

Middle School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Three skills help students prepare for college & career

Your middle schooler may not know what he wants to do after he graduates from high school. That's years away! However, there are some skills he can start building now that will help him be successful—whatever his future plans may be. They include:

- 1. Communication.** From factory floors to hospital operating rooms, on-the-job success depends on communication. You can help your child strengthen his speaking and listening skills at home. If he wants you to rethink a rule, have him build a case and present it to you. Why does he want to stay out later next Friday? How has he shown he is responsible enough for this change?
- 2. Critical thinking** and problem solving. Middle schoolers often see things they'd like to change.

There's a school policy that doesn't seem fair. Their team needs new uniforms, but the school lacks the budget. Instead of just listening to your child complain, help him think about how *he* could help solve the problem. Perhaps he can share his idea with the principal.

- 3. Decision making.** Suppose your child is wondering if he should sign up for an honors math class next year. To help him think through the choice, make a T chart. Have him put the reasons *for* on one side and the reasons *against* on the other. When he sees the pros and cons, he can make a more informed choice.

Source: B. Cook, "College and Career Ready: What It Means for Middle School Students: Helping students develop the skills they know they need to succeed," Association for Middle Level Education, niswc.com/mid_skills.

Set reasonable expectations for your child



It's important to set expectations for your middle schooler's academic success, but it's equally

important to make sure those expectations are reasonable.

To determine whether you're setting the bar at the right level for your child, ask yourself if your expectations:

- **Are flexible.** Have you read parenting books telling you what your child "should be" doing, thinking or feeling at this age? Then you may have lost sight of the fact that most of that information is based on *averages*. It doesn't relate specifically to what any one individual should be doing (or achieving). Keep that in mind if you find yourself setting a goal for your child just because "all the other sixth graders" seem to be meeting it.
- **Reflect who she really is.** Do you see your child clearly when you're thinking about what she should achieve? If she has been a reluctant reader since preschool, pushing her to take honors English may not make sense. Work together with her teachers to set your child up for success.

Tutoring might be the answer to ongoing academic struggles



If your child struggles in one or more of her classes, she may need some one-on-one learning support outside of school.

Getting a tutor could be the answer to your middle schooler's academic problems—especially if:

- **Homework time** is a nightly battle.
- **Your child's grades** are slipping more by the day.
- **The entire family** is feeling the stress of her school troubles.

Ask your child's school counselor to recommend tutoring resources. She may even be able to connect you with local high school students who tutor.

Then, to help your middle schooler get the most from tutoring sessions:

- **Stand back.** If the sessions take place in your home, don't pitch in. Give the tutor space to do the job.
- **Provide a distraction-free setting.** Be sure there is a quiet, well-lit place for your child and the tutor to work.

- **Set reachable goals.** Don't expect your middle schooler to bring home straight A's right after she begins tutoring sessions. Instead, set smaller goals, such as raising her science grade a few percentage points per month. Meeting these goals may be your best indicator as to whether the tutoring is working.
- **Don't be afraid to make a change.** Not every tutor-student relationship works out. If your child isn't meeting her goals after several months, it may be time to try something new.

Source: J. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.

“There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.”

—Colin Powell

Inspire your middle schooler to work hard and succeed in school



A motivated student is a dedicated student. To inspire your middle schooler to do well in school:

- **Stay involved in his education.** Show you care about the things your child is learning in class. Your involvement shows that his education matters to you.
- **Help him get organized.** It's tough to stay motivated when notes and assignments are scattered all over the place. So help your child sort and file things by subject.
- **Nurture his curiosity.** Learning happens everywhere, not just in class. Encourage your child to explore outside interests. If he likes art, for example, check out a new exhibit together.
- **Offer feedback.** When you see your child working hard, let him know that you notice! If he does well on a project or a test, talk about how much his effort has paid off.
- **Be patient with him.** Chances are, you're not always motivated at work. So don't expect your child to be forever gung-ho about school. Instead, assume he'll have periods when he's less than enthusiastic. But with your support, he'll likely get back on track soon.

Are you still emphasizing attendance?



April often heralds the return of warmer days. But it's not summer vacation yet—and your child needs to be in

school, on time, until it is.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are doing all you can to promote regular, on-time school attendance:

- ___ **1. Have you made it clear** that attending school is your child's first priority through the end of the year?
- ___ **2. Do you avoid** taking your child out of school unless he is sick or it is an emergency?
- ___ **3. Do you emphasize** to your child that your family does not condone skipping school?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to take steps that will get him to school on time, like using an alarm clock?
- ___ **5. Do you work with** the school to make sure you are alerted if your child is not in school?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are conveying the importance of attendance to your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Give your child three test-taking strategies that lead to success



Whether it's a short quiz in math class or a high-stakes standardized test, testing is a fact of life for today's students.

To help your child succeed on *any* test, encourage him to:

1. Read the directions carefully.

This will keep him from making simple and avoidable mistakes. The directions could say, "Answer two of these four questions." Or they could say that some multiple choice questions have more than one correct answer. On a math or science test, the directions will say whether your teen has to show his work. (Even if he gets the final answer wrong, perhaps he could get partial credit for showing his work.)

2. Use time wisely.

Encourage your child to read through the entire test

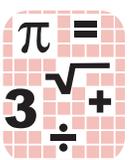
before answering any questions. Then, he should budget his time. If the essay question is worth 50 points, he will know how much time to allow. He'll also know if he's spending too much time on a single question.

