, get better during the day (while the child is home), and then reappear the next morning.
- **Crying, yelling** or other indicators of extreme anxiety.

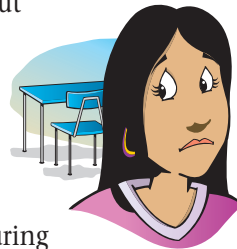
It's vital to remember that school refusal is different from truancy. To tell whether your preteen's spotty attendance stems from real anxiety (school refusal) rather than truancy (a desire to "play hooky"), ask yourself:

- **Is she genuinely nervous** about going to school?
- **Does she tell you** when she misses school? (She doesn't try to hide it.)
- **Is she typically** well-behaved?

If you answered *yes*, your preteen is likely experiencing school refusal.

Whether it stems from a concrete fear (such as being bullied) or general anxiety, you must address the problem. Seek help from your preteen's doctor, teachers or guidance counselor. With effort and commitment, school refusal can be overcome.

Source: Wanda Fremont, M.D., "School Refusal in Children and Adolescents," Pediatrics for Parents, [www.pedsforparents.com/articles/2724.shtml](http://www.pedsforparents.com/articles/2724.shtml).



## REINFORCING LEARNING

### Language skills help in multiple ways

Good reading, speaking and writing skills help children in all school subjects. Here are some suggestions for sharpening them:

- **Encourage your child** to read for pleasure. Don't worry about *what* he decides to read—all that matters is that he's reading.
- **Have fun with words.** For example, pick a prefix, such as "anti." Then challenge your child to list words that use it. How many can he think of? (*antifreeze, antidote*)
- **Do your best** to speak properly. Refresh your memory about grammar rules. You'll provide your child with an excellent role model.
- **Link movies to reading.** Watch the movie version of a book your child has read at school. Talk about whether the movie does a good job portraying the story.

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan Publishing, 1-800-527-4836, [www.kaplanpublishing.com](http://www.kaplanpublishing.com)).

## STUDY SKILLS

### Make concentrating easy

You can't turn your home into the quiet room of a public library. But you can:

- **Keep light** and room temperature at comfortable levels. Keep music off or low.
- **Turn off the TV.** Limit phone calls and other distractions, except during scheduled study breaks.
- **Have a policy** of no visitors during study time.

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Promote good citizenship

Children's ideas can have a positive impact on schools and communities. And when children are heard, they feel empowered. They want to do more writing. Letters are a great way for your child to share thoughts. Consider letting him write to:

- **A newspaper editor.**
- **The school principal.**
- **Local and state representatives.**



## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Bring math fun home

Your preteen looks to you for math help. What can you do? Here are some everyday ways to bolster her math skills:

- **Play board games** that require mathematical thinking.
- **Head into the kitchen.** Recipes are *filled* with numbers.
- **Flip to the sports page** in the morning paper. How many points is her favorite player averaging per game?



Source: Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., "Helping Your Child with Math at Home," [www.tnpc.com/parentalk/preteens/pretee17.html](http://www.tnpc.com/parentalk/preteens/pretee17.html).

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents advise preteens?

**Q: My son was excited when he made the soccer team. Now he says it's not fun. Should I let him quit, or does he need to stick it out?**

**A:** This is a tough decision. You want your child to learn perseverance, but you don't want to force him to do something he truly dislikes. To find a solution:

- **Talk with your child.** Ask him why it's "no fun." Is it just very different from what he imagined it would be? Are the practices longer than he thought they would be? Or is there a more serious issue?
- **Brainstorm solutions.** If soccer is merely different than he imagined, brainstorm some positive sides of the situation. He may want to stick with it after all. If the practices are longer than he thought they would be, help him rearrange his after-school schedule to make time for both homework and soccer practice.
- **Try a two-week "on hold" period.** During this time, your child should stay with the team as he considers what you've discussed. Did your brainstorming session help him see things in a new light? Great!
- **Know when to say when.** If after the two weeks, assuming he gave it his best effort, your child still wants to leave the team, let him. After all, middle school is a time for discovery. If soccer isn't for him, he should learn from the experience and move on.



## PARENT QUIZ

### Is your child safe after school?

The hours immediately after school (3 to 5 p.m.) are when children are most likely to get into trouble. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if your child's after-school hours are safe and productive:

- \_\_\_ **1. Does your child have** an adult who checks on her after school?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you require** your child to tell you if she is going to be anywhere but where you expect her to be after school?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you make sure** your child has several ways to reach you (such as phone and email), even if another adult checks in on her?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you encourage** your child to participate in extracurricular activities, such as band or sports?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you have** an after-school schedule and rules for your child?

**How did you do?** Each *yes* answer means you are making sure your child's after-school time is well spent. For each *no* answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.

“Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.”  
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

### Keep emotions in check

Shouting at your child shifts the focus from her behavior to yours. Instead of feeling sorry about what she did, she feels sorry for herself—and angry with you. To keep the focus on your child's behavior:

- **Describe.** Say, “That kind of language is disrespectful.”
- **Decide.** Say, “I’ll consider it when you can speak in a nicer tone.”
- **Close** the subject.

Source: Nancy Samalin, *Loving Without Spoiling*, ISBN: 0-8092-9551-2 (Contemporary Books, 1-800-262-4729, [www.books.mcgraw-hill.com](http://www.books.mcgraw-hill.com)).

## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Follow a three-point plan

Offer your child these guidelines as he considers choices:

- 1. Think.** Before doing anything, ask, “What will happen if ... ?”
- 2. Get the facts.** What does each choice involve? Is it realistic?
- 3. Choose.** Many times the *right* choice and the *easiest* choice are not the same.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, ISBN: 15-7542-063-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## TESTING TIPS

### Acronyms help on tests

Suggest that your teen use *acronyms* to remember facts. Acronyms are words made up from the first letters of other words. For example, to remember the Great Lakes, she can use the acronym HOMES. HOMES will help her remember that H=Huron, O=Ontario, M=Michigan, E=Erie and S=Superior. She can also invent words. To recall the three branches of government, for instance, she can use JEL (J=Judicial, E=Executive and L=Legislative).



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