

Parents[®]

Middle School

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Education Service Center Region 15

still make the difference!



Your involvement leads to your child's academic success

What's the best way to help your child succeed in middle school? Your involvement is one of the biggest factors in whether she will do well academically.

To get your child off to a great start this year:

- **Make your home learning-rich.** Keep materials on hand that stimulate your child's mind. From simple art supplies to library books, offer creative outlets for her curiosity.
- **Encourage reading.** Reading for pleasure will help your child build the comprehension and vocabulary skills she'll need to tackle more difficult material. Whether she reads poetry or science fiction, set aside time for your child to read every day.
- **Talk to your child** about the importance of paying attention in class. Suggest that she take notes and participate in class. Challenge her to ask one question per day in each of her classes. This will keep her focused and engaged in what she is learning.
- **Start homework routines.** Have a set time for homework. Offer your child a quiet place to work. Good study habits will help her through middle school—and beyond. On days your child doesn't have homework, encourage her to read or review instead.
- **Ask questions.** Show your child that education is a priority in your family by asking her about school every day. Then, be sure to *really* listen to what she has to say.

Model, enforce the three C's to promote respect



Respect can be many things—but it always involves the three C's: communication, courtesy and consid-

eration. Practice these with your child and others, and expect your child to practice them in return.

1. **Communication.** Respectful people ask others for their viewpoints, feelings and opinions. They accept that they may not agree, but that the other person's ideas and needs have worth.
2. **Courtesy.** Manners count, and *please* and *thank you* really are magic words. Tone of voice matters, too. Respectful people know that *how* they say something is as important as *what* they say!
3. **Consideration.** A respectful person moves from asking and listening to another's concerns to thinking and acting in response to them. When you give your child downtime after he has had a hard day, that's consideration, and therefore, respect. Or, if your child makes his own breakfast so you can sleep in on a Saturday, he is showing respect for you.

Help your child be successful, responsible with organization



Middle schoolers can have a hard time staying organized. But if they become too disorganized, their

grades may suffer. In fact, if you're not sure which class your child is struggling in most, check his backpack. Chances are, his sloppiest folder goes with his most troublesome course.

While it's ultimately your child's responsibility to keep his schoolwork organized, you can:

- **Make sure he has** the right materials. Your child should have a separate place to keep schoolwork for each of his classes.

He can use a notebook or folder for each class—or a binder divided with tabs.

- **Give him a daily planner.** He can use it to write down dates for assignments and tests.
- **Have him organize his backpack.** He should throw away trash, sort and file his papers and restock the backpack with necessary school supplies.

“A place for everything, everything in its place.”

—Benjamin Franklin

Experts say middle school is the prime time for bullying



Middle school can be stressful enough, but it may also be the time students and parents need to worry most

about bullying. Studies show that nasty behavior seems to boost kids' popularity in middle school.

The bullies of the 21st century aren't just your typical schoolyard bullies. They also include the:

- **Verbally abusive bully** who calls people names and spreads rumors.
- **Social bully** who gets others to exclude or reject someone.
- **Cyberbully** who posts nasty comments on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

If your child is being bullied:

- **Talk to him about it.** Understand that he might be too embarrassed or scared to admit it.
- **Be supportive.** Assure him that it's not his fault.

- **Ask him** how he's been dealing with the bully. What has worked? What hasn't?
- **Ask others to help.** A teacher or guidance counselor might have a solution you haven't thought of.
- **Encourage him** to stay with a group of friends. Bullies often pick on kids who are alone.

If your child is the one bullying:

- **Let him know** that you will not tolerate bullying behavior.
- **Try to get him** to acknowledge his actions. Ask what he did. Whom did he hurt?
- **Ask him** what he was trying to accomplish. How might he meet that goal in the future without hurting anyone?
- **Help him figure out** how to make amends with the person he hurt.

Source: *Bullying: Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program*, Resource Kit, The Parent Institute.

Are you helping your child make a smooth transition?



The change from elementary to middle school is significant. How well are you helping your child manage this

transition? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Have you and your child** researched the new school? Have you checked out the website? Have you reviewed the school handbook?
- ___ **2. Have you reassured** your child that, while this is a big change, you believe she can do well in school?
- ___ **3. Do you ask your child** what she thinks about middle school and listen carefully to her responses?
- ___ **4. Do you plan to attend** parent events at school in order to get more information that can help you support your child?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to come to you and her teachers right away if she is having difficulty?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are supporting your child during this transition time. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Goals can help your child stay motivated throughout the year



The beginning of a new school year is a natural time to set goals. But who should be doing the goal-setting?

At this age, it should definitely be your child. Setting goals helps her take charge of her own learning.

Provide support and guide your child as she sets goals. Encourage her to:

- **Be realistic.** If your child has struggled in the past, bringing every grade up to an A in one quarter may not be a realistic goal. Instead, help her identify her most important need and set specific goals to address that. For example, “I want to raise my math grade from a C to a B.”
- **Write down goals.** Research shows that putting a goal in

writing increases the chances of achieving it.

