

Middle School Parents[®]

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Education Service Center Region 15

still make the difference!



Expect your middle schooler to succeed in school and life!

Don't just *hope* your middle schooler will succeed—*expect* him to succeed! If you have high, yet realistic, expectations for your child, he will rise to meet them.

To help your middle schooler succeed in the classroom and beyond:

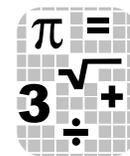
- **Don't act surprised** when he succeeds. Did your child just bring home a B+ on a super-hard science test? Instead of acting shocked, act like you never doubted that he'd do well. "That's awesome! I knew all of your extra studying this week would pay off!"
- **Support him when he stumbles.** Never belittle your child when he messes up. Remind him that

failure happens to everyone sometimes. Besides, plenty of other people in the world will be there to criticize him. That's why your constant love and acceptance are so vital. Be your middle schooler's "safe place."

- **Discourage "victim mode."** When unfortunate things happen, don't chalk them up to bad luck. That will make your child feel as if he's a victim and has no control over situations.

Instead, empower him to take action. When something goes wrong, ask him what he learned from it. Help him think about how he might handle similar situations in the future.

Help your child overcome math frustration



During middle school, students are introduced to more abstract math concepts. If they've missed basic concepts along the way, they may find it difficult to keep up in class.

When this happens, middle schoolers can become anxious and defensive. Their lack of confidence may grow and can cripple their progress in school.

To help your child:

- **Really listen to her.** Express sympathy when she complains, "I don't get it!" Say, "This is challenging, but I know you *can* get it." Ask questions to help her figure out what is confusing.
- **Get familiar with the math** concepts she is learning. Look through her math textbook and look online for additional resources.
- **Don't try to reteach your child.** Your approach might conflict with the teacher's.
- **Make the teacher an ally.** Ask about your child's progress. Are her difficulties common for her grade? What special help can you, the teacher and the school provide?

Get the most out of this year's parent-teacher conferences



Parent-teacher conferences in middle school are often brief. But they're extremely important, too. To get the most from a meeting with your child's teacher:

- **Make a list of questions.** Is there something in particular you need to discuss with your child's teacher? Jot it down ahead of time so you won't forget to bring it up.
- **Be prompt.** Arriving late may delay conferences after yours.
- **Stay focused.** To make the most of your time, avoid chatting about things that have nothing to do with school.

- **Be open-minded.** Really listen to what your child's teacher has to say. Her insight matters.
- **Ask the teacher how you can help at home.** Remember: You are partners in your child's education.
- **Take notes.** This will help you remember what you discussed.

"Unity is strength ... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved."

—Mattie Stepanek

Reading for pleasure can help your child do better in school!



It's true: Reading for pleasure boosts academic achievement. One study showed that children who read for pleasure had higher gains in math, vocabulary and spelling than those who rarely read.

For these and many other reasons, it's important to encourage reading at home. Here's how to get your middle schooler to read:

- **Read aloud.** Middle schoolers aren't too old for this. Take turns reading chapters to each other. Or have your child read to a younger sibling.
- **Read yourself.** It's important to show your child that reading is enjoyable.
- **Keep reading materials handy.** Fill your house with books, magazines, newspapers and other reading materials.
- **Look for books.** Take regular trips to the library or bookstore. See what books appeal to your child and encourage her interests.
- **Talk with librarians and booksellers.** Ask what books they recommend for kids your child's age.
- **Set limits on technology time.** This leaves more time for reading.
- **Don't force your child to read books she doesn't enjoy.** Free-time reading should always be interesting.
- **Discuss books.** Tell your child about a book you liked. Or ask your child to tell you about her favorite book.
- **Provide time for reading.** Make room in your child's schedule for reading every day.

Source: "Study provides evidence that reading for pleasure boosts children's academic performance," National Literacy Trust, niswc.com/mid_pleasure.

Are you spending time with your middle schooler?



Middle schoolers still need their parents, but in different ways than they used to. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions

below to find out if you are giving your child the right kind of attention:

- ___ 1. **Do you invite** your child to spend time with you doing something he is interested in?
- ___ 2. **Do you take advantage of** opportunities when you have your child's undivided attention, such as when you are in the car together?
- ___ 3. **Do you allow** your child to invite friends to some family activities?
- ___ 4. **Do you make** a strong effort to share at least one meal a day with your child?
- ___ 5. **Are you happy** for your child when he has experiences that boost his independence, even if you are not doing the activities with him?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, then you are adapting to and meeting your child's changing needs for togetherness. Mostly *no* answers? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

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Understand the important role of guidance counselors



When you were in middle school, you may not have had a guidance counselor. A generation ago,

counselors often worked only in high schools. Their job was to help students choose courses and plan for life after graduation.

Guidance counselors still do those things in high schools. But now they do much, much more. Counselors know that students need good mental health, as well as good physical health, to be productive learners. They are a key part of the educational team in middle schools.

Your child's guidance counselor can help your child with:

- **Academics** and study skills, including organization.
- **Choosing classes.**
- **Solving problems** with friends. This can include mediation.
- **Making decisions.**
- **Coping skills**, including methods for coping with bullies.
- **Setting goals.**
- **Making plans** for high school and beyond.
- **Counseling sessions**, either one-on-one or in a small group. This can include grief counseling.
- **Referrals** to other professionals.
- **Finding support** if your child or your family is facing a crisis.

