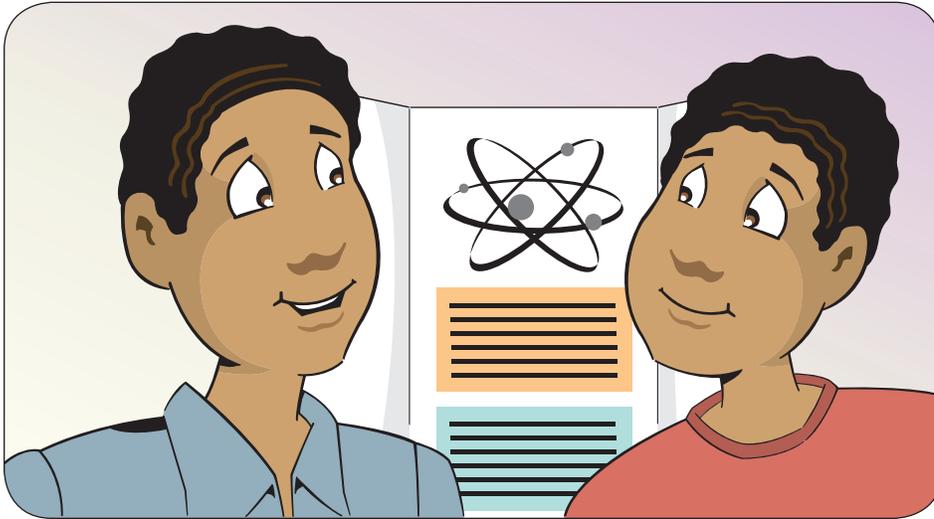


# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

February 2017  
Vol. 20, No. 6

Educational Service Unit #8

*still make the difference!*



## Give your middle schooler's critical thinking skills a boost

**A**s your child progresses through school, his teachers will expect higher-level thinking. Instead of just giving an answer, he will need to give examples to support it.

You can help your child practice this type of critical thinking if you:

- **Slow down.** Don't rush through every conversation with your child. Instead, take time to really discuss various topics—from the upcoming science fair to the weather. The more you explore things in depth, the more opportunities you'll be giving him to think.
- **Don't swoop in.** When your middle schooler is struggling with a decision, don't be quick to answer it for him. Instead, give him a chance to mull it over on his own. If he asks, "Which sport

should I try out for?" get him to think it over carefully: "Which one do I most enjoy? Is one more challenging than another?"

- **Ask him to support his decision.** When your child reaches a decision about something, have him put his thought process into words. "I'm excited that you picked basketball. Tell me why you chose that sport." By explaining how he made the decision, he'll be clarifying it in his own head.
- **Withhold judgment.** You may not agree with your child's way of thinking on every topic, but but you should still respect it.

**Source:** A.J. LeStorti, "Developing Thinking in the Gifted," The Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, [nswc.com/mid\\_thinkskills](http://nswc.com/mid_thinkskills).

## Share effective note-taking tips with your child



Taking class notes is an important skill for middle school success—and it's one your child will use even more in high school.

Share these note-taking tips with your child:

- **Don't write down every word.** Encourage your child to come up with her own system of shortening words, using symbols for key words, and highlighting phrases the teacher emphasizes.
- **Edit notes after class.** While the information is still fresh in your child's mind, she should read over her notes and expand on them where necessary. She can even try to write a short summary of the most important points covered in that day's class. If she is unsure of something she wrote down, she should ask her teacher for clarification.
- **Study notes.** Studying her notes each day will help your child gain a true understanding of the material so she is prepared for the next class or test.

**Source:** J.R. Ban, *Parents Assuring Student Success*, National Educational Service.

## Meaningful responsibilities can help your middle schooler thrive



Fulfilling responsibilities at home, in addition to homework, helps your middle schooler see himself as a capable

person. This feeling of self-worth will serve him well in school and in life.

