

# Middle School Parents®

Education Service Center Region 15

March 2016  
Vol. 19, No. 7

**still make the difference!**



## Teach your middle schooler to bounce back from failure

No parent ever wants to see a child fail. But failure is a part of life, and many students first begin to realize this during the middle school years.

While you can't prevent your child from failing, you can do something even more essential: Encourage her to get back up and try again.

To help your middle schooler develop resilience:

- **Emphasize effort.** Children often think that ability is the only key to success. If they fail a math test, they may say: "I just stink at math." The way not to "stink" at something is to keep practicing it. Praise your child's *efforts* and not just *results*.
- **Encourage interests.** Just like anyone else, your child is more likely to stick with an activity she enjoys. And by sticking with it—whether it is reading, sports or piano—she'll get better at it and improve her overall self-concept. With a boost in confidence, she may be more willing to tackle more difficult activities, because she believes she can eventually prevail.

- **Be a role model.** Remind your child that adults don't succeed at everything they try either, especially the first time. Let your child see how you keep trying—whether it is to get a new job, learn a new skill or get organized at home. Say things like, "I get discouraged sometimes, but I know I will make this happen if I keep at it."

### Share memories from your time in middle school



Do you remember being 13 and going through some difficult times? You might have felt clumsy, nervous, misunderstood or unpopular. It's important that you talk about these times with your child.

Many college professors do something similar in their education classes. They ask students who are studying to become teachers to write about how they felt as middle school students.

Why bring up these old feelings? The feelings actually help soon-to-be teachers see into the hearts and minds of the middle schoolers they will be teaching. They agree that this helps them find common ground with middle schoolers.

It works for parents, too. It's likely you will be more understanding if you can remember having had similar experiences.

So the next time your child seems upset, share a story from your middle-school years. Your child may be more willing to open up if he thinks you can relate to what he is saying.

**Source:** J.S. Davies and N.G. Adams, "Exploring Early Adolescent Identity Through Teacher Autobiography," *Middle School Journal*, National Middle School Association.

# The 'dropout seed' may be planted in middle school



Dropouts may occur in high school, but the seed is often planted in middle school. In other words, many kids who drop out of school between ninth and twelfth grade started down that path in sixth, seventh or eighth grade.

Studies show that, without intervention, a sixth grader is 75 percent more likely than his peers to drop out of school if he:

- **Misses class** 20 percent or more of the time.
- **Fails language arts or math.**
- **Earns poor grades** in a core course due to behavior issues. That's the bad news. The good news is that parents can intervene and steer middle schoolers down the right path. Here's how:
- **Expect your child** to attend school every single day. He should only miss school if he is ill or there is a family emergency.

- **Encourage your child** to work hard and do his best.
- **Let your child know** that you believe in him—and that you know he'll succeed at whatever he tries.
- **Encourage your child** to become involved in an extracurricular activity. Students with ties to the school beyond academics are more likely to stay in school.
- **Work as a team** with your child's teachers. You all want the best for him.
- **Talk about school** and what your child is learning every day.

**Source:** A. Khan "Middle School Moment," FRONTLINE, niswc.com/mid\_dropout.

**"Kids get in trouble when no one is paying attention."**

—Madeline Levine, Ph.D.

## Help your child figure out how to connect with classmates



Your child just uttered those dreaded words: "I don't fit in at school!" What should you do? First, don't overreact.

Take a deep breath and get the facts.

If you discover your child is being bullied, intervene and tell the school. Bullying is too serious a problem to be chalked up to "kids being kids."

On the other hand, if your child feels like an outsider simply because she doesn't know how to jump in and participate with her peers, here's how you can help:

- **Explore her likes and dislikes.** Your child is maturing, and her interests are surely expanding.

Maybe there's an activity or sport that appeals to her now, even if it wasn't on her radar screen before.

- **Find out what's available.** Once you've discussed her interests, see what school clubs or teams might be a good fit. "You love graphic design and working on the yearbook could be a way to meet other kids who like it, too."
- **Look beyond the school.** Volunteer organizations, county recreation leagues and community theaters are excellent places to meet other kids. If your child finds her niche in one of them, she may feel more confident and less like the "odd man out" in school.

## Are you keeping communication lines open?



Middle school is a time of change. Your child needs *you* to be the constant. He must be sure that he can come to you when he needs to talk.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you and your child are communicating well:

1. **Do you make** time to have regular conversations with your child?
2. **Do you strive** to remain calm, even during disagreements with your child?
3. **Do you respect** your child's point of view and require that he do the same?
4. **Do you use** nonverbal communication, such as smiles, "thumbs up" and hugs?
5. **Do you avoid** nagging by using tools such as checklists for chores and homework?

### How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean that you are working to keep the lines of communication open. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.



Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1283

For subscription information call or write:  
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-  
7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May  
by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS,  
Inc., an independent, private agency.  
Equal opportunity employer.

Copyright © 2016 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.  
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

# Effective note-taking skills can lead to greater test success



Research shows that taking notes can benefit students in many ways. Some students forget what the teacher says in class, but they will remember if they have a written record. Reviewing class notes is also a great way to study for tests.

Share these note-taking tips with your middle schooler:

- **Think about** what is important and write it down. If your teacher writes important points on the board or displays them on a screen, copy them down. If not, listen for names, dates, times of events and other such key facts.
- **Don't try to write down everything.** That will exhaust you and won't help you do well on the test. Check with your teacher if you are not sure what the highlights are.
- **Review and rewrite your notes** when you get home. Notes taken

in a hurry are sometimes sloppy. Rewriting them ensures you know what you are reading when you study later. It also helps the information stick in your mind. You can also try typing them and printing them out.

