

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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***still make the difference!***



## Arm your middle schooler with effective study habits

**S**tudents need strong study skills to be successful in middle school—and parents play a significant role in helping their children develop them. The study skills middle schoolers learn now will help them succeed today, in high school and beyond.

To lay the groundwork for your child's academic success:

- **Encourage her to break down** large projects. Don't let your middle schooler get rattled by long-term assignments. Show her how to divide big projects into smaller, more manageable parts.
- **Have your child estimate** how long a homework assignment or project will take and plan her study time accordingly. Then, have her use a timer to see if her estimates are accurate. This will help her make

adjustments for future assignments, if necessary.

- **Increase her self-awareness.** Ask your child to figure out when she's at her best. Then encourage her to do most of her homework and studying during those times. If she needs to let off some steam after school, encourage her to go for a run or a brisk walk before sitting down to study.
- **Turn off the television.** Don't buy your child's argument that TV is "just background noise." Make sure homework time is free from all distractions.
- **Promote organization.** Help her create a system to keep track of important assignments. It might be file folders, a color-coded binder or a desk calendar.

## Sleep improves students' school performance



Experts agree: Most middle schoolers aren't getting the sleep they need in order to do their best in school. One

study found that 85% of adolescents get fewer than eight and a half hours of sleep each night. Students this age should be getting nine to 10 hours.

When kids don't get enough sleep, their academic performance suffers. They have difficulty remembering material and concentrating in school.

And it's not just the amount of sleep that matters. Researchers say that consistency and quality of sleep matter, too.

To make sure your child gets the sleep he needs:

- **Set a reasonable bedtime** that results in at least nine hours of sleep each night. Be consistent throughout the week.
- **Establish a bedtime routine** that helps him relax and fall asleep. He could read or take a hot bath.
- **Set a screen time curfew.** Studies show that watching TV or using electronics 90 minutes before bedtime delays sleep.

**Source:** J.F. Dewald and others, "The influence of sleep quality, sleep duration and sleepiness on school performance in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review," *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, Elsevier.

# Simple strategies can help you spend more time with your child



Now that your child is getting older and her schedule is getting busier, it can be tough to find time to just hang out with

her. But time together strengthens your bond and opens the doors of communication, so don't give up on it!

Instead, take advantage of the time you spend:

- **In the car.** If you're like many parents, you spend plenty of time behind the wheel. So take your child with you when you run errands. Sitting side by side (rather than face to face) may make it easier for her to open up and talk—about school, sports, friends or just life in general.

- **In the kitchen.** Cooking is another wonderful opportunity for spending time together. Ask your child to chop lettuce while you boil pasta. Have her describe her dream meal while you work.
- **At the library.** Browse whichever shelves she chooses. By taking an interest in the things she likes, you demonstrate that you value her.

**"Children are our second chance to have a great parent-child relationship."**

—Laura Schlessinger

# Don't let electronic devices derail your middle schooler's studies!



Sometimes it seems that middle schoolers are permanently attached to their phones, tablets and other devices. They text

from the minute they wake up until they go to bed. They share funny videos and pictures with their friends. They scroll through social media.

So it's no surprise that students often try to use their phones while they're working in class or doing homework. But several research studies show that the more time students say that they text, use social media or read online while they do schoolwork, the lower their grades are.

Students often think their devices can help with their work. After all, they can watch a video of the Pyramids while studying history. They can check their answer to a math problem.

There's just one problem: Kids seldom stay focused on the work they

are doing. Pretty soon, they click from the history video to the latest internet joke. From then on, history is not their focus.

What can you do to help your child stay focused on his work and not on his smartphone? Here are some tips:

- **Talk about multitasking**—and how research shows it doesn't work. Students need to focus while studying or they won't learn.
- **Follow the rules** regarding devices in class. Many teachers have a "parking lot" where students must leave their phones or tablets.
- **Limit the use of devices** during homework time. Studies show that the more time students spend multitasking, the longer their studies take.
- **Be a role model yourself.** Don't check your phone during family dinner or (especially) in the car.

**Source:** K. Kowalski, "When Smartphones Go to School," Science News for Students, [nswc.com/mid\\_smartphone](http://nswc.com/mid_smartphone).

# Do you encourage your child to spend time reading?



Reading for pleasure helps students build valuable comprehension and vocabulary skills. But many middle schoolers

say they just don't have time to read.

Are you encouraging your child to make time for reading? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you keep** all types of reading material around the house? Include magazines, newspapers, books, manuals, catalogs—anything with words!
2. **Do you schedule** regular trips to the library so your child has plenty of opportunities to check out books?
3. **Do you link** reading to your child's interests by suggesting books on topics that are important to her?
4. **Do you set** a good example by reading in front of your child and talking about the things you read?
5. **Do you have** a regular time for family reading? You might set aside one evening a week.

## How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are strongly encouraging your middle schooler to read. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Teach your child to follow four steps to learn from mistakes



While it may be comforting for students who have made a mistake to hear, “Well, you’ll learn from this,” it’s not always the case that they learn from it. Sometimes, students just keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

In order to really learn from mistakes, students need to think about them. Here are four steps your child can take to do just that:

- 1. Look at what was right.** You could say, “Your test wasn’t perfect. But let’s see where you succeeded.” Pointing out that all is not lost will motivate your child to take the next step.
- 2. Figure out what went wrong.** It’s hard to fix a problem if you don’t know what caused it. Sometimes, the solution is easy: The directions said to add and she subtracted. But other times, it requires more

analysis. Did your child misunderstand the question? Not leave enough time to check her work?