Some kids are ready for certain tasks before others are. Take your child's development into account, then consider giving him responsibility for:

- **Scheduling.** Have your child track his appointments, social events and extracurricular activities. He can mark them on the family calendar and coordinate with you how to get to and from his activities.
- **Budgeting.** Have your child manage some of his expenses. If he wants to purchase something, encourage him to make a plan.

How much allowance will he have to save, or what odd jobs can he do to reach his goal?

- **Contributing.** Expect your child to participate in discussions about things that affect family life. As parents, you'll make the final decisions, but ask your child for his opinion and consider it. Asking him to contribute his ideas helps him feel valued and understood.

Source: J.J. Pawel, *The Parent's Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, Ambris Publishing.

**"We worry about what a child will become tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."**

—Stacia Tauscher

## Remind your child that there is no such thing as online privacy



Use of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat is on the rise. Middle and high school students

have signed up in droves to share their thoughts, messages, photos and videos on such sites.

To help your middle schooler make the best choices while on social networking sites, you should monitor what she posts.

In addition:

- **Talk to your child** about her online "friends." The accounts your child creates can be viewed or followed only by people she allows. Make sure your child allows only people she actually
- knows in real life to view her posts.
- **Remind your child** that nothing is ever completely removed from the internet. She should think carefully before posting anything that would damage her reputation or someone else's friendships.
- **Talk about values.** Remind your child that if she wouldn't do or say something in real life, she should avoid doing it and saying it online.
- **Stress safety.** Your child should never post information that would allow someone to locate her in real life. She should also never arrange to meet anyone she has only met online.

## Do you support your child during homework time?



Middle school is a time of increased expectations, which may include more homework. While you should never do homework for your middle schooler, you should offer your support.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are supporting your child during homework time:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** a well-lit, quiet place for your child to do homework?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you stay** informed on what your child's teachers expect?
- \_\_\_ **3. Are you available** during homework time as often as possible?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you help** your child use homework resources—the internet, a study group or a study buddy?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you let** your child's teachers know if homework is consistently too difficult for your child or takes longer than the teacher intends?

### How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are giving your child the right amount of support for homework. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions on supporting your child.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1283

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

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Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.  
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# A peaceful home environment promotes academic success



Your middle schooler faces academic and social pressures, and you and other family members also have responsibilities that can create stress. Unfortunately, all of this stress can have a negative impact on your child's grades.

It's nearly impossible to lead a stress-free life these days, but you can work to make home a haven away from the daily grind.

To help your entire family feel mentally and emotionally well:

- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories.
- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach your child to take deep

breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music whenever he feels stressed.

- **Remember the big three:** good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise. These are the keys to wellness.
- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report at least one good thing (no matter how small) that happened. Try to do this during a family meal.
- **Pitch in.** Chores go so much more quickly when everyone works together. Have a family chore time and then reward yourselves by doing something fun as a family.

**Source:** A. Marks, M.D. and B. Rothbart, M.S.W., *Healthy Teens, Body and Soul: A Parent's Complete Guide*, Fireside.

# Four strategies can reduce your middle schooler's test anxiety



Does your middle schooler's stomach do flip-flops the night before a huge test? Does yours? Relax!

Although you can't take the test for your child, there are lots of ways you can help her get ready.

To help your child prepare:

1. **Chat with her.** Ask your middle schooler why she's so nervous about the test. Is the material too hard? Does she not understand it? Sometimes just getting her concerns off her chest can make the test less scary.
2. **Help her make a study schedule.** If the test is next week, encourage her to set aside study time on each of the days leading up to it. This may keep her from cramming the night before.

## 3. Create a comfy study spot.

Carve out a quiet, well-lit place at home where your middle schooler can study. Make sure she has all the supplies she needs—including a healthy snack—when she sits down to hit the books.

## 4. Remind her of her strengths.

"I know you're worried about the big science test, but remember how well you did on the last one?" Focus on the positives.

Later, when your child receives her test grade, talk about it. If she did well, celebrate her success. If she didn't, calmly go over what went wrong and talk about how she can improve next time.

**Source:** "Helping Your Child with Test-Taking: Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Department of Education, [nswc.com/mid\\_testanxiety](http://nswc.com/mid_testanxiety).

