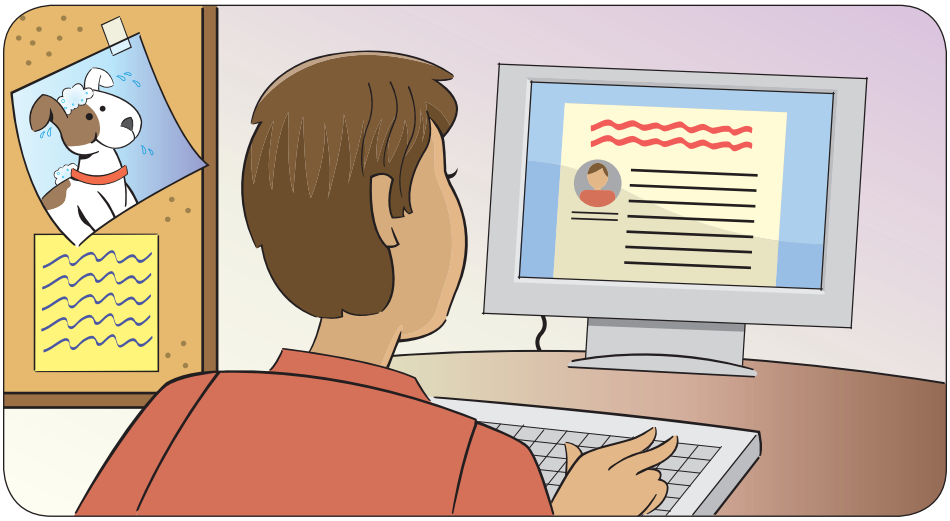
Middle School Parents®
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Educational Service Unit #8
still make the difference!



# Use blogs & texting to build your child's writing skills

Your middle schooler may prefer communicating via texts and short social-media bursts. But don't let him abandon the art of writing. Writing is too vital a skill to be tossed aside in favor of short 140-character posts!

To keep your middle schooler's writing skills sharp, despite the allure of texting acronyms and choppy online communication:

- **Help him start a blog.** Don't run from technology—embrace it! Help your child start a family blog. He can create one at no cost on sites such as *wordpress.com*. Invite relatives and longtime friends to follow it and remind your child to update it frequently. If he seems unsure of what to write about, offer prompts every so often. "Remember what a mess we made when we were giving the dog a bath? I bet Uncle Jim would love to hear about it."

  Be sure to review the privacy settings of the site your child uses so you can control who is able to view his posts.
- **Demand proper grammar.** If your child uses maddening "e-shorthand" whenever he texts or emails you, insist he stop. Let him know that you are finished trying to decipher his scattered words and weird abbreviations. The next time he needs a ride to the mall or wants you to pick something up on the way home from work, insist that he text you an actual sentence—with correct spelling, punctuation and all!

## Let your child take over some school tasks



Your middle schooler won't morph into a responsible young adult overnight. But she may not morph into one at all if you continue doing everything for her!

Now that she's in middle school, your child is capable of taking responsibility for:

- **Packing her lunch.** Making a sandwich isn't rocket science. So give her a lesson in how to load up her lunch box. Lay down some basic rules about what's OK—or not OK—to pack, and insist she prepare her lunch the night before school.
- **Waking up on time.** Show your child how to set an alarm clock. In the morning, let the alarm wake her up. (But act as her "backup alarm" until she gets the hang of it.) If she's too quick to hit "snooze" and doze off again, place the clock across the room from her bed so she'll have to get up to turn it off.
- **Getting forms signed.** Don't go through her backpack searching for papers that need your signature. Getting them signed is her responsibility, so let her bring them to you.

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# Too much stress can decrease your child's ability to learn



Middle school students often have a lot on their plates—and on their minds. They can easily become overwhelmed, and the results aren't always good. As anxiety goes up, grades can go down.

