

Middle School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Make academic effort the focus of your expectations

Research consistently shows that students feel more positive and connected to school when they believe that hard work will lead to success. Communicate to your child that you expect his best effort. When he gives it, let him know how proud you are. You should also expect that your child:

- **Try rigorous courses.** He should take as much math as he can, for example. He may not always make top grades. But research shows that even students who are thought to be “low-achieving” benefit more from taking harder courses than easier ones. Children rise to the occasion if given a chance.

- **Devote time to schoolwork.** Effort can’t be wished into practice. Your child should study each night. He should also have time for family, exercise, food and sleep. Most use of entertainment and social media should take place on weekends.
- **Set goals.** If your child is to put forth his best effort, he has to connect it to a goal. For example, “I will raise my math grade to a B next quarter.” Your child’s goals need to be specific. They should be achievable. And there should be a way to see his progress.

Source: S.L. Christenson Ph.D. and C. Peterson, “Standards and Expectations,” University of Minnesota Extension, www.extension.umn.edu/family/components/00079a.html.

Support your child through conversations



You won’t always approve of your child’s behavior. But it is important to let her know that you support her for the person she is.

Here are ways to show support as you talk with your middle schooler:

- **Listen.** When your child has something to say, drop what you are doing, if you can. Direct your focus solely on her for a few moments.
- **Notice things your child likes.** “Look, here’s an article about that singer you said you liked.” She will be pleased you remembered, even if she doesn’t say so.
- **Take her ideas seriously.** Avoid statements such as, “You can’t do that.” Instead, try, “You’ll need a good plan for that, but if anyone can pull it off, you can.”
- **Remember that your child is not the adult in the house,** so she doesn’t make decisions for the family. But she deserves some input. Frequently ask, “What do you think?”

Source: E. Hartley-Brewer, *Talking to Tweens: Getting It Right Before It Gets Rocky with Your 8- to 12-Year-Old*, Lifelong Books.

Research shows that cheating is more common than ever!



The research is in on students and cheating, and the news is sobering. According to the Educational Testing

Service/Ad Council Campaign to Discourage Academic Cheating:

- **Episodes of cheating** have risen dramatically in the past 50 years.
- **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.
- **Cheating doesn't carry much of a stigma anymore.** There isn't the shame in it that there once was.
- **Cheaters often justify** their actions by claiming that "everyone's doing it." In their minds, they'll be at a disadvantage if they don't cheat.
- **Cheating is easier** than ever, thanks to the Internet. Students can download entire papers or projects online and pass them off as original work.

- **Kids tend to begin cheating** in elementary school, typically by cheating at games or sports. True academic cheating sets in during middle school.
- **The more pressure** kids feel to earn higher grades, the more likely they are to cheat.

What does all this mean for your child? It means you must talk with her about cheating. Let her know you expect honesty from her at all times, whether she's at home or in class.

Source: "Academic Cheating Fact Sheet," Educational Testing Service, www.glass-castle.com/clients/www-nocheating-org/adccouncil/research/cheatingfactsheet.html.

"Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who tread on their toes."

—Chinese Proverb

Middle school students still need after-school supervision



When kids reach middle school, parents may feel they no longer need to be supervised after school.

But studies show that kids with too much time on their hands may be at risk of substance abuse.

One study found that eighth graders who were unsupervised for 11 hours a week were twice as likely to use drugs and alcohol as those under some form of adult supervision.

Where can parents find the after-school supervision that kids need? Here are some suggestions:

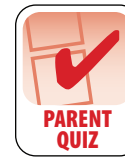
- **School activities.** Whether your child stays after school to play in

the band, work on his jump shot or attend a club meeting, he's involved with positive activities.

- **