

Free Report: 8 Tips For A Successful School Year

We've all been there - the summer is winding down, and expectations for a great school year are running high. Some parents are hoping for big changes (in a good way) from last year's school experience. Some kids are nervous about entering a new school, or making a good first impression. Believe it or not, teachers like me are also full of anticipation for a great start to the school year. After 25 years of teaching middle school (and parenting two kids of my own), I've learned a few tips for a successful school year. I hope they help you have a wonderful experience!

Step 1: Attend Back To School Night, Parent Nights and Open House.

Everyone has busy schedules, but this is an important show of support to your child, their teacher and school community. These nights often are times to sign up for email lists, learn about the course, and at a minimum get a 'visual' of where your child spends their day, and who their teachers are.

Step 2: Expect homework every night.

Follow the school's homework policy or create one of your own. If your teen says they 'don't have any homework', ask to see their planner or sit down with them to check the school or teacher website. If they truly have nothing assigned, require them to read a book, graphic novel, or magazine of their choice for 20-30 minutes.

Step 3: Set aside a regular time and quiet place to study.

In middle school it is important to create and/or maintain good study habits. Not only will it help improve grades, but will assist students as they enter more rigorous high school courses that count towards college entrance. Bedrooms, kitchen tables, and family rooms all can be acceptable study areas as long as they are equipped with a writing surface, are relatively free of distractions, and have a place for teens to store their school supplies and books when not in use. Many teens are able to listen to music while studying-TV and computers are generally more distracting. Also, turn phones on silent to discourage the temptation to read texts while concentrating.

Step 4: Check your child's planner/backpack/binder regularly.

Not every teen is a born organizer. They need help finding a system that works for them. Teach them how to use a calendar to write down homework, preferably something that will clip into a 3 ring binder. Try using one binder for all classes-it will cut down on the misplaced papers and forgotten assignments in lockers. Once a week, dump out backpacks and book bags. Hole punch loose papers and put in their binder behind dividers for each subject.

Step 5: Make studying fun.

Some teens have shorter attention spans than others. Try setting a timer for 15-20 minutes of solid concentration. Take a 5 minute break, then resume studying. Make sure they have a full tummy-hunger can be very distracting. Try Skype or FaceTime-teens are social by nature and may surprise you with

their ability to work with a partner. Studying with a friend at home or in a cafe can also be a nice change of pace.

Step 6: Provide encouragement, clear expectations and logical consequences.

Middle school is a time for kids to learn what works and doesn't work for them. Rewards and consequences are an effective tool to help teens stay on track. Try to use a one week system-many kids today are used to instant gratification and waiting for a month or two is too long. Figure out what they really like, value or want and use that as your motivator!

Step 7: Be proactive with teachers.

Middle school teachers often have 100+ students. While they may want to contact you, often times they aren't able to let you know about problems and successes as soon as you'd like them to. Make sure to get on email distribution lists. Send teachers an email every week or two asking specific questions about your student. Think of yourself, your child and their teachers as a team that is working together to provide the best educational experience possible.

Step 8: Expect success and understand struggles.

Teens are bound to encounter subjects that challenge them in middle school. Earning straight A's is not in every subject. By setting high expectations yet understanding their struggles teens will learn that you are listening and care about them. When teens are scared to talk to their parents about grades it

becomes unproductive and unsafe. Encourage them to do their best everyday, and understand when they make mistakes. They're still learning!

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~Brought to you by Jennifer Wolfe (aka mamawolfe), a mom to two teens, as well as a middle school teacher in California. She has degrees in elementary and secondary education and has taught for 25 years.

jenniferwolfe.net