

Middle School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Make academic effort the focus of your expectations

Research consistently shows that students feel more positive and connected to school when they believe that hard work will lead to success. Communicate to your child that you expect her best effort. And when she gives it, let her know how proud you are.

You should also expect your middle schooler to:

- **Take rigorous courses.** Research shows that students benefit more from taking challenging courses than easier ones. That's because students will rise to the occasion when given the chance. So even if your middle schooler isn't earning top grades in her classes, encourage her to keep challenging herself.

- **Devote time to schoolwork.** Effort can't be wished into practice. Your child should study every night. She should also have time for family, exercise, meals and sleep. Most entertainment and use of social media may have to take place on weekends.
- **Set goals.** If your child is to put forth her best effort, she has to connect it to a goal. For example, "I will raise my math grade to a B next quarter." Your child's goals need to be specific. They should be achievable. And there should be a way to see her progress.

Source: S.L. Christenson, Ph.D. and C. Peterson, "Research on the Factors for School Success: Standards and Expectations," Partnering for School Success, University of Minnesota Extension, nismw.com/standards.

Middle schoolers need supervision after school



Some parents think their middle schoolers don't need to be supervised after school. But studies show that kids with too much time on their hands may be at higher risk of substance abuse.

One study found that eighth graders who were unsupervised for 11 hours a week were twice as likely to use drugs and alcohol as those under some form of adult supervision.

Where can parents find the after-school supervision that kids need? Here are some suggestions:

- **School activities.** Whether your child stays after school for band, sports or a club, he will be involved in a positive activity.
- **Community centers.** Check out programs for preteens.
- **Volunteering.** Your child can gain job skills while making the world a better place.
- **Youth organizations.** Scouting, 4-H and many other student organizations have programs designed specifically for middle school students.

Source: "Keeping Kids Safe and Supported in the Hours After School," *MetLife Foundation Afterschool Alert*, Afterschool Alliance, nismw.com/after_school.

Talk to your child about the importance of academic honesty



The research is in on students and cheating, and the news is sobering. In a nationwide survey of 36,000 secondary students, 60 percent admitted to cheating on tests and assignments.

Studies also show that:

- **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.
- **Cheating doesn't carry much** of a stigma anymore. There isn't the shame in it that there once was.
- **The more pressure** kids feel to earn higher grades, the more likely they are to cheat.
- **Cheaters often justify** their actions by claiming that "every-one's doing it." In their minds, they'll be at a disadvantage if they don't cheat.
- **Cheating is easier** than ever, thanks to the Internet. Students can download entire papers or

projects online and pass them off as original work.

- **Kids tend to begin** cheating in elementary school, typically by cheating at games or sports. True academic cheating sets in during middle school.

Talk with your child about cheating. Let him know you expect honesty from him at all times, whether he's at home or in class.

Source: P.S. Strom and R.D. Strom, "Cheating in Middle School and High School," *The Educational Forum*, Kappa Delta Pi, nswc.com/cheat_fact.

"Cheating in school is a form of self-deception. We go to school to learn. We cheat ourselves when we coast on the efforts and scholarship of someone else."

—James E. Faust

Reinforce your child's academic skills with fun & simple activities



Learning doesn't happen *only* in a classroom. You can reinforce your middle schooler's academic skills right at home. Here's how:

- **Take turns** reading something aloud with your child.
- **Have conversations** about everything—and really listen to what your child has to say.
- **Ask about** what your child is doing in her classes. Find out about her perspective on school.
- **Help your child** engage in critical thinking. Discuss the similarities

and differences between her classes. Ask for her advice when you are facing a problem at work.

- **Give your child** meaningful responsibilities. If you have a pet, ask her to help with its care. Teach your child how to prepare simple meals, do laundry and other chores to help the family.
- **Spend time with your child.** If you have cultural attractions nearby, such as museums, check them out. Go on a walk together and look for things you haven't noticed before.

Are you prepared for the changes in your adolescent?



Middle school is a time of rapid development for your child. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you know

what to expect:

- ___ **1. Do you understand** your child's need to separate from you? It is something that all young people undergo on the road to adulthood.
- ___ **2. Do you realize** that your child needs some privacy? Know where he is and who he is with, but knock before entering his room.
- ___ **3. Do you accept** that your child may be moody? Pick your battles, but don't tolerate disrespect.
- ___ **4. Are you prepared** for your child to test rules and limits? Be firm, fair and consistent in explaining and enforcing your family's rules.
- ___ **5. Do you realize** that your child lives in the present? Encourage him to think about his future and to set goals.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you have an understanding of the development of middle schoolers. For every *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Your child can improve writing skills with revision & resources



Not every student is a born writer. But kids who write well tend to do better in middle school than

kids who don't.

To help your child improve his writing, have him:

- **Read it aloud.** After he completes a writing assignment for class, ask your child to read it to you. (If just the thought of this makes him cringe, at least have him read it quietly to himself.) Suggest he mark any clunky or ungrammatical passages as he reads.
- **Revise it.** Even a good draft can almost always be improved with careful revision. So have your child go back through his work

to see where it can be tightened up, expanded or clarified.

