

Middle School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8

still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler finish the school year strong

Even though the school year isn't over, most middle schoolers are already thinking about summer vacation. The last few weeks of school, however, are just as important as the rest. It's vital for your middle schooler to stay focused so she can finish the school year strong.

To motivate your child to keep working hard as the year winds down:

1. Stick to routines. It's easy to get wooed by warmer temperatures and more daylight. If you find yourself letting her hang out with friends longer and longer and stay up later and later, it's time to get back on track. Morning comes as early as ever, and if your middle schooler doesn't get enough sleep at night,

she may be worn out and unable to focus in class.

- 2. Stay interested** in her schoolwork. Don't stop asking your child about what's happening in her classes just because by this point you're pretty familiar with what goes on there. Show her you still care about her education and the things she is learning in school.
- 3. Maintain expectations.** Remind your child that if her grades begin to slip near the end of the year—or if she stops completing her homework—there will be consequences. The thought of missing a summertime movie or trip to the pool may inspire her to buckle down.

Listen to your child's ideas and opinions



"Could you at least hear me out?" Whether you are in a discussion at work or with a family member, you've probably asked that question yourself. Because even if you don't get your way in the end, you want to know that your point of view was considered.

It should come as no surprise that middle schoolers feel the same way. According to a recent study, giving kids a chance to express their opinions makes them happier, more self-motivated and more confident—which affects their motivation to do well in school.

When your middle schooler has something to say, really listen to him. And when he makes a good point, seriously consider it. For example, he might have an idea about switching up his chores. Or, he may have a compelling argument for staying out a bit later on Friday night.

You may not always agree with your child, but by hearing him out, you are giving him the confidence to speak up and contribute in class and in other areas of his life.

Source: K.N. Marbell-Pierre and others, "Parental Autonomy Support in Two Cultures: The Moderating Effects of Adolescents' Self-Concepts," *Child Development*, nswc.com/mid_express.

Explore volunteer opportunities with your middle schooler



Community service may sound like a big commitment. But if your child can find just one hour a week, he

can do something significant to help others and himself.

Service opportunities are everywhere. Here are some age-appropriate ones for your child to consider:

- **Be a counselor** or a counselor-in-training at a summer program for younger children.
- **Help a neighborhood family.** Offer free babysitting, pet sitting or dog-walking services.
- **Collect canned food** and deliver it to a food bank.
- **Tutor a younger child** in math or reading over the summer.
- **Collect personal essentials**, such as toothbrushes, shampoo and soap, and donate them to a shelter.

- **Read to older people** at an assisted living center, or volunteer to lead a game, such as bingo.
- **Work at an animal shelter.** Or, collect pet food, old towels and blankets to donate.
- **Collect letters** thanking active duty servicemen and servicewomen and send them to an organization that ships packages to troops, such as www.operationgratitude.com.
- **Organize or participate** in a neighborhood clean-up event.
- **Do yard work** for a person who is elderly or has a disability.

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

Establish and maintain positive family connections this summer



Soon your child will have an extended break from his regular routine. With school out for the summer, he will likely

spend more time at home.

This is an opportunity for the two of you to spend some quality time together. Here ways to do it:

- **Increase the number** of times you eat together as a family. With a looser schedule, your child should be more available—not just to eat with you, but also to help you prepare meals and clean up.
- **Get active.** Take advantage of the long, warm, summer evenings. If you and your child like a sport, such as tennis, play together.

Or, just walk and enjoy each other's company—as well as the conversation that happens more naturally at these times.

- **Celebrate the weekend.** Summer weekends are precious and few. Never let them go to waste. Encourage your child to make a list of low-cost activities he'd like to do together. Then, schedule time to do them.
- **Plant a summer garden.** Involve your child in the planning, planting, watering and harvesting.
- **Make memories.** Take photos to record your summer. Spend an evening together making a slide show or putting the photos in an album or scrapbook.

Are you preparing your child for a safe summer?



Summer is prime time for fun and also for taking risks—especially for middle schoolers, who may not always be

in sight of an adult. Are you doing all you can to make sure your child is safe over the summer? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you require** your child to wear sunscreen when she is outdoors?
- ___ **2. Do you insist** that your child wear a helmet when on a bike, scooter or skateboard?
- ___ **3. Do you make** it a point to know where your child is, who she is with and what she is doing? Do you discourage hanging out after dark?
- ___ **4. Do you consider** your child's maturity before assigning chores, such as mowing the lawn with a riding lawn mower?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to drink plenty of water when working, playing or exercising outdoors in the heat?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are focused on summer safety. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Making art can help middle schoolers deal with emotions



There's no question that middle schoolers are sometimes moody. Changes in their bodies can make their behavior

unpredictable. Adolescents are also beginning to think about and define who they are. And all that can make them feel overwhelmed.

Art can help. Creating art gives kids a productive way to express themselves, and can even reduce anxiety. It can also help them understand and name their emotions—which is often the first step toward learning how to regulate those emotions.

To support your child's emotional well-being, encourage her to:

- **Keep a journal.** She can write or draw about her feelings. She can add quotations that motivate her.
- **Create a display box.** Your child can collect items that make her happy,

such as a small rock from a favorite outdoor place, a dried flower and a photo. Then, she can arrange them in the box in a visually pleasing way.