If your middle schooler seems stressed, help him find ways to relax. He could:

- **Enjoy time with a friend.** Suggest they do something that makes them laugh, such as watching a favorite funny movie.
- **Participate in a hobby** (other than playing games online). Hobbyists are focused on activities they enjoy, so they usually "lose themselves" in what they are doing for a while. Focusing on an enjoyable activity helps to reduce stress.
- **Breathe deeply.** Research shows this truly works. A few minutes of slow deep breathing can calm your child when he is feeling overwhelmed. Practicing it for a brief time each day can lower your child's overall stress levels.
- **Stretch.** Doing yoga is linked to lower stress levels. Tell your child to try a few minutes of slow, gentle stretches.

**Source:** M. Ellis, "How Stress Affects Academic Performance," HealthNews, Inc., niswc.com/mid-stress.

**"The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another."**

*—William James*

# Give your child opportunities to develop critical thinking skills



Students spend a lot of time learning straightforward facts, such as names, dates and locations. These facts are usually easy to understand.

But once a learner reaches middle school, she is expected to be able to learn things that require her to think more critically.

To help your child practice higher-order thinking skills:

- **Talk to her** about the books she reads for school. Ask questions like, "What did you think was the most important part of the book?" "What message do you think the author wanted to get across in the book?" "Who was the most interesting character?" "Why?"
- **Watch her favorite** television show or movie with her. Ask questions while you watch, such as, "What would you have done?" If you see a commercial, ask, "Did that make you want to buy that product?" "If you were selling the product, what would you do to make people want to buy it?"
- **Look for opportunities** around your home that require her to solve problems. Your child could put something together, such as a toy for a younger sibling. She could plan and make a simple, balanced meal for the family. Your child could even be responsible for developing a family chore chart.

# Are you teaching your child to act in a civil manner?



Middle school is a time when students are trying out new ideas and behaviors. Unfortunately, some of these can get your child into trouble at school and give others an unfavorable impression.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are encouraging polite behavior in your child:

___**1. Do you forbid** your child to use curse words and other inappropriate language?

___**2. Do you refuse** to let your child wear clothing that contains offensive language, pictures or symbols?

___**3. Do you discuss** unacceptable lyrics when you hear them in music?

___**4. Have you discussed** inappropriate behavior, such as being rude to others and name-calling?

___**5. Do you insist** on proper hygiene? This shows that your child respects herself and others.

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are raising your child to look, act and speak in a civil manner. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

Middle School Parents still make the difference!

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# Audio books and e-books add variety to students' reading time



Reading is the foundation of learning. But it doesn't have to involve heavy, dusty volumes perched on tall shelves! Times are changing, and there are now more ways than ever to expose your child to words and stories.

To encourage him to read more often, "think outside the book" and nudge your child toward:

- **Audio books.** These can be a great resource, especially if your child struggles with fluency. These recorded stories offer many of the same benefits as print books—exposure to story structure, compelling plots and new vocabulary words—but in an engaging format. Even better, they're often recorded by gifted performers or beloved authors. Like traditional titles, audio books are available at the library. Along with finding them on CD, you can often download them from home.
- **E-books.** Short for "electronic books," e-books present stories digitally. They come in several formats. Your child can read an e-book on a computer or a handheld device. While some e-books contain strictly text, others include graphics, videos and links. This can be a big help when it comes to holding a reluctant reader's attention. E-books are available at the public library and can also be purchased online just like regular books.

# Show your middle schooler how to make valuable contributions



The myth that middle schoolers are lazy is just that: a myth. The truth is that kids want to be useful and feel like their contributions matter.

So help your child find ways to contribute at home and in the community. Not only will it make her feel good about herself, it may help nurture her sense of responsibility toward people around her.

Your child could:

- **Join a service organization.** Whether national or local, service organizations can be a perfect place for middle schoolers to make a difference and connect with other students who share similar interests.
- **Be a caring neighbor.** Is your older neighbor stuck at home because of a recent snowfall? Have your child grab a shovel and get busy. The same goes for bringing in a sick neighbor's trash can from the curb. Point out ways your child can take the initiative and pitch in. Responsible actions contribute to the overall well-being of her community.
- **Support a cause.** She could collect goods for a local shelter or host a bake sale to raise funds for a charitable group. Help her do some research and make a plan.
- **Write letters of thanks.** Ask your child to write a thank-you note to a firefighter or police officer. It'll show her how nice it feels when one responsible member of society applauds another!