**Q:** I caught my daughter copying all the answers from her friend's homework. She said it was no big deal. What should I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, middle school is a time when many students turn to cheating. At this age, students are highly aware of how they compare to their peers and they may view cheating as a way to keep up.

In one study, conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, 90% of middle schoolers admitted to copying a friend's homework and 75% admitted to cheating on tests.

Cheating is very serious. But you can keep your daughter from turning one mistake into a more severe problem. Here's how:

- **Send a clear message** to your child that cheating is wrong. It's dishonest and it robs her of learning the skills and information she'll need for success in life.
- **Talk to your daughter** and ask her why she cheated. Is she afraid of disappointing you or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades?
- **Don't put too much emphasis** on grades. Instead, stress the importance of effort. Let your child know that mistakes are learning opportunities and you will love her no matter what.
- **Help your daughter** develop her study habits—so she can make better grades on her own.
- **Find help** if your child has fallen behind. Her teacher may know a student who would be willing to tutor your child a few hours a week.
- **Arrange** for you and your child to meet with her teacher and counselor.

# It Matters: Discipline

## Three strategies can eliminate rude back talk



As the parent of a middle school child, you may have days where it seems as if everything you say is the wrong thing. Even an innocent comment may be met with a rude, arrogant or scornful reply from your child.

You may be angry and frustrated. But it's best to avoid a big show of emotion. Instead:

1. **Use "I-messages."** Anything that begins "you always" or "you never" or even just "you" may sound like an accusation to your child. And nothing will gear him up for a fight faster than that. Instead, put the emphasis on *your* feelings. Say, "I get frustrated when the trash piles up," instead of, "You never take out the trash!"
2. **Become a broken record.** Don't get into a debate about why he can't go to a concert without you. Instead, repeat yourself. "The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts." When he complains, respond again, "The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts."
3. **Say something nice,** then walk away. There are times when you just won't be able to get any further with your child until he calms down. Try, "I know you're upset, and that makes me sad for you. But you're being so rude to me that I can't talk to you right now. I'll be happy to discuss things more in a little while."

**Source:** A. Svensen, "Did That Come Out of My Child's Mouth?" Family Education, [niswc.com/mid\\_backtalk](http://niswc.com/mid_backtalk).

## Establish family rules that promote respectful behavior

It's important for children to be respectful at school. How they interact with family members at home lay the groundwork for how they act toward others.

By establishing rules for acceptable behavior, you'll be creating a more peaceful, respectful climate at home—and school.

Encourage family members to:

- **Speak in polite tones.**
- **Ask before taking** or borrowing someone else's property.
- **Share.** A box of cereal is for everyone in the family, not just your child.
- **Accept** that no one always gets his or her own way. Family members have to take turns.
- **Think of others.** Ask about their day. Offer support or congratulations when appropriate.



Don't tolerate behavior such as:

- **Physical violence** in any form.
- **Screaming** and yelling.
- **Insulting** other family members.
- **Stealing** from family members.
- **Treating** family property with disrespect.

**Source:** R. Howard, *Parenting at the Speed of Teens: Positive Tips on Everyday Issues*, Search Institute Press.

## Avoid discipline techniques that encourage poor behavior



Many common ways of handling discipline can actually encourage poor behavior. Experts say parents should remember these don'ts:

- **Don't tempt your child.** Saying things like, "I'd like to see you try it!" can sound like a dare.
- **Don't leave room for error.** Instead of saying, "Try to finish your chores today," be clear and say, "Finish your chores today."
- **Don't ask pointless questions.** Instead of asking your child, "How many times have I told

you not to use that tone with me?" focus on what you'd like him to do. Say, "Speak in a respectful tone."

- **Don't use threats.** Saying, "If you don't finish your homework before dinner, you can't have dessert," gives your child a choice. It's better to say, "You need to finish your homework before dinner."
- **Don't be vague.** Kids don't learn from phrases like, "Grow up!" They need specifics. Say, "It is your responsibility to remember your chores."