

Home Supports and Routines for Middle School Success

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As a lifelong educator, I have realized that implementing some consistent structures and routines at home with my own children have significantly contributed to their success as students. In talking with many of the parents of the students at my schools, many of them have no structures in place at home to help their children become successful in school.

As a parent, I was very intentional in how I approached my children's education. I put structures in place at home and invested in my children's education with my time and sometimes money. In implementing these structures, I feel my children developed a strong work ethic and a love for learning.

This is not to say that the structures and routines I implemented will work for everyone, but I do believe having some type of consistent structure and routine is imperative in developing a successful middle school student.

In this article, I will map out the structures and routines that I implemented for my children. The information in this article is intended to be used by parents as a guide for supporting your children's academic success at home.

When I talk to parents on this subject, the biggest mistake I see them make is allowing the children to believe that having electronic devices (smartphones, video games, computers, TV, etc.) are a right and not a luxury. It is my belief that electronic devices can be significant distractions to teenagers unless parents intervene with guidelines, so students find the proper role of technology in their lives.

The first thing that was established in my household was that there was no TV or video games on school days. My sons did not have cell phones in middle school, so that was never a factor. If they did have cell phones however, I can imagine I would have collected them and turned them off when we got home. The payoff was that if everyone did what they were supposed to do during the week with schoolwork, they could watch as much TV and play as many video games as they wanted to on the weekends.

I did want them to feel as though they were earning something for their hard work. You would be surprised at how quickly the children adjust to not having access to electronic devices.

Here are some of the essential elements in the structures and routines I created for my children at home. Regardless of the structures and routines you choose, consistency is the key.

1. **Agenda Book** - The agenda book is a vital part of the structure I implemented. This allowed my children to take ownership of what they were responsible for doing at home with respect to homework, projects, and upcoming quizzes and tests. Each day they wrote their homework assignments and any other assignments in their agenda books so that when they got home after school, they could remember what they needed to complete for the next day and in the days to come. If there was no homework in a specific class, they would write "No Homework" and have the teacher initial it. I checked their agenda books daily to make sure they were capturing the necessary information each day. Using the agenda book effectively took some time. To implement this strategy, parents will have to continuously work with the child to help them become proficient at maintaining it.
2. **Completing Homework** - One of the things I have come to learn as an educator over the years is that many students lose traction in school because they do not complete their homework. While my children worked on their homework, I would monitor their progress and help them with understanding the content. I would not give them answers; I would prompt them with questions to help move toward finding the correct answer. It is okay for your child to struggle. It helps them develop grit and teaches them to think and persevere. If they get stuck on an item that I am unsure of or unable to help them

with, I have them write a question to ask their teacher when they go back to school. When they completed an assignment, I would have them teach the content to me to demonstrate their understanding and command of the content.

3. **Study Skills** - When my children came home with very little homework or no homework, we would work on study skills. I taught them how to create and use flash cards. I would have them rewrite their notes or develop notes on the content they were working on in school. Once they completed these assignments, I would quiz them on the content or have them teach me the content. This way I could ask them questions to make sure they truly understood the concepts.
4. **Leisure Reading** - Fortunately, my children developed a love for reading at an early age. Nevertheless, I required them to read for at least 30 minutes every day. Because they did not watch TV or play video games during the week, this became their entertainment. If you are having an issue getting your child to read, set a timer and have them read into a recording device. This was the method my mother used with me when I was in middle school and it was very effective. Your child can hear themselves read and it helps them with their expression and fluency.
5. **Family Time** - We also made time to do things together as a family during the week, such as outdoor activities or playing board games or card games. It's always good to have a balance between work and play.
6. **Bedtime** - It is very important that children get a enough sleep. I have found that a lack of sleep with students manifests itself in disruptive behaviors in school, lack of attentiveness and sleeping during school hours. It is vital that middle school age children get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep every night.

These are the structures and routines that worked for my children. You will have to develop structures and routines that work for your family. The most important takeaways are that consistent structures and routines are key in supporting your child's academic success.