Source: "Why Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association, nswc.com/mid_counselors.

A good night's sleep is critical for staying focused in school



A key part of your middle schooler's education happens far outside the classroom. It's sleep, and it's critical to his

success in school. Why? Because, according to research, a lack of sleep can make it tough for kids to focus on learning.

Although everyone is different, kids between the ages of 11 and 13 need roughly 9.5 to 10 hours of sleep per night. To figure out whether your child is getting enough shut-eye, ask yourself:

- **Does he fall asleep** within 30 minutes of going to bed?
- **Can he wake up fairly easily** in the morning?
- **Is he alert all day**—with no reports from school about his inability to focus in class?

If you answered *yes* to all these questions, chances are your child is getting the right amount of sleep. But if you answered *no*, it's time to take action. To help your child get enough sleep:

- **Enforce a regular bedtime.** Don't let him sleep in more than two hours past his normal wake time on the weekends.
- **Limit caffeine intake.** Watch for this stimulant in things like soda, iced tea and chocolate.
- **Ban before-bed TV watching.** Studies link watching TV to sleep problems.
- **Keep his cell phone** out of his room overnight. Your child needs to be sleeping, not texting and checking social media!

Source: K. Boyse, R.N., "Sleep Problems," University of Michigan Health System, nswc.com/mid_sleep.

Q: With schoolwork, friends and sports competing for her time, my eighth grader is constantly going, going, going! She doesn't complain, but I worry that she's stressed. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: First, remember that a little stress is normal (and usually harmless). To figure out whether your child's stress is too much, ask yourself:

- **Is she always tired** or irritable?
- **Does she have trouble** sleeping or concentrating?
- **Does she seem unhappy?**
- **Is she becoming angry** or self-critical?

If the answers are *yes*, then your child may indeed be overly stressed. To help get her stress level back under control:

- **Acknowledge the problem.** Don't pretend there's no reason for her to feel stressed. Instead, say something like, "I understand how hard you work to do well in all of your classes. It's really challenging, isn't it?"
- **Help her set reasonable goals.** Is she striving to be a straight-A student, a star soccer player and everyone's best friend? Encourage her to tone down her expectations. Remind her that she can't be all things to all people.
- **Be there for her.** Let her know that she can come to you when she feels overwhelmed or unable to cope.
- **Scale back her schedule.** If necessary, help your child adjust her calendar. She may not be able to limit her school-related responsibilities, but she can rein in extracurricular and social activities.

It Matters: Building Responsibility

Help your child solve problems in five steps



“I don’t have enough time to finish my project.” “I don’t think my teacher likes me.”

These are typical problems facing middle schoolers.

While it may be tempting to solve your child’s problems, help him sharpen his own problem-solving skills instead.

Teach your child this five-step method for solving problems:

- 1. Define the problem.** Before your child can solve a problem, he needs to understand what that problem is.
- 2. Brainstorm solutions.** Once your child has defined the problem, have him list possible solutions. During this step, don’t let him get bogged down in analyzing each idea—he should simply list every solution that he can think of.
- 3. Evaluate his options.** Now that he’s come up with several potential solutions, your child needs to weigh the pros and cons of each. Which solution seems especially strong?
- 4. Make a plan of action.** Your child should choose the solution he thinks is best and devise a plan to carry it out. Let him follow his plan by himself, but offer guidance if he’s unsure how to proceed.
- 5. Reassess the situation.** How is his plan working? Is it helping him solve the problem or reach his goal? If yes, wonderful! If not, suggest that your child go back to the “evaluating” step and try another solution.

Responsibility is crucial for your middle schooler’s success

Boost your middle schooler’s sense of responsibility and you’ll help her in the classroom and out. To instill a sense of responsibility:

- **Talk about it.** Teach your child that she’s responsible for her attitude and the decisions she makes. If things are going wrong, help her see how her choices might have contributed to the situation. She may be surprised to find out that even little things, like her choice of words, tone or body language, influence the way things will turn out for her.
- **Enforce it.** Insist that your child take responsibility for her actions. That means allowing her to experience the consequences of those actions. For example, don’t take her forgotten homework to school over and over again.
- **Advocate it.** Let your child know that you value responsibility-related traits like self-control and



persistence. When you see her demonstrating those qualities, praise her.

- **Model it.** Let your child see you taking responsibility for your mistakes. “I left my gardening tools in the rain, and now they are rusted. I should have been more responsible.” She will learn more by your admission than she’d learn in an hour of lecturing.

Source: M. Josephson and others, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, Boys Town Press.

Study skills help students take responsibility for learning



Is your child sweating his next big assignment or test? Help him take responsibility for his learning by showing

him how to prepare for it.

The best way he can prepare is to sharpen his study skills every day. Encourage him to:

- **Read ahead.** By scanning the next day’s lesson or chapter ahead of time, he’ll be better

prepared for class. This may also help him ask better questions and participate more.

- **Review class notes.** Even when he doesn’t have homework in a certain class, he should look over his notes at night. It’s a quick way to review what he’s learning.
- **Show up to class.** Your child can’t learn if he isn’t in class. He should only miss school when it’s absolutely necessary.