- 3. Take steps to correct the problem.** Perhaps your child will discover that she hasn’t learned content she needed to know. In that case, she may need to reread some of the textbook or ask the teacher for more help. Help her make a plan for what she will do differently the next time.
- 4. Apply this knowledge** to a new situation. Have your child try a problem that is similar to the one she missed on the test. Encourage her to stop at the place where she made the error and try to make a different choice. When she does, she’ll know that she really has learned from her mistake.

**Source:** H.S. Schroder and others, “Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset,” *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.

## Reinforce learning outside the classroom with these activities



Your middle schooler’s education doesn’t just happen at school. It happens everywhere! And you don’t need a degree to reinforce his learning. You just need to be creative.

To support your child’s learning:

- **Have him teach you** a thing or two. Find out what he is studying at school, and ask him to explain it to you. When he retells something he’s learning, it will reinforce it in his own mind.
- **Put his knowledge to use.** If he just finished tackling fractions in math, have him join you in the kitchen. Show him the real-life value of what he’s learned. “This recipe calls for half a cup of milk, but we only have a 1/3-cup measurer. How can we figure out the right amount?”
- **Expose him to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from a trip to a garden center to a visit to a local museum—has an impact on his learning. On your next outing, ask him how what he sees relates to what he is learning in school.
- **Host a family movie night.** Choose a thought-provoking film that your middle schooler has never seen. Afterward, ask him questions about the movie. Encourage him to think critically before he answers.

**Q:** Now that my child is in middle school, I’m afraid I won’t be in the loop about things like homework and upcoming tests. How can I stay informed about what he’s doing in school without seeming nosy?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Remember, it’s your job—and your right—to know how your son is doing in school, so you’re not being nosy. You’re being a good parent!

To stay informed:

- **Talk to your child.** Have him tell you about each of his classes. The more you know about his courses, the more comfortable you’ll feel asking about them. If your child doesn’t want to talk about school every day, set aside 10 to 15 minutes for a weekly chat. It will give him a chance to fill you in on how he’s doing. And if there’s a problem brewing, he will have an opportunity to tell you about it.
- **Read everything** that comes home. Ask your middle schooler to go through his backpack and give you any handouts from the school. Read all school emails and visit the school website. These are the most effective ways to stay informed about upcoming standardized tests, school events, etc.
- **Touch base** with your child’s teachers. If you won’t get an opportunity to meet them in person, send a note to each and introduce yourself. Include your phone number and email address, and ask them for their contact information.
- **Attend** school events and workshops when you can. It’s the perfect way to connect with school staff and other parents—and to find out what’s going on at school!



# It Matters: Responsibility

## Responsibility is vital for middle school success



Now that your child is a middle schooler, he will need to take more responsibility for his learning. Just sitting

quietly and behaving in his classes won't be enough.

Middle school teachers want students to participate actively in classroom activities. Students' grades are often affected by the level of their class participation.

So, make sure your child knows it is his responsibility to:

- **Attend class** every day. He can't participate if he's not in class.
- **Arrive on time.** Arriving late disrupts his teacher and classmates.
- **Come prepared** for class with homework completed and supplies in hand.
- **Ask questions.** He should aim to ask at least one thoughtful question in each class every day.
- **Contribute to class discussions** and group work.

It is also your child's responsibility to avoid certain behaviors. Share these classroom "don'ts" with him:

- **Don't talk excessively** when not called upon.
- **Don't daydream.**
- **Don't put your head down** on the desk or sleep.
- **Don't move about the room** when it's not required for class activity.
- **Don't fidget or play** with games or gadgets.
- **Don't complete homework** for one class during another.
- **Don't make rude remarks** or inappropriate gestures.

## School attendance should be your child's top responsibility

**A**ttendance is as important to your child's school career as a foundation is to a house. Without it, there is nothing to build on.

It would be nearly impossible to list all the reasons your child must be in school. Here are just a few:

- **School attendance is the law.** Every school district requires students to attend. The only exceptions are illness, a religious holiday or a family emergency.
  - **Missing school is terrible** for classroom performance. Most students have trouble keeping up if they miss more than a few days.
  - **Friendships often get started** at school. A child who misses school may have fewer friends.
- To aim for great attendance:
- **Tell your child** that his education is important to you and the family.



Let him know you expect him to go to school every day.

- **Schedule appointments** after school whenever possible.
- **Plan family trips** on days when school is not in session.
- **Avoid taking your child** out of school to babysit younger siblings or to run errands.

## Facing consequences & solving problems builds responsibility



Your child forgot her homework, so she wants you to drive it to school. She didn't finish her paper—will you email her teacher with an excuse?

Sound familiar? Middle schoolers aren't always responsible. But some haven't ever *had to be*. Whenever those kids face a problem, their parents try to fix it.

That may solve some problems today. But it will create even bigger problems in the future.

To help your child develop the accountability she needs:

- **Let her solve problems** on her own. If she gets a grade that she feels is unfair, encourage her to talk to her teacher about it. Don't immediately contact the teacher yourself.
- **Help her think** about consequences. Encourage your child to think about the potential results of an action before taking it.
- **Let her learn** from experience. It's a good teacher. But your child can't learn the lesson if you always bail her out. So if she doesn't get her paper written on time, let her suffer the consequences.