

Middle School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Organization is the key to success for middle schoolers

Middle schoolers may have homework in six or more classes, after-school activities and a busy social life. Organization is critical in middle school and can make the difference between doing well and sinking.

To help your child get organized:

- **Have a weekly planning meeting.** Sitting down with your child for 15 minutes each Sunday to plan the week ahead can make the days go more smoothly. Bring your family calendar to the meeting and be sure to write down important deadlines and events.
- **Be sure she is using** a daily planner to keep track of homework and activities. Encourage your child to check it every day to see which books to bring home.
- **Have her make** a checklist each day of tasks to complete when she starts her homework. Also have your child make checklists for long-range projects, outlining the steps and their deadlines.
- **Choose places to put** specific belongings—especially those that get misplaced frequently. Schoolbooks and other items to bring back to school might be kept in a box by the front door.
- **Expect your child to put** things away in their designated spots. Set an example by doing this with other household items. Have a place for keys, purses, mail, cleaning supplies, etc.
- **Encourage your child to wear** a watch and to refer to it often.

Talk to your child about cyberbullying



Today, bullying has gone beyond the classroom to cyberspace. *Cyberbullying* can take many forms:

Kids create fake social media accounts where they make fun of others. They send threatening text messages to students. They take videos and pictures in locker rooms and then post them on the internet.

To protect your child:

- **Talk to him** about cyberbullying. Ask him to tell you if someone posts cruel or hurtful things about him—or anyone else—online.
- **Tell him** not to share account passwords with friends.
- **Keep devices** that can connect to the internet out of his bedroom. It's easier to monitor online activity in a central location in your home.

If your child is bullied online, take these three steps:

1. **Tell your child not to respond.**
2. **Keep records.** Print out things posted about your child online.
3. **Go to the authorities.** Talk to school officials or the police and show them what you have printed out.

Recognize the many milestones your middle schooler will face



Middle schoolers are still reaching milestones. And the more you're aware of them, especially the emotional ones, the

better you'll understand your child.

Along with the physical changes of puberty, your middle schooler may be dealing with:

- **A need for independence.** The preteen years are prime time for this particular milestone. So expect your middle schooler to separate a bit from you as she begins figuring out who she is. Your child may be less likely to admit it right now, but she still needs your love and support.
- **A desire to feel respected.** Your middle schooler may bristle at being "treated like a kid." Honor her need to feel

more grown up. Give her real responsibilities and allow her to make some decisions on her own, such as when to do her homework.

- **Waves of self-doubt.** Along with more maturity, the preteen years can bring a great deal of insecurity. Help your middle schooler weather these episodes of self-doubt by praising her when she does well and catching her when she stumbles.

"Children are like wet cement. Whatever falls on them makes an impression."

—Haim Ginott

Focus on your child's strengths to overcome learning problems



Success is contagious. So if your child struggles in math, for example, try pointing out what he's doing right in

another subject. This can motivate him to transfer his strengths to math, too.

Try these ideas:

- **Ask your child what he thinks** he does best. The key is to get him feeling positive about what he *can* accomplish.
- **Have him list some reasons** why this area is a strength for him. This list can be the beginning of a plan for doing well in other areas.
- **Add some positive notes** of your own to his list. Examples could

be that he is a good listener, he doesn't give up easily or he has a good sense of humor.

- **Do some brainstorming.** For example, "One of the reasons you earned a good grade in history is that you always asked questions after class if there was something you didn't quite understand. What do you think might happen if you did the same in your math class?"
- **Have update meetings.** Pledge that you and your child will meet together once a week for an update. Ask him to give you specific examples of how he used his list of strengths. Talk about the results and discuss plans for where he can go from here.

Are you helping your child maintain healthy habits?



The school year is well past its halfway point and your middle schooler's good habits may be starting to slip.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child stick to healthy habits:

___ **1. Do you offer** nutritious foods, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein?

___ **2. Do you encourage** sleep? Research shows that middle school students need at least nine hours a night to function at their best.

___ **3. Do you promote** exercise for the whole family?

___ **4. Do you talk** with your child about the dangers of underage drinking and drug use?

___ **5. Do you suggest** fun activities? Stress is a major problem for many middle schoolers. Your child needs healthy ways to blow off steam and enjoy life.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child stay healthy right through the school year. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Never miss a chance to reinforce learning outside the classroom



Education doesn't just happen at school. It happens everywhere! And the more you can connect what your

child is learning in school to the real world, the more motivated she will be!

To reinforce your child's learning:

- **Have her teach you** a thing or two. Find out what your child is studying at school, and ask her to explain it to you. By "retelling" the things she's learning, she reinforces those things in her own mind.
- **Put her knowledge into action.** If your child just finished tackling fractions in math, have her join

you in the kitchen. Show her the real-life importance of what she'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 her to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from shopping to a museum visit—has an impact on her learning. On your next outing, ask her how what she is seeing relates to what she is learning in school.
- **Respect her ability.** Let your child use her knowledge and skills to help you. The next time you make a wrong turn somewhere, hand her a map and see if she can figure out a solution.

