

Parents[®]

Middle School

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Education Service Center Region 15

still make the difference!



Encourage your child to make school-related resolutions

New Year's resolutions aren't just for adults! Middle schoolers can benefit from them, too. Encourage your child to come up with a few school-related resolutions. If she's not sure where to start, suggest she make resolutions regarding:

- **Projects.** If your child typically puts off big assignments until the last moment, get her to turn over a new leaf. The next time a book report or research paper looms, she should break it into small parts and tackle one bit at a time.
- **Homework.** If your child's study habits are haphazard, she can refine them. Instead of hitting the books "whenever and wherever," help her designate a work area. Review her after-school schedule and set a regular time for studying.
- **Writing.** If your child groans when she has to write a paper for school, challenge her to strengthen her writing skills. Writing in a journal for a few minutes every day will help her do just that.
- **Reading.** If your child doesn't like to read for pleasure, help her set reading goals. Start small. Perhaps she can read for 15 minutes every night before going to bed.
- **Extracurricular activities.** If your child signs up for every activity that comes her way, she may be spreading herself too thin. Have her think about which activities can stay and which should go. And remember: School comes first. No activity—regardless of how much she enjoys it—should be allowed to interfere with academics.

Attendance is a predictor of future success



Your middle schooler is about halfway through the school year. How has his attendance been?

Strong attendance is as important to your child's school career as the foundation is to a house. Without it, there is nothing to build on.

Need some more convincing on the importance of attendance in middle school? According to a recent study:

- **Attendance and grades in middle school** are the best indicators of how students will perform in high school.
- **Students who are chronically absent in middle school** are at high risk for being off-track in high school. These students are less likely to graduate on time and more likely to drop out of school altogether.
- **Students who make even modest improvements to their attendance or grades in middle school** significantly increase their chances of success in high school.

Source: E.M. Allensworth and others, *Looking Forward to High School and College: Middle Grade Indicators of Readiness in Chicago Public Schools*, The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, niswc.com/mid_attendancestudy.

Three ways parent involvement benefits you and your family



Parent involvement at the middle-school level is just as important as it was in elementary school.

Students' grades, test scores, attendance and behavior all tend to be better when parents are aware of what is going on at school.

But your child is not the only one who benefits when you get involved. Here are three ways being involved also benefits you:

- 1. You know whom to contact** if you have concerns. You know your child's teachers. You know the counselor and are familiar with the administrators.
- 2. You understand more** about how the school works. Perhaps you are from an area where the school system is quite different from the one where you are currently living. Being involved

helps you become familiar with the local education system.

- 3. The school and the teachers** have a better understanding of you and your family. Perhaps English is not your first language. Perhaps you need support. The school may be able to direct you to community agencies and organizations who can help. If they know what is going on at home, they can better respond to your child at school.

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”

—Henry Ford

Strategies can help your middle schooler ace true-false tests



True-false tests may seem simple, but that doesn't mean they're easy. Like for every other exam, your child should prepare for these tests by studying and getting plenty of sleep the night before—and eating a good breakfast the morning of—test day.

To help her do her best on these sometimes tricky tests or quizzes, remind your child to pay close attention to the wording of each question.

She should:

- **Watch out for words** like *never* and *always*. When they appear, it means *every* part of the

statement must be correct for “true” to be the right answer.

- **Notice words** like *sometimes* or *generally*. These words mean that *most* of the statement must be accurate for “true” to be the right answer.
- **Remember that** if *any* part of the statement is incorrect, “false” is the right answer.

Before the test, your child should ask if there's a penalty for guessing an answer. If there isn't a penalty for guessing, tell your child to go ahead and roll the dice. She's got a 50-50 shot of picking the right answer!

Source: “Multiple Choice and True/False Tests,” Houghton College, niswc.com/mid_truefalse.

Are you helping your child prepare for the future?



The steps your child takes in middle school influence his future success. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions

below to see if you are encouraging your child to prepare for the future:

- 1. Do you encourage** your child to take the most rigorous math class he is capable of taking each year?
- 2. Do you recognize** the importance of reading in middle school and urge your child to read often?
- 3. Do you encourage** your child to learn about current affairs to boost his interest and knowledge of civics and history?
- 4. Do you encourage** your child to take a foreign language? Starting early can give your child a head start for high school.
- 5. Have you talked** with your child about his interests and how they might translate to a career after school?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child focus on the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Support your child as homework becomes more challenging



As kids progress through middle school, they will likely notice a significant change in their homework.

There may be more of it, and it may be more challenging. In most cases, it will be both.

At this point, many parents aren't sure how to react. They may no longer feel comfortable and confident helping with homework. Or they may worry that their child has too much to do and that he will never be able to get it all done.

Rest assured that you are still a valuable resource as your child does homework. You can suggest places for him to get information. "Is there

a government website that deals with that?" Or you can offer to help him find a book at the library. You can also share tips on keeping assignments organized, which becomes even more important in middle school.

Through it all, keep telling your child that you have confidence in him. Yes, the homework is harder, but he can do it. Look at how much he has already learned. Compliment him on his effort. And encourage him to talk to his teacher as soon as possible if he is having a problem.