- **Create a “mood mandala.”**

Mandalas are geometric designs that can start as a series of circles. Your child can use one circle for each day of the month. Then, she can use color and design to reflect her feelings for each day. She can add designs and a favorite quote.

Your child may want to share her artistic creations. Or, she may want to keep them private. Just let her know you're available to talk.

If your middle schooler's moodiness lasts for days on end, or if she seems sad or anxious all the time, be sure to consult with her doctor.

Source: J. Fraga, “How Making Art Helps Teens Better Understand Their Mental Health,” KQED News, nswc.com/mid_mental.

Q: My eighth grader loves middle school, but the thought of starting high school next fall seems to overwhelm him. Is there anything I can do this summer to make the transition go more smoothly?

Questions & Answers

A: Absolutely! Although you can't guarantee your child an easy transition from middle school to high school, there are several things you can do this summer to help him prepare for the change:

- **Listen to him.** When your child talks about his fears regarding high school, pay attention. It may help you get to the bottom of the problem. For example, you might assume he is worried about making friends in a new school. It could turn out, though, that he's really just worried about getting lost in the halls or riding on a different school bus.
- **Help him get organized.** High school means more classes and a bigger workload. Help your child prepare by teaching him how to stay organized. Give him a small calendar (or let him download a calendar app) and encourage him to use it to keep track of his appointments and activities over the summer. This will help him get into the habit of planning his time and writing things down.
- **Visit the school.** See if you and your child can take a tour of the building during the summer. The more familiar he is with the layout, the more comfortable he may be on the first day of school.
- **Encourage him to talk** to a current high school freshman. Hearing first-hand about what the transition to high school is like may ease his fears.

Boost your child's math skills with an imaginary stock portfolio



Nearly every middle schooler is interested in making money. See if your child can “make” some money by playing a stock market game.

First, explain to your child how stocks are small pieces or *shares* of a company. If enough people are buying pieces of that company, the value of its stock will go up. But if people are selling off pieces of that company, the value of its stock will go down. Then, show her where the stock prices are listed online or in the newspaper.

Next, come up with an imaginary amount of money to invest. Then, have your child pick stocks for several companies. She'll have to decide how

much of her imaginary money she wants to spend on each stock.

Now ask your child to track the stocks online for one month. She should chart the prices each day and figure out how much money she has made or lost.

Explain that if she purchased 100 shares of a \$10 stock on the first day, she would have \$1,000 worth of the stock. But if the stock went up to \$11 on the second day, she would now have \$1,100 worth of the stock. She “made” \$100.

Have her look at her stocks this way for the entire month. At the end of the month, have her give the family a report on how she did. Don't forget to ask if there is anything different she would do next time, based on what she learned.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Be firm about limits on screen time this summer



Many kids watch more than twice as much TV in the summer as they do during the school year. And that doesn't count the time spent in front of a computer, on a tablet or with a cell phone!

Of course your child deserves time to relax over the summer. However, when it comes to screen time, limits are important. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute recommend setting limits on adolescents' screen time. Why? Because screen time can affect:

- **Maturity.** Middle schoolers should use part of the summer to take on new responsibilities, learn new hobbies and explore new interests. Binge watching a series on Netflix won't get your child very far on that journey.
- **Health.** Time spent in front of a screen is time kids are not spending on more healthy pursuits, such as exercise. Studies show that overindulging on screen time is linked to obesity, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol—each of which puts your child at risk of heart disease.
- **Social skills.** Students in middle school socialize with friends on social media. But too much of this might replace face-to-face time. Your child needs to spend “real life” time with friends and family, too.

Source: T. Bahrapour, “Teens who spend less time in front of screens are happier — up to a point, new research shows,” *The Washington Post*, nswc.com/mid_less-screen.

Offer your middle schooler purposeful writing activities

Summer vacation is a good time to help your middle schooler learn two important things about writing. First, writing has a purpose. It is not something teachers make up to torture their students! Second, writing can be a lot of fun, especially when writing about a great topic.

Encourage your child to write:

- **A review** of a book he has read. This is different from a book report. In a review, he should focus on whether he liked the book, why or why not, and whether he would recommend it to others.
- **Trivia questions** about a favorite sport. This is a wonderful way to show what an “expert” he is.
- **A letter to the editor**, or a letter of complaint to a company. Airing gripes is a purpose for writing. Have him share his.



- **A letter**—yes, a real letter on paper. Have him make Grandma's day, or that of another relative or family friend.
- **Fan fiction.** He can choose his favorite characters from any kind of media and then put them in a story that he creates.

Three adjustments can keep your middle schooler reading



Your child's elementary school years are well behind her, and high school looms ahead (maybe even next fall).

Keep your child's progression to young adulthood in mind as you help her select reading material.

To encourage a lifelong habit of reading for pleasure:

1. **Tap into** your middle schooler's more sophisticated ability to understand and care about current events. Read a newspaper in print or online every day and share at least one article of interest

with your child. Challenge her to share an article each day with you as well.

2. **Help your child** find books about kids her age asserting themselves to make a difference. Middle schoolers are beginning to think about their place in the world and the difference they can make. Ask a librarian for some book suggestions.
3. **Ask your child** to pick a book for the two of you to read and discuss. You'll show her that you think reading is important—and that you value her ideas.