- **Ask for help.** If his work still seems a little flat or weak, encourage him to ask his teacher to recommend a reputable writing website. Together, explore its ideas for strengthening writing. Beyond that, remind your child that one of the best ways to become a stronger writer is simply to read. The more he surrounds himself with words, the more examples he'll see of solid writing. And that can only help when it's time for him to put pen to paper.

Source: R. Kavanagh, "Help Middle School Students Improve Writing Skills," EduGuide, nswc.com/improve_writing.

Know the skills your child needs to master reading assignments



Middle school requires your child to read material that is more complex. This can be challenging for many

students. Remember, reading does not come naturally. It is a learned skill and, like any skill, can be improved with practice.

You can help your child do better with reading assignments if you:

- **Encourage your child to read for pleasure.** The more your child reads, the more she'll be able to read smoothly and accurately. This is called *fluency*, and it is an important step toward comprehension.
- **Teach your child to read actively.** Looking at the words on the page isn't enough for many students. They need to be focused and engaged with the content. Taking

notes while reading is the perfect activity to suggest. Just the act of taking notes often improves reading comprehension. It's even more effective if your child studies her notes after reading. She can also use index cards or sticky notes to mark important pages.

- **Focus on vocabulary.** One reason middle school texts and fictional works are challenging is that they introduce unfamiliar vocabulary. Tell your child not to skip over words. When she comes across a word she doesn't know, she should look it up. Then she should write and study the definition.

Source: "Middle School Reading: Improving Your Seventh and Eighth Grader's Reading Comprehension," Math & Reading Help, American Library Association, nswc.com/reading_skills.

Q: My seventh grader used to be so confident, but recently she's been saying things like, "I just don't fit in!" or "I'm so weird!" How can I help her feel good about herself again?

Questions & Answers

A: The best way to help your daughter is to acknowledge that maybe she really doesn't fit in right now. Middle school is a time of enormous change and growth for kids, and it could be that your child is starting to "march to her own drummer" and become her own person.

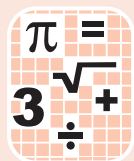
And that's okay. As long as your child isn't socially isolated, struggling in school or being bullied, there's nothing wrong with letting her blossom into her own quirky, unique person.

To support your child along the way:

- **Respect her evolving views.** You don't have to agree with your child's opinions, but don't belittle them, either.
- **Be tolerant** of her quest for individuality. Don't nix her choice of clothing, hairstyle or entertainment just because it's not your taste. As long as it isn't inappropriate or offensive, let her embrace what she likes.
- **Spend time together.** Do something you both enjoy. But don't expect her to like a certain activity just because you do—or because she did when she was younger.
- **Teach her not to fear failure.** Everyone stumbles from time to time. Remind your child that missteps aren't horrible—they are opportunities for growth.

It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

Share strategies for conquering math homework



Many students move up to pre-algebra or algebra in middle school. Even if your child is not taking these courses, he will be exposed to some of the concepts—and they can be challenging. If he doesn't fully understand them, homework might be a struggle.

Here are some tips to share with your child:

- **Make the best use of class time.** Pay attention to the teacher. Take notes or follow along with handouts. Always write down at least two examples of each type of problem the teacher is presenting.
- **Go over class notes** each day at home, even if the teacher doesn't give homework. Studies show that students get the most out of notes when the class is fresh in their minds.
- **Look in the textbook.** Look for additional examples of problems. Read explanations of how to solve them. Try the questions at the end of the chapter.
- **Ask for help.** No one should do your child's homework but your child. However, if he knows a friend or family member who is familiar with the concepts, he can ask for a demonstration.
- **Talk to the teacher.** See if extra help is available. Your child may be able to make an appointment to stay after school for help.

Source: "Homework Help for Middle School Math," Math & Reading Help, American Library Association, nismc.com/math_homework.

Give your child encouragement & some control over homework

You might have a difficult time finding a middle school student who loves doing homework. But you can help your child develop a positive attitude about homework. The key is to give him a feeling of control over it.

Research shows that middle schoolers have definite preferences about homework. They would rather:

- **Do homework** somewhere besides home.
- **Do homework** when their peers are around.
- **Have their parents** be less involved with their homework.

So what can you do to support your child? You can:

- **Check your child's achievement** at school. Is he doing fairly well? If so, consider allowing him to choose where he completes homework, on occasion.



- **Let your child try studying** with a friend. Offer to host the study session so you can supervise.
- **Provide encouragement.** Say things like, "I see you working hard on your homework. I know your hard work will pay off!"

Source: H.Z. Kackar and others, "Age and gender differences in adolescents' homework experiences," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Elsevier.

Your child can tackle long-term projects with a plan of action!



Middle schoolers are often assigned long-term projects. Whether it is writing a research paper or building a model of a Roman city, the key to success is to create a plan of action.

To keep things under control and on schedule, encourage your child to:

1. **Break down the project** into smaller steps.
2. **Assign a deadline** for completing each step.
3. **Make the steps specific.** Instead of: "Find a website on the topic,"

try: "Find 10 facts that support the topic. Note the source for each fact."

4. **Incorporate the steps** for the project into her nightly homework schedule. She should write down how long she will spend on the project each night.
5. **Reward herself** each time she completes a step. She could spend 15 minutes checking social media or enjoying a healthy snack.

Source: A.K. Dolin, *Homework Made Simple: Tips, Tools and Solutions for Stress-Free Homework*, Advantage Books.