**Source:** E. Medhus, M.D., *Raising Everyday Heroes: Parenting Children to Be Self-Reliant,* Beyond Words Publishing.

**Q: There's clearly something bothering my seventh grader, but he refuses to open up to me. How can I get him to tell me what's going on without being pushy?**

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Preteens and teens are notoriously tight-lipped when it comes to sharing problems with their parents. But you *must* keep trying to find out what is bothering your son.

Although it's very likely the "something" that's troubling him is relatively minor, it's important to deal with it. This is especially true if the issue drags on for days or weeks.

To encourage your child to share what's happening without feeling pressured in the process:

- **Tell him you are concerned.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I want you to know I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about absolutely anything. Part of my job as a parent is to help you figure things out."
- **Be clear** about your expectations. "I respect your privacy and the fact that you want to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a little more time to mull it over by yourself, but we will get to the bottom of this after dinner tonight."
- **Call in reinforcements.** If your child still refuses to talk, go to a teacher, pediatrician, guidance counselor, coach or other trusted figure in his life. Ask this person to help you uncover what's wrong.

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# It Matters: Motivation

## Help your child get out of a mid-year rut



Your middle schooler has been in school for several months and summer still seems far away. This is the time when it is easy for him to fall into a mid-year rut.

To help your child remain motivated through the end of the school year:

- **Point out past successes.** Say things like, "Yes, this is a challenging class. But you did so well on the last test because of all the study time you put in. I know you can do that again with this test!"
- **Have a "one day at a time"** attitude. The last thing your child wants to hear is, "Before you know it, it will be June." That's an eternity to a middle school child. Instead, try, "Hey, it's Thursday. Just one more quiz and then you can look forward to the weekend."
- **Celebrate nothing.** Making an ordinary day feel special can really improve your child's mood and attitude. "Let's watch that movie you recorded." "I got the ingredients for your favorite dinner. Do a little homework, and then come and help me make it."
- **Encourage him to get involved** in a new project that helps others. Volunteering is a wonderful way for your child to get involved in his community. It will also help him get the focus off himself and onto others who have greater needs.

## Teach your child to ask three questions when setting goals

Having high expectations can be a great way to motivate your child—but only if your child believes she can actually meet them.

When setting goals, ask your child to answer these three questions for each of her classes:

1. **"What do I want to achieve** in this class next grading period?" This can be a higher grade, or another achievement, such as turning in all homework on time.
2. **"What is my plan** for achieving it?" She could make a study chart and follow it. Or organize her binder, so that homework gets home and then back to school.
3. **"How will I avoid distractions** that may conflict with my goals?" She could turn off her phone during study hours. Or decide she will not check social media while she's studying.




Have her write down her expectations and goals and post the list where you can both see it. Check it frequently to see how things are going, and make changes as needed.

## Concern, recognition and friends can motivate underachievers



It's frustrating for you as a parent, and for others who care about your child, when you know he has the ability to succeed but seems not to want to. This is the trap of underachievement. Here are some ways out of it:

- **Show your child you care** about him as a *person*, not just a student. If a rousing lecture about getting better grades were the trick to motivation, there would be no such thing as an underachiever. Make time to talk to your child about his life, go with him to see a favorite movie, play a board game together. This helps him feel valued—an important step toward getting him motivated.
- **Recognize improvements.** It might not thrill you if your child brings home a low C. But if the last grade was a D, that's progress. Say something simple like, "You brought your grade up. I want you to know I believe in you."
- **Harness the power of friends.** If your child doesn't want your help, consider a friend. Tell your child, "Maybe the homework would go better if Michael were here doing his, too. I can make a pizza if you want to have him over on Friday."