Using time wisely also means using all the time available. Some students treat tests like a race—they want to be first across the finish line. Teach your middle schooler to use any extra time to check his work.

3. Answer the easy questions first.

Getting off to a strong start can give your child the confidence he needs to tackle tougher questions. Answering the easier questions first may also remind your child of a fact or two he'll need to answer the more difficult questions.

Promote your middle schooler's interest in science and math



Science and math sometimes get a bad reputation among middle schoolers. Many students believe they're "just not good" in these subjects.

But when children actually try some hands-on activities in science, technology, engineering and math (called STEM), they often enjoy them.

To open the mind of a middle schooler who thinks she doesn't like science or math:

- **Praise the process.** When a child is learning something new in one of her classes, it's often hard at first. So don't focus on the grade she's earning. Instead, help her focus on *what* she's learning and the new skills she's developing.

- **Watch science and technology** shows together. Search on YouTube or Common Sense Media to find science shows and games for children of all ages.
- **Head to the kitchen.** Cooking involves both math and chemistry. (And kids get to eat the results!) As you cook with your child, ask her questions: "Why do you think water boils when it gets hot?" "What happened when we forgot to add baking powder to the cookies?"
- **Visit a museum.** In many museums, you can find STEM exhibits, learn about the history of technology and discover how things were made.

Source: M. Pinola, "How to Get Your Kids Interested in STEM (Without Forcing It on Them)," LifeHacker, nswc.com/mid_stem.

Q: I recently went back to work full-time. And although my seventh grader is mature enough to stay by herself after school, I hate the thought of her being home alone every afternoon. Should I hire a sitter even though she insists she doesn't need one?

Questions & Answers

A: Not necessarily. Since you feel your child is responsible enough to stay alone for a few hours each day, it sounds like the issue isn't that she's by herself—it's how often she's by herself.

If that's the case, then the solution may be to limit the number of days she's home alone every week. But it doesn't need to be an "all or nothing" solution.

To find a solution that works for your child:

- **Research after-hours programs** at the school. They could offer your child an extra chance to hang out with other students once or twice each week.
- **Consider a school sport.** Practices will keep your child busy after school. If she isn't an athlete, she might enjoy helping out as a team manager.
- **Research neighborhood options.** See what your local community center has to offer for middle schoolers. If you find a cool weekday program for your child, she may be eager to go there every few days.
- **Check out volunteer opportunities.** If your child enjoys working with younger kids, she could volunteer at a day care center or preschool.
- **Enlist family.** Is a nearby relative willing to hang out once a week with your child? Your child—and her relative—may end up loving that quality time together!

It Matters: Building Respect

Self-respect is critical for your child's success



Self-respect is essential for middle schoolers.

A child with self-respect believes in himself as a worthy

person. He knows he deserves to be treated fairly and kindly. And he knows it would be out of character for him to treat others differently.

To foster your child's sense of self-respect:

- **Help him fight negative peer pressure.** Talk about ways your child can avoid situations he knows are not right for him.
- **Keep a positive attitude.** Everyone experiences bumps in the road. These are temporary. Encourage your child to make a fresh start after a setback.
- **Point out his strengths** and explain that people have different strengths and weaknesses. This awareness can help your child control feelings of jealousy. The ability to be happy for others, rather than jealous of them, is an important part of self-respect.
- **Take a firm stance** against substance abuse. Tell your child that self-respect includes respect for his personal safety and health.
- **Model self-respect.** Remember to speak positively about yourself. Be honest and follow-through with commitments. Forgive yourself when you make mistakes. Take good care of your health and relationships.

Source: Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside.

Help your middle schooler develop a sense of respect

You make a point of respecting your child, but do you insist that she show you respect, too? If not, now is the time to start.

To develop your child's sense of respect for you, herself and others:

- **Don't let her run the show.** Does your home life revolve around her activities, achievements and desires? It shouldn't. If her needs always come first, she may not learn to respect the notion that other people have needs, too.
- **Hold your applause.** It's fine to congratulate your child when she does well, but don't gush over every accomplishment. Instead, save your highest praise for when your child works hard.
- **Allow her to experience** disappointment. You can't spare your child from all of life's troubles, nor



should you. Whether it's being cut from the volleyball team or failing to earn an A in math, she needs to learn to take her lumps. Besides, they're hers—not yours. So give her a hug and let her move past it. She'll likely respect herself for bouncing back—and respect you for showing her she could.

Pay attention to how you speak to your middle schooler



You probably speak to your friends and colleagues with respect. But how do you speak to your child?

It's natural for family members to let their guards down around one another and speak in a more casual way than they do with others. But if that crosses into disrespect, you are doing your child and yourself a disservice.

If you speak disrespectfully to your child, he won't learn how to speak respectfully—to you or anyone else. Here are some tips:

- **Set a positive tone.** Saying "Hi, honey" or simply "Good morning" is an easy way to start.
- **Consider feelings.** If you know your child has had a bad day at school, don't scold him about not making his bed. Discuss issues when your child is feeling better.
- **Be attentive.** Take your eyes off your phone when your child speaks to you. Look him in the eye. If you are driving, you obviously have to watch the road. Encourage your child to speak to you anyway. A lot of great parent-child communication happens in the car.