



be a science quiz today, how did it go?” Research shows that families who eat dinner together several nights a week (with the TV off) and discuss homework every day have kids that do better in school.

Next, keep working on your children’s organizational skills, and insist they take responsibility for their actions. ***It turns out that children who know that they can be responsible for their own success will end up being more optimistic—and more successful.*** So help them practice responsibility for chores and assignments and so on.

If at all possible, don’t leave them alone after school. Children who spend more than three hours a day alone have lower self-esteem, are more depressed, and do less well in school, no matter what their parents earn. “Should Middle Grade Students Be Left Alone After School?” Steven Mertens, Nancy Flowers and Peter Mulhall. *Middle School Journal*, May, 2003.

## Setting goals for 7<sup>th</sup> grade success

Another thing your children will be doing in school this year—with your help and the teacher’s help—is setting some goals that will help them succeed in the 7th grade. The goals need to be personal, simple, and doable. For example:

- I will finish all my homework every night, pack it in my book bag before I go to bed, and hand it in on time.
- When I have free time, I will read out loud to my little sister. She’ll like that, and it will help me be a better reader.
- This year I will find an activity that I would like to do [like music or the school newspaper], join that group, and stick with it.
- I will ride my bike or go running or do ***something*** with all my extra energy, at least half an hour every day.

## Finding out how your children learn best

In school, students will complete an exercise that helps them know ***how*** they learn things. So another important thing parents can do is ask their children about learning styles. Do they learn best by reading about things? By talking? By building things? By moving their bodies and acting things out? Do they learn best by themselves, or in groups? Does your child think in numbers, in words, in pictures?

Once you know how your children learn, ***use*** that knowledge. For example, if you see them struggling with an assignment, suggest that they try switching to some other approach that uses a different style. Remind them what their learning strengths are, and help them find ways to use those strengths in school and in their hobbies and other interests.

## Exploring skills and interests

Middle schoolers can accept more responsibility at school and like to work on projects with their peers. They also like to make a difference in the world and are great at tutoring younger kids, raising funds for good causes, etc. These projects help them find out who they are and what they’re really good at.

As part of exploring who they are, 7<sup>th</sup> graders need to test themselves against others. Some do this in sports, but children who aren’t athletic need to join other groups. Find out what is available at your school, church, Boys/Girls Clubs, or local Y’s. Kids who don’t have a place to be themselves in activities with other kids can be tempted to take dangerous risks. The teen years are risk-taking years—you have to make sure the risks are ***good*** risks.

Children at this age also need rituals and reward ceremonies. They need “their” adults to recognize them for their achievements they want to know that they are growing up, getting ready to join the adult world. One good way to help them explore their interests is to get them going by talking about themselves and what matters most to them. For starters, you could ask them to finish these statements:

- If I could spend the rest of my life doing my favorite thing, it would be.....
- I always feel good when I am .....
- I just seem to have a natural ability to.....

Kids this age ***love*** to talk about themselves. It’s normal. It’s healthy. It helps them learn. So—ask!

### ***Ask your child—***

Tell me the story of your day at school. What was the worst thing that happened? The best thing? Who’s your favorite teacher? What do you think makes a teacher good? How would you teach if you were the one in charge of the class?