- **Plan.** Accomplishing goals takes vision, effort and time. If bringing up a math grade will take an extra 30 minutes of study each night, your child may need to cut down on time spent on other activities. She should block out her study times on the calendar.
- **Check.** Reevaluate goals every few weeks. How is your child doing? What changes, if any, should she make? At the end of the quarter or semester, your child should review her goals. She should figure out a maintenance plan for met goals, an action plan for goals not met and an exploration plan for possible new goals.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Touchstone.

Make school attendance a priority for your family!



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.

Here are just a few reasons your child should be in school:

- **School attendance is the law.** Every school district requires students to attend. Your child should miss school only for illness or a family emergency.
- **Missing school affects grades.** Studies show that when students miss class regularly, they suffer academically. They miss out on opportunities to ask questions in class and to participate in class discussions.

- **Peer relationships** often get started at school. A child who misses school often may have fewer friends.

To aim for top attendance:

- **Tell your child** that school is important to your family and that you expect her to be in school on time every day.
- **Schedule vacations** during school breaks or weekends.
- **Schedule appointments** for non-school hours if possible.
- **Don’t let your child** stay home from school to avoid taking a test, to catch up on sleep or to finish a project.

Source: *Make Every Day Count: Sending the Right Message About Attendance to Parents and Students*, Attendance Works, niswc.com/mid_attendance.

Q: It’s September, but my middle schooler still seems to be in “summer vacation mode.” How can I get him focused on school so his grades don’t begin to suffer?

Questions & Answers

A: It can be difficult for middle schoolers to shift gears from the less structured days of summer to the steady rhythm of a new school year. However, the sooner you can help your child regain his focus, the better.

Here’s how:

- **Reestablish routines.** Did your child follow a certain after-school routine last year? Get him back into it. If his old habit was to come home, grab a snack and then hit the books, make it easy for him to do it again. Have plenty of nutritious treats on hand and leave him a note encouraging him to get to work.
- **Enforce bedtime.** Staying up late may have been no big deal over the summer, but it won’t work during the school year. A lack of sleep can interfere with both his academics and his mood. To make sure he gets enough shut-eye, set a reasonable bedtime and stick with it.
- **Tame the technology.** Even if you’re normally vigilant about your child’s TV, video game and social media habits, you may have relaxed the rules a bit over summer break. If so, now’s the time to ramp those back up. Studies show that too much recreational screen time isn’t good for kids, so place daily limits. Also, require all electronics (cell phone included) to be turned off by a specified time each evening.

It Matters: The Home-School Team

What should you find out at the start of the year?



Parent involvement doesn't just mean volunteering. It means educating yourself about what goes on

at school. The more you know, the more you can play an active role in your child's education.

Here are a few things to find out at the beginning of the school year:

- **Your child's bus number** and bus route.
- **Your child's class schedule.**
- **The names** of your child's teachers.
- **The best way** and time to contact teachers.
- **Teachers' homework policies.**
- **A list of school projects** and events planned for this month.
- **The names and phone numbers** of parents of your child's friends at school.
- **The name of your child's school** guidance counselor, and the role she plays.
- **Tutoring services** available.
- **The locker and class changing** routines.
- **Your child's locker combination.**
- **The school's telephone number.**
- **The name of the principal.**
- **The name of the school mascot.**
- **The school's dress code.**
- **The school's backpack policy.**
- **The school's technology policy.**
- **Procedures to follow** should your child need to be administered medication during the day.
- **Procedures for reporting tardies** and absences.
- **At least one way** you can volunteer at the school.

Take parent involvement to the next level in middle school

Do you consider yourself a partner with your child's school? If so, you've taken an important step in helping him succeed. Research shows that children benefit when parents actively support their education.

To nurture the home-school partnership:

- **Take an interest in schoolwork.** Don't just glance over at your child when he's studying. Stop and ask him about what he's learning. It'll show him that you care about what goes on at school. And who knows? You just may learn something new yourself!
- **Go beyond the basics.** Once you've talked with your child about the things he's learning, take that learning to the next level. For example, a museum visit would bring art or history to life.



- **Get involved** in the school community. If possible, consider becoming active in your local parent-teacher group. It may give you the chance to connect with your child's school on a deeper level than you have before.

Source: J.L. Epstein, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools, Second Edition*, Westview Press.

Build positive relationships with your child's teachers



Working with your child's school is about forming relationships. And some of the most important relationships

are the ones you forge with her teachers.

To connect with teachers:

- **Get to know them.** Attend parent-teacher conferences and other events. Talk to them about their expectations. Exchange contact information.
- **Volunteer.** Ask if there are ways you can support them. Can you

chaperone a field trip? Can you donate items to the classroom?

- **Show your appreciation.** Teachers are used to hearing from parents about problems. A note or call expressing thanks will make a teacher's day. Let teachers know when your child really enjoys an assignment. Thank teachers who take extra time to help your child.
- **Be understanding.** Teachers are human. They work hard and are often under lots of pressure. Don't expect perfection.