Source: H.S. Glenn, Ph.D. and M.L. Brock, M.A., *7 Strategies for Developing Capable Students*, Prima Publishing.

Help your child develop a study system to tackle chapter tests



If your child tends to study by the "seat of his pants" whenever an end-of-chapter test approaches, it's time

to overhaul his habits!

Help him develop a system for studying textbook chapters—one he can use anytime a test looms. Suggest that he:

- 1. Start by reading** the first section of the chapter. He may be tempted to race through and finish the whole thing, but tell him to resist the urge. He'll remember more if he studies one section at a time.
- 2. Imagine what questions** his teacher might ask. Looking back over the section he just read, have your child think of things his teacher could ask about the material. If he can't think of any, he should read it again.
- 3. Write down those questions.** Have him jot down each of his

"imagined" questions on a separate index card and write its answer on the back of the card.

- 4. Proceed section by section.** If one section is particularly long or tricky, or if he can imagine several questions about it on the test, suggest he break the section into smaller parts.
- 5. Identify new vocabulary words.** After he's made his "question cards" for the chapter, have him go back through the chapter and look for unfamiliar words. He can write each one on the front of an index card and its definition on the back.

Once he has a chapter's worth of information-packed cards, he should use them to study for the test. Better yet, you can use them to quiz him!

Source: J.S. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework: The Complete Guide to Encouraging Good Study Habits and Ending the Homework Wars*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Q: My child does OK in school, but she's not working up to her potential. When I ask her why, she replies, "School's not that important." Where is she getting this message?

Questions & Answers

A: Unfortunately, your child is probably getting this message from several different places—and in very subtle ways. Although popular culture gives lip service to the notion that school matters, kids often absorb the opposite message. Here's why:

- **The media highlights** unique success stories. Stories of self-made millionaires abound. And often, the clincher is that some of these folks abandoned school. So you can see why your child might think, "Well, if she got rich without studying hard, then I can, too." This is why it's vital to remind her that these people are *extreme* exceptions to the rule.
- **Many popular TV shows** and movies celebrate ignorance. The most popular characters are often not-so-bright "jokesters." But if your child believes intentional ignorance is her ticket to a bright future, she's in for a rude awakening.
- **Parents are busy.** Do you groan about your child's school projects? Are you too busy to look over homework? The message your child is getting may not be the one you intend to send.

Show your child that school is a priority by asking about school every day. Let her know that her best chance at a happy and successful life is to take school seriously.

It Matters: Discipline

How should you respond to your child's back talk?



Even the child who gave you no trouble in elementary school may develop a “smart mouth” in middle

school. At this stage in life, adolescents begin to question and challenge. As a parent, you bear the brunt of the sharp, dismissive and often disrespectful statements.

To curb your child's back talk:

- **Be a role model.** Your middle schooler hears rude and mocking language everywhere. But she shouldn't hear it from you. Treat your child with respect, even when her behavior doesn't earn it.
- **Point out your child's language.** “That is disrespectful.” “Your tone is not appropriate.”
- **Use consequences.** Calmly tell your child how you feel about the way she speaks to you. State the consequences: “You are allowed to be angry with me. But you are not allowed to speak disrespectfully. If you continue to do so, you will lose TV privileges for a week.”
- **Acknowledge improvement.** If you notice that your child is making an effort to cut the back talk, say so.
- **Consider your child's intent.** Sometimes, what seems like back talk is your child's attempt to show you that her opinion differs from yours. She is allowed to have a different opinion, but she needs to express it appropriately. Show her how by restating her point using a respectful tone.

Middle schoolers need parents to be role models, not friends

You are many things to your child, but a “friend” shouldn't be at the top of the list. That's because it's your job to shape him into a responsible adult by setting rules, boundaries and expectations for behaviors.

Suppose your child complains about his “horrible” teacher. A friend might join in: “You're right, she's awful!” But if *you* do that, you're undermining the teacher's authority and showing your child that it's OK to be disrespectful.

So approach the same scenario as his parent: “I'm sorry if you're having trouble with your teacher. I'm sure you will be able to work



it out. But let me know if you need some help or advice.”

By responding this way, you're acknowledging your child's feelings. And you're also being his parent—not just his friend.

Talk with your child about the importance of respect



To be successful in school, your child must learn to respect herself and others, including teachers, school staff and classmates. Still, many middle schoolers aren't quite sure what respect really is.

Talk with your middle schooler about the importance of respect and the role it plays in:

- **Behavior.** Your child should always think before acting. She should ask herself, “Would I like to be treated this way?” “Will this action give me a positive result?” If she can answer *yes*, she will probably act respectfully.
- **Disagreements.** Your child can disagree with someone and still be respectful. Respect uses words, the gentler the better, to disagree. Using curse words or being violent is the ultimate form of disrespect.
- **Property.** Your child should take care of her textbooks and return items she borrows on time. She should be sure to leave things in the same or better condition than she found them.
- **Friends.** Your child should surround herself with peers who treat her and others with respect. Remind your child that people will judge her in part by who her friends are. That may be all it takes to convince her to choose her friends carefully.