Encourage your child to use a journal to plan for the future



Your child is in middle school, and it is not necessary—or even realistic—to expect her to know what she

wants to do for the rest of her life. But it is realistic for her to have some sense of what she likes and what she doesn't, what she is good at and what she struggles with.

Experts agree that it is helpful for students to begin thinking this way once they get to sixth grade. Children who know themselves have a good head start on the future.

Keeping a journal can be an effective way for your middle schooler to get to know herself better. Encourage her to write about what she thinks as well as what she does.

In the journal, your child should answer questions such as:

- *What are my strengths in school?*
- *What are my weaknesses in school?*
- *What do I love doing outside school?*
- *What am I good at doing outside school?*
- *What do I like to learn about or would I like to learn more about?*
- *What is important to me right now?*
- *Do I prefer to work with others or alone?*
- *Am I happier when I am indoors or outdoors?"*
- *What have I done in my life that I am most proud of?*

Encourage your child to update the journal regularly. Let her know that differences will happen and are important to note. But she should look for things that stay the same—these trends could provide clues to her future success.

Q: I'd like to volunteer in one of my child's classes, but he says he would be embarrassed to have me at school. Should I scrap my plans and stay home?

Questions & Answers

A: No. Schools rely on parent volunteers—especially at the middle and high school levels, where the number of parents willing to pitch in tends to drop.

Still, you don't want your efforts at school to cause a war at home. To keep your child from cringing (or from squashing your volunteer spirit):

- **Hear him out.** Don't ignore his complaints. Sit down and talk about it. "I realize you don't want me volunteering at school, but I'd like to know why. Is there something specific that you're worried about?"
- **Validate his feelings.** There's huge social pressure to fit in during middle school, so remember that when listening to your child's concerns. "Are you afraid your friends will think you're weird if they see me at school?" If he says yes, have him put himself in their shoes. Would he find their volunteering parents weird? Or would it be no big deal?
- **Compromise.** Don't back down from your commitment to volunteer, but do respect your child's feelings. If you've talked it out and he's still nervous about seeing you in one of his classes, volunteer in the media center or assist front office staff. And if you happen to see your child when you are volunteering at school, don't make a big deal out of it. Just give him a smile and walk away!

It Matters: Test Success

Help your child keep learning after the test



Your child is probably used to studying and learning material before a test. But what about after the test?

Unless your middle schooler gets a perfect score on every test, every time, there is more learning to do after the test. Educators agree that proper review after a test is one of the most effective ways to improve scores on future tests.

When your child gets a graded test back, encourage him to:

- **Review it and make notes** about which answers he got right and which he got wrong. Have him correct the wrong answers and make sure he understands them. If he isn't sure why something was marked wrong, he should check with his teacher.
- **Recognize the types of errors** he made. Mistakes generally come in two forms: carelessness and lack of preparation.
- **Make adjustments.** Brainstorm with your child about how he can reduce careless mistakes. He could read each question twice, think about the question before answering and check his work before turning in his paper.

For mistakes based on lack of preparation, the solution is probably more studying. Experts suggest beginning to review at least five days before a test. The last 24 hours should be spent reviewing everything a final time, not trying to learn new material.

Checklists and study schedules can lead to greater test success

Middle schoolers have to keep track of lots of information for each of their classes. This is especially important at test time! It will be hard for your child to do well on a test if he doesn't know when the test is, what to study or which materials he needs.

This is where a test checklist can help. Have your child write down the:

- **Name** of the class.
- **Date** of the test.
- **Topics** the test will cover.
- **Format** of the test.
- **Materials** needed to study—textbook, notes, study guide.

Your child should also create a study schedule. To create his schedule, he should consider:

- **How many days** in advance to begin studying.



- **How much time** to devote to studying each night.
- **How well he knows** each topic—will it take relearning or will a review do it?
- **What (if anything)** to do besides reading—perhaps take notes from the book or make flash cards.

Share general strategies your child can use during any test



While there are specific ways to approach specific kinds of tests, there are some general strategies that will help your child do her best on any test.

Tell your child to:

- **Read the instructions** carefully. Then she should read them again to make sure she knows exactly what to do.
- **Underline any direction words** such as *compare*, *list*, *describe*, *define* and *summarize*.
- **Skim all the questions** quickly before she starts and think about

how much time she can spend on each question.

- **Read each question carefully** as she begins the test. Then she should determine what she thinks the answer is before she reads any choices provided.
- **Skip a question** if she isn't sure of the answer. She should answer all the questions she knows first. Then she can come back to the others.
- **Allow time to go back** and check her answers. Do they make sense? Are sentences complete?