- **Enlist a friend.** If a classmate also takes notes, you can compare them. Maybe your friend picked up something you missed. Study together and quiz each other for practice.
- **Stay organized.** Your notes won't help you study if you lose them. It won't help you if you don't know which class they are for, or for which time period. Consider using a binder that has different sections, labeled with the name of each class. Date your notes and file them in the appropriate section.

**Source:** "Note-taking Tips," TeensHealth, Nemours, niswc.com/mid\_notes.

## Keep your middle schooler safe and productive when home alone



You may feel your middle schooler is mature and capable. However, if he comes home to an empty house every day after school, you probably still worry about him.

Here are five strategies to make sure your child's after-school alone time is safe and that he spends the time being productive and working on homework:

1. **Prepare for emergencies.** Before leaving your child alone, be sure he knows what to do in case of a fire, severe weather or other urgent situation.

2. **Write down the rules.** Whether it's "no friends over" or "no cooking" while you're away, make your expectations clear.
3. **Insist he check in.** He should call or text you as soon as he arrives home.
4. **Help him develop a routine.** If the bus drops your child off at 4 p.m. and you get home at 6 p.m., give him a framework for filling those hours. "Take 30 minutes to relax, and then tackle your homework."
5. **Create a Plan B.** Keys get lost. Doors can jam. So make sure your child has a back-up plan if he can't get into the house.

**Q:** My daughter is doing well in school, but she is driving me crazy at home. She zones out when I'm speaking to her and seems to take great pleasure in annoying me. Why is she trying so hard to upset me?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** It's great that your child is doing well in school. Her home environment plays a big role in her academic success, so it's important to deal with her frustrating behavior in positive ways.

As difficult as it might be to believe, there's a good chance your child isn't trying to upset you. In fact, it's possible her behavior isn't about you at all.

Some psychologists believe there are two kinds of parents:

1. **Positive thinkers.** These parents feel their kids are basically good. When their kids "zone out," they chalk it up to distraction, not misbehavior. Positive thinkers are also likely to be calm when faced with annoying behavior.
2. **Negative thinkers.** These parents see their children's frustrating behavior as disrespectful. Worse, they believe it's targeted at them, so they're likely to react angrily.

Which kind of parent are you? If you see *every* instance of annoying behavior as a direct insult, you're likely to be angry with your child much of the time and to assume she's trying to upset you.

Instead, take a more positive approach, one that acknowledges she's a normal preteen. You might be more likely to react calmly—and to avoid being driven nuts!

# It Matters: Reading

## Tips for getting your child to read more!



You already know you can't force your child to read. So focus your efforts on making sure she has time to read and finds reading worth her while, at least for a few minutes each day.

To motivate your child:

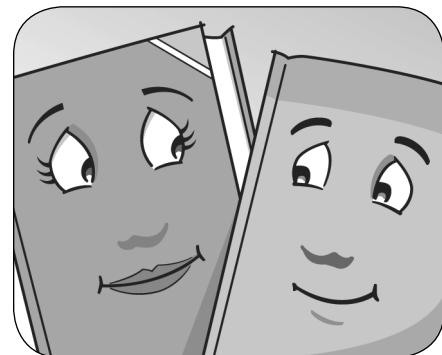
- **Let her stay up** a bit later to read. (No more than about 15 minutes on school nights—she needs her sleep!)
- **Ask her to read** to another person. This gets your child reading and allows her to do something nice for someone else, all in one. Reading to a younger sibling is an obvious choice. But an older relative would love to have your child read to him, too.
- **Encourage her to read** in her own way. Your child does not have to finish every book she starts. Let her know that she can put a book down if she doesn't like it. Or she can read a series out of order if she wants. Reading is a form of freedom!
- **Don't criticize** what she reads. Unless the material is harmful or inappropriate, try not to worry too much about what your middle schooler reads. You may think teen magazines are "junk," but reading them is better than reading nothing.
- **Suggest that she offer** her opinion. Middle schoolers like to think they can influence others. By writing a book review, your child might be able to do just that!

## Enjoy reading experiences with your middle schooler

**M**any things are competing for your child's attention now that he is in middle school. However, reading for pleasure is one of the best things he can do to ensure school success.

To encourage reading:

- **Read with your child.** Ask the librarian to suggest some books for middle schoolers. Pick a book and reserve two copies. Set up a "mini book club" just for the two of you. Offer a special outing or privilege for finishing the book. Remember, finishing includes discussing it together.
- **Read at the same time.** Your child is less likely to get distracted if you are doing the same thing



he is doing. Pick a time each day when you both can sit down for 20 minutes and read.

- **Look for movies** that are based on books. Interest in a movie can make your child more likely to read the book that prompted it. Plan to read the book and see the movie together.

## What reading skills will your child use in middle school?



School success depends on your child's ability to understand what she reads. But what does that *really* mean?

Here are six areas your child should focus on:

1. **Knowing the author's purpose.** Why did the author write this? Was it to inform the reader? To entertain? To influence thinking?
2. **Identifying the main idea** and details. What is the author's basic message? What does she add to her writing that supports and strengthens this message?
3. **Understanding descriptive language.** "The ocean sang to

me," doesn't mean the ocean really *sings*. It means that the author finds the ocean appealing.

4. **Sequencing.** What happened first in the story? What happened next? What was the result?
5. **Looking at relationships** between things that happened in the story and the outcome of the story.
6. **Understanding the characters.** What feelings do they have? How do they act as a result of those feelings?

**Source:** ACT, "For Middle Schoolers: Activities to Build College-Level Reading Skills," AdLit.org, niswc.com/mid\_readskills.