

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

**Paxon Hollow Middle School**  
**Have you read a good book lately?**

April 2008

## BUILDING MATH SKILLS

### Review key math facts together

Middle schoolers work with numbers in many forms. Some of these include fractions, decimals and percents. It helps for parents and kids to understand various ways to express numbers. Here are some things to review:

- **The numerator is the top number in a fraction.**  
For example, in  $1/2$ , the numerator is 1.
- **The denominator is the bottom number in a fraction.** In  $1/2$ , the denominator is 2.
- **A fraction in which the top number is smaller,** such as  $3/4$ , is called a *proper fraction*. If the top number is larger, such as  $4/3$ , this is an *improper fraction*. If the fraction is to the right of a whole number, such as  $2\frac{1}{4}$ , this is a *mixed fraction*.
- **A decimal is a way to show the value of a fraction.** A decimal looks more like a traditional number, but it always includes a dot, called a *decimal point*. For example, the decimal for  $1/2$  is .50.
- **A percent is a way to show the value of a fraction, too.** It expresses the fraction in parts per hundred. For example,  $1/2$  is 50 percent. This makes up 50 parts, or half, out of 100 parts.



Source: Virginia Thompson and Karen Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math, The Middle School Years: Algebraic Reasoning and Number Sense*, ISBN: 0-912511-29-X (Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California at Berkeley, 1-800-897-5036, <http://equals.lhs.berkeley.edu>).

## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS

### Children benefit from problem-solving

When a child is struggling with an assignment, it's tempting for parents to tell the child how to do it. After all, they want their child to do well! But remember the value of helping your child find solutions on her own. To build her confidence and problem-solving skills, you can:

- **Ask open-ended questions** that don't have a *yes* or *no* answer. "What were the hardest math problems you did today?" When you ask such questions, you open the door for conversation. That works better than, "Did you do better in math today?"
- **Be a sounding board.** If your child says, "I hate English class!" say, "It sounds like you're really frustrated with English." If she says, "I just don't understand those gerunds!" say, "Can you show me some examples in your textbook?"

Source: Natalie Rathvon, *The Unmotivated Child*, ISBN: 0-684-80306-2 (Fireside, a division of Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, [www.simonsays.com](http://www.simonsays.com)).

## DISCIPLINE

### Approach discipline easily

When your child was little, her headstrong streak was cute. Now it's a challenge. The key is to use this common-sense approach to discipline:

- **Be clear.** Let her know what's expected.
- **Focus** on the positive. Remind her of what she *can* do.
- **Criticize** the *behavior*, not your child.
- **Focus** on the big picture. Set limits now. Your efforts will pay off.

## DEALING WITH TOUGH ISSUES

### Teach your child ways to cope with world events

From wars to hurricanes, you can help your child keep bad news in perspective. Here's how:

- **Talk about it.** Ask how he feels.
- **Be there.** Sit next to him as you watch the news.
- **Limit exposure.** Television tends to play tragic events over and over.



Source: "Talking About Disasters to Children of Different Ages," [Crescentlife.com](http://Crescentlife.com), [www.crescentlife.com/heal%20the%20world/talking\\_to\\_children\\_of\\_different\\_ages.htm](http://www.crescentlife.com/heal%20the%20world/talking_to_children_of_different_ages.htm).

## TESTING TIPS

### Eliminate testing stress

It's likely that the testing crunch is on and it's important to let your child know you expect:

- **Good effort.** This means participating in class and maintaining good study habits.
- **Healthy habits.** Enough sleep and a decent breakfast will help your child concentrate.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### How can parents help children with their writing assignments?

**Q: My child can't stand writing assignments. She always says, "I can't think of anything to write!" How can I help without giving my ideas?**

**A:** Writing looms large for many students, in part because all they see is the blank page or computer screen in front of them. They stare at it, wondering how in the world they are going to fill it.

Encourage your child to find a new starting point. She can ask herself, "What question or questions am I trying to answer?" To show that this really works, point out today's news. If the reporters have done their jobs, their stories will answer these questions: *Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?*

Your child might answer the same six questions, especially if she's writing a report. If she's doing creative writing, however, she might pose other thought-provoking questions, such as:

- **What would happen if ... ?**
- **I wonder why ... .**
- **Okay, but what happened the next day?**
- **What's the other side of the story?**
- **What if two people's situations were reversed?**



Come up with "starter questions" that work for her. This should get her creative juices flowing!

Source: Vicki Poretta and Marian Edelman Borden, *Mom's Guide to Raising a Good Student*, ISBN: 0-02-861942-0 (Alpha Books, a division of the Penguin Group, 1-800-788-6262, www.penguin.com).

## PARENT QUIZ

### Are you teaching time management?

Time management is one of the keys to school success—and is especially important in this busy spring season. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're helping your child manage his time wisely:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| ___ <b>1. Do you make</b> scheduling tools, such as a calendar, available to your child?  | ___ <b>5. Do you suggest</b> strategies, such as making a priority list, when he has a lot to do?  |
| ___ <b>2. Do you ask</b> your child to make sure there is enough time for current commitments before adding more?                   | <b>How did you do?</b> <i>Each yes answer means you are helping your child use time wisely. For each no answer, consider trying that idea from the quiz.</i> |
| ___ <b>3. Do you give</b> ideas, such as using a timer and checking things off a list, to help your child get things back on track? |  |
| ___ <b>4. Do you encourage</b> your child to plan for long-term projects?   |  |

*"Give a little love to a child, and you get a great deal back."*  
—John Ruskin

## WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

### Build a relationship with your child's school today

To forge a strong relationship with your child's school:

- **Get to know everyone**—teachers, principal, librarian, front-office assistant.
- **Keep your child on track.** If he's falling behind, talk to the teacher. Find out about tutoring sessions or after-school programs.
- **Know the rules.** Stay informed about the school's policies and procedures.
- **Network.** Get involved with other parents.

Source: "How Parents Can Work With Schools and Communities to Help Their Children Meet High Standards," American Federation of Teachers, www.aft.org/parents/downloads/HYCS2.pdf.

## BUILDING CHARACTER

### Teach your child empathy

Empathy allows us to know what other people are feeling and how to respond to them. To teach your child empathy, encourage her to:

- **Consider** the feelings of others.
- **Be aware** of body language.
- **Respond** appropriately.

Source: Cathi Cohen, *Raise Your Child's Social IQ*, ISBN: 0-9660366-8-9 (Advantage Books, 1-888-238-8588, www.addvance.com).

## MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

### More motivation can mean fewer struggles

To keep your student motivated until the final bell rings:

- **Make connections.** Does he love video games? Solid math skills could be his ticket into that field.
- **Praise him.** When he does well, let him know how proud you are.
- **Celebrate success.** Make an occasion out of his good work.



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