

Middle School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Boost your middle schooler's success by staying involved!

Many parents wonder if their involvement in school really makes a difference once their children reach adolescence. The answer is *yes!* Study after study shows that parents have an enormous effect on their children's ultimate success in school—especially during the middle school years.

Years of research have proven that students whose parents are continuously involved in their education have:

- **Better grades and test scores.**
- **Higher graduation rates.**
- **Lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse.**
- **Stronger self-esteem.**

Staying involved in your middle schooler's education won't just help

him today—it'll help him tomorrow and for the rest of his life.

To play an active role in your child's education:

- **Show an interest** in what he's learning. Ask your child what he did in class today and *really* listen to his answer.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Your child is more likely to believe in himself if he knows you believe in him. So set the bar high and cheer him on as he strives to reach it.
- **Be a role model.** Inspire your child to work hard by displaying perseverance yourself.

Source: N.E. Hill, D.P. Witherspoon and D. Bartz, "Parental involvement in education during middle school: Perspectives of ethnically diverse parents, teachers, and students," *The Journal of Educational Research*, Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Missing school affects more than grades



Missing too much school won't just hurt your middle schooler's performance in class—it may damage

her future. Studies show that kids who are frequently truant are likelier than their peers to:

- **Repeat a grade.**
- **Get expelled.**
- **Drop out of school.**

So don't let your child convince you that casually missing school is "no big deal." Attendance is vital—and it's her responsibility. After all, it's her future that's on the line!

To make sure your middle schooler's attendance doesn't suffer:

- **Be firm.** Every vague complaint shouldn't be a ticket to a day off. Keep your child home only if she has a fever or feels *really* sick.
- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge that school's not always fun. Your middle schooler may appreciate your honesty.
- **Be proactive.** If your child is clearly avoiding school, find out why. Start by talking to her school counselor.

Source: P.W. Jordan and R. Miller, *Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd, niswc.com/mid_chronic.

Middle schoolers need parents' help navigating social media



According to Common Sense Media, middle schoolers spend more than 4.5 hours on entertainment screen media every day. And a good portion of that time is spent on social media.

Middle schoolers need guidance and support as they learn to navigate the world of social media. To help your child:

- **Learn about her online activity.** Ask her where she spends the most time and how often she checks her social media accounts. Download the apps she uses most often. Learn how they work. And check to see if your child has one account she shows you and another she shares with friends.
- **Set standards for online behavior.** Your child shouldn't post anything on social media that she wouldn't want you or her friends' parents reading. Remind her that nothing

on the internet ever goes away so she should think carefully before she posts anything.

- **Encourage her to limit her followers.** Kids want to be popular, and they sometimes add followers at random. To protect privacy, your child should know who is following her online.
- **Build in digital downtime.** Be a role model yourself—put the phone away at meal time. After dinner, go for a walk or read a book.

Source: A. Wichard-Edds, "5 Ways Parents Can Help Kids Balance Social Media with the Real World," *The Washington Post*, nswc.com/mid_socialmedia.

"Social media is an amazing tool, but it's really the face-to-face interaction that makes a long-term impact."

—Felicia Day

Physical activity is linked to stronger school performance



Exercise helps your child build the strong body he needs for good health. Research suggests that exercise can also improve your child's academic performance.

A review of 14 studies involving 12,000 students found that active students performed better in school than students who weren't active. Exercise can help:

- **Increase the flow of oxygen and blood to your child's brain.** This improves cognition (thinking skills) and his ability to focus.

- **Put your child in a better mood.** Exercise is known to increase positive feelings and reduce stress. Stress and anxiety work against school progress.
- **Reinforce certain lessons that help your child do better in school.** This is especially true if he is on a sports team. Sports require players to follow rules and to take turns. These actions are also associated with school success.

Source: A. Singh, Ph.D., "Physical Activity and Performance at School: A Systematic Review of the Literature Including a Methodological Quality Assessment," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, American Medical Association.

Are you helping your child get off to a great start?



Middle school brings a lot of changes and transitions. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child through the first few weeks of school:

- ___ **1. Have you reviewed** your child's classes, the names of his teachers and the name of his counselor?
- ___ **2. Have you asked** your child about whether he can open his locker and find his classes?
- ___ **3. Do you work** with your child to increase his use of calendars and other tools, such as to-do lists?
- ___ **4. Are you patient** with your child? Some days he will seem very independent, and other days he will seem to need you more than ever.
- ___ **5. Have you made your home** a comfortable place by continuing familiar rituals, such as family meals?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are doing a good job of helping your child navigate the challenges of middle school. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Help your child find a balance between school and activities



A whole new world of extracurricular activities often opens up once a child reaches middle school. And

many middle schoolers dive right in.

This is mostly good. Activities are fun and build friendships. They teach respect for peers and adult leaders. They steer children away from simply “hanging out.” And they are an important part of a successful college application.

But there can be too much of a good thing. Academics are the most important part of school. To help your middle schooler find the right balance:

- **Encourage her to prioritize.** Which activities did your child enjoy best last year? Which benefited her the most? Ask her to think honestly about these questions. Don't settle

for a terse “I loved doing everything!” response. If your child is going to make smart choices about extracurricular activities, she'll need to evaluate them candidly.

- **List the pros and cons.** Once your child has narrowed down her favorites, have her list the pluses and minuses of each one. For instance, lacrosse was fun, but it consumed too many weekends. Help her see each activity with a clear and critical eye.
- **Devise a plan.** Keeping each activity's pros and cons in mind, help your child select one or two to join this semester. In a few weeks, reassess the situation. If she's already struggling in class, make some changes. But if she's thriving? She may have struck the right balance!

Survive middle school with tips from a school counselor



When it comes to the tools he'll need to succeed academically, your child will need

more than just pencils and paper. Be sure to send him to class with proper “middle-school survival skills,” too!

These skills are crucial because excelling in middle school involves more than academics. Your child will have the best chance of thriving if he:

- **Is emotionally healthy.** Adolescents are notoriously filled with self-doubt. And that can make them more likely to give in to peer pressure or attempt to “fit in” at all costs. So help keep your child emotionally strong. Spend time with him. Encourage healthy

friendships and then get to know those friends. Take an interest in the things that interest your child. And if you see him losing his way, seek professional help.

- **Understands his changing body.** Never underestimate the impact physical changes can have on your child! A poor self-image can quickly translate into poor grades. Body image is that important to preteens. So talk to your child about the physical changes he'll likely experience during the middle school years. If he knows they're normal, he may feel less abnormal when they happen.

Source: C. Francis, “Surviving Middle School: Tips for Parents from a Middle School Counselor,” American School Counselor Association, niscw.com/mid_counselor.

Q: My child started middle school last year and had a tough time fitting in. Now she's dreading the new school year. What can I do to ease her fears and support her?

Questions & Answers

A: Given what your child's been through, it makes sense that she'd be nervous about the upcoming year. Luckily, a difficult time last year does not mean this one will be the same.

To help your child flourish this time around:

- **Listen to her.** Let your child talk about last year's troubles, and really pay attention to what she says. Don't dismiss her concerns by simply telling her that this year will be better. If she's still upset about last year, she needs to get those feelings out.
- **Define the problem.** Help her pinpoint the trouble spot (or spots). “You struggled last year because you felt like you didn't have anything in common with the other kids. Is that right?” The more clearly you can define the issue, the better.
- **Brainstorm solutions.** Together with your child, think of ways to address the issue. “Where are some good places to meet kids who like what you like?” Possibilities include clubs (school-based or not), sports teams, volunteer groups and religious organizations.
- **Take action.** Decide how to help your child put ideas into action, and then do it. “Since you said you'd like to find other kids who play chess, maybe you can talk to your school counselor about starting a chess club.” This may not solve all of your child's school problems, but it's a good start.

It Matters: Responsibility

Learning is your middle schooler's responsibility



Middle school marks an important new phase in your child's education. From this point on, he

will be expected to take increased responsibility for his own learning. Instead of being teacher-led, learning in the secondary years becomes student-led.

To support your child, encourage him to:

- **Stand up for himself** and his education. He should think about what he needs to be successful and ask for it. Encourage him to get to know his teachers so he feels comfortable approaching them.
- **Participate in class.** Your child should ask questions and give opinions in class.
- **Get help at the first sign** of a problem. He should find out when his teachers are available for extra help.
- **Work to get along** with his teachers and classmates. Everyone learns better in a pleasant environment.
- **Take challenging classes.** Your child shouldn't just coast along. If his classes are easy for him, he may not be in the right classes. Encourage him to talk to his school counselor about his options.
- **Think about his learning.** Instead of just memorizing information, your child should ask himself, "How does this topic relate to something I have learned or experienced before?"

Help your middle schooler build a true sense of responsibility

Boost your middle schooler's sense of responsibility and you'll help her in the classroom and in life. To nurture her sense of responsibility:

- **Help your child manage money.** If she does not get an allowance, consider giving her one. By letting her manage money (and not spotting her a few bucks each time she runs low), she may develop more respect for it.
- **Include your child** when you're paying bills or working on your budget. Don't share every financial detail, but let her see what budgeting looks like. "I'd love to order pizza tonight, but it'll have to wait. It's not in our budget this week."
- **Revamp her chore list.** Are you still packing your child's lunch? How about doing her laundry? If so, pass the torch. Don't overload her with hours of new tasks, but



work toward giving her meaningful responsibilities.

- **Let your child experience consequences.** When your child makes a mistake, don't swoop in to save her (unless she's in true danger). If you're always running to her rescue, she'll never learn from her mistakes.

Share four tools to help your student stay organized



Responsibility for staying on top of several classes as well as extracurricular activities is a big challenge in middle school.

To make organization easier for your child, have him use these tools:

1. **Sticky notes.** Have your child place sticky notes on the spines of books and binders in his locker that he should bring home for homework.
2. **To-do lists.** Have your child write down everything he needs to complete for the following day, week, month, etc.

3. **A calendar.** Your child should write all assignment due dates and test dates on a calendar. Remind him to check it often.
4. **Schedules.** Show your child how to make and follow a schedule every day. Here's a sample schedule:
 3:00 *Home from school*
 3:15 *Snack and relaxation*
 3:30 *Homework*
 5:00 *Change for soccer practice*
 5:30 *Leave for soccer practice*

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