Middle School
Parents®
May 2016
Vol. 19, No. 9
Educational Service Unit #8
still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler finish the school year strong

The calendar may be inching toward summer, but it's not vacation time yet! To keep your middle schooler focused and working hard through the end of the school year:

- **Be firm.** Even if you're hearing summertime's siren song, too, remind yourself to keep enforcing your school-year routines. That means sticking to homework and bedtime rituals.
- **Insist on attendance.** It can be tempting to skip school, especially on a day that feels like summer. Don't let your child give in to the temptation. Showing up every day—right up until the last day—is one of the best things she can do to be successful in school.
- **Set specific goals.** Rather than sending a generic "keep working hard" message, help your child set a concrete goal. "Science has been giving you trouble all year. How about committing to an extra 15 minutes of studying your notes each night?" Even if it's too late to bring up her grade, it's never too late to reinforce or establish strong study habits.
- **Stay connected.** Don't assume there's nothing meaningful happening at school just because the school calendar is winding down. Students are reviewing for important tests and completing end-of-year projects. Stay in touch with your child's teachers and keep reading information that comes home from school.

Productive summers begin with structure



It's fine to let your child relax over summer vacation. But that doesn't mean all his good school-year habits should fly out the window!

To help him recharge and stay productive, give your child:

- **Structure.** Continue enforcing a reasonable bedtime (although making it a bit later is fine) and setting limits on recreational screen time. Expect your child to perform regular chores.
- **Opportunities to learn.** Research shows that students' academic skills—especially in reading and math—can decline dramatically over summer break. Don't let it happen to your child! From trips to the library or museum to playing reasoning games online, find ways for him to keep his brain primed for learning.
- **Fitness routines.** A summertime "couch potato" can quickly become a school-year slacker. Encourage your child to get regular exercise and fresh air every day with a walk, a bike ride or other activity.

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Middle schoolers still need supervision over the summer



Summer usually offers more freedom for your child. This is promising for her, but it requires more oversight from you. During the school year, you generally know where your child is and what she is doing during certain hours. That may not be as true during the summer months.

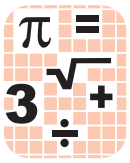
To set the stage for a safe summer:

- **Establish rules with your child** at the beginning of summer. Rules should cover *exactly* where she is allowed to go, with whom and when. Let her know that any exceptions need to be discussed and approved by you in advance.
- **Do not allow your child** to "go hang out with the girls." Ask her, "Which girls?" She shouldn't be hanging out with anyone you don't know. Ask to meet her friends and find out their ages. In general, middle school students should not be spending recreational time with high school students, especially with those in the upper grades.
- **Establish consequences** for breaking the rules. Make sure the consequences fit "the crime." For example, if your child comes in late, she may have to stay in the house the next night.

"Even as kids reach adolescence, they need more than ever for us to watch over them."

—Ron Taffel

Ask questions when your child gets stuck on math problems



Middle school math can be challenging for kids and parents alike! If your child gets stuck on math homework, think of yourself as a *guide* rather than as a teacher. You don't need to have the answers to show him how to tackle his homework effectively.

To help your child solve a math problem, ask him:

- **What specific problem** are you working on? This will help him focus on one task at a time, rather than become intimidated by an entire sheet of equations.
- **What do the instructions say?** Have him read the directions out loud to you. It's possible that he missed key words the first time around.
- **Are there parts** of the instructions you don't understand? Be sure he completely understands what he's supposed to do.
- **Are there things** you've learned before that may help you here?

If your child is still hopelessly stuck (and you are, too), encourage him to look for help online. If his teacher has a website, he should look there first. He can also search sites like YouTube for instructional math videos.

If your child still isn't able to figure it out, have him turn in as much of the work as he was able to complete. Then encourage him to ask his teacher for help.

Are you laying a good foundation for next year?



Middle school goes by quickly, and before you know it, your child will be heading to high school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child get ready:

___**1. Have you worked** with your child on organization, emphasizing the importance of planners?

___**2. Have you helped** your child develop good study habits, including having a place to study and doing some kind of studying each night?

___**3. Do you talk** with your child about taking schoolwork seriously? Grades in high school will have an impact on his post-secondary future.

___**4. Do you monitor** your child's social life and encourage him to avoid unsafe and inappropriate activities?

___**5. Do you communicate** with your child and offer support and guidance?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are laying a good foundation for next year and beyond. Mostly *no* answers? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

Middle School Parents still make the difference!

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

For subscription information call or write: The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667. Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer.
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Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

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Playing board games builds skills and encourages learning



Board games provide an activity the whole family can enjoy. They also reinforce skills that inspire learning and thinking.

Your child will benefit from:

- **Following directions.** Middle schoolers still need to practice this skill—just ask any middle school teacher!
- **Lessons in logic,** reasoning and strategy. For success with many games, your child will need to decide which move to make or card to play. This kind of decision making is helpful when she takes higher math and science classes.
- **Reading, writing,** spelling and vocabulary. Some board games are all about creating words and word puzzles. For others, your child must read and understand questions and clues.
- **Creating and spotting patterns.** Studies show that success in recognizing, remembering and applying patterns is directly related to success in math.

Source: L. Rodgers, "Board games that increase brain power," Parenting, Meredith Corporation, niswc.com/mid_boardgames.

You have the biggest impact on your child's school achievement



Do you think the quality of a school makes the greatest difference in a student's overall academic success? Think again! Studies show that parent involvement has the biggest impact on kids' achievement.

Researchers compared "family social capital" and "school social capital." They defined family social capital as:

- **The degree** of trust between parent and child.
- **The amount** of communication at home.
- **The level** of parent involvement in education.

Researchers defined school social capital as:

- **The availability** of extracurricular activities.
- **Teacher morale.**
- **The willingness** and ability of staff to meet students' needs.
- **The presence** of a positive learning environment.

It turns out that kids with high levels of family social capital but low levels of school social capital do better than kids with more perks at school but less parental input at home.

What does this mean? It means staying involved in your child's education is absolutely critical.

To remain actively involved in your child's schooling:

- **Connect with his teachers.** Attend parent-teacher conferences. Read every handout that comes home. Regularly visit the school's website to see what's new.
- **Take an interest** in what he's learning. Every night, ask your child about what he did in school that day. And don't settle for a reply of "Nothing."
- **Encourage him to aim high.** "You're doing great in math! How about taking honors next year?"

Source: M.J. Dufur and others, "Does Capital at Home Matter More than Capital at School? Social Capital Effects on Academic Achievement," *Research in Social Stratification* and *Mobility*, Elsevier Ltd., niswc.com/mid_impact.

Q: My sixth-grader is getting moodier and more scattered by the day. I'm worried that her transition to seventh grade is going to be awful. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: First, relax. It's normal for preteens—especially as they move to seventh grade—to become moody and scattered.

This is partly because seventh grade isn't *just* another year of middle school. It's often a dividing line between childhood and adolescence. From her changing body to her changing emotions, your child is keenly aware that things are different now.

To help her weather these changes and thrive in seventh grade next fall:

- **Maintain an even keel.** Your child probably speaks like an adult one minute and fusses like a toddler the next. What's going on? Puberty. The more you can keep steady—and not freak out—in the face of her volatile moods, the better.
- **Hold her accountable.** While it's developmentally normal for your child to test the boundaries, it doesn't mean she has a free pass. Her actions still have consequences. So if she is disrespectful or chooses to break a rule, enforce the consequence—every time.
- **Be flexible.** Lots of things change in seventh grade, including your child's interests. So be reasonable if she decides to ditch old activities for new ones. Just because she "used to love" soccer or the clarinet doesn't mean she can't step away from them and try something else.

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It Matters: Summer Learning

Volunteering boosts learning, widens horizons



One important way children can continue to learn during the summer months is by volunteering. Volunteer work keeps kids busy in constructive activities and reinforces the message that they should think of and assist others. And the best part of volunteering is that it also benefits the community!

To help your middle schooler find a volunteer activity that is right for her, ask her to think about what she loves to do. Does she:

- **Love to read?** She could read to a younger child or elderly neighbor. She could contact the public library to see if they need help with their summer reading programs for kids.
- **Want to help those in need?** She could volunteer at a local food bank or start a canned food drive in your neighborhood.
- **Love animals?** She could call the local humane society and ask about volunteer opportunities. She could collect supplies for a local pet shelter.
- **Care about the environment?** She could organize a clean-up of a local park or other public space.
- **Love to play soccer?** She could volunteer to help out a youth team coach with practices. She could contact a day care provider and offer to teach kids how to play soccer.

Your middle schooler can find even more ideas for volunteering at *www.dosomething.org*.

Three ways to get your middle schooler to read this summer

One of the best ways to reduce summer learning loss is to read. But how can you keep your middle schooler reading over the summer months? Here are three strategies to try:

1. **Visit the library.** Encourage your child to check out more than books. Position him in front of the magazine rack and let him browse. Or if you are planning a summer trip, ask him to pick out a few audio books to listen to as you travel. Open up as many avenues for literacy as possible.
2. **Challenge your child.** If the teacher hands out a summer reading list, issue a challenge: If your child reads one or two extra books on the list, you will give him a special treat.
3. **Find out what the other kids** are reading. Authors such as J.K. Rowling of the Harry Potter series and Rick Riordan of the Percy Jackson & the Olympians series have helped to make reading cool among preteens and teens. If there is a new popular book out, encourage your child to read it, too.



Encourage your child to explore creativity through writing



As a middle schooler, your child is able to consider ideas and think in ways that wouldn't have been possible when she was younger.

Encourage your child to record her thoughts and ideas in a journal this summer. It is a wonderful way to preserve her creative ideas.

Give your child a notebook and suggest that she:

- **Make lists.** What are her favorite songs, TV shows, books or celebrities? It's fun to look back on these later to see how her opinions change.
- **Write down everything** she sees and does on a particular day.
- **Try fiction.** Encourage her to write a story, song or poem.
- **Write about something** that makes her laugh. Why does she find it so funny? Which of her friends has a similar sense of humor?
- **Write about her ideal day.** How would it be different from her typical day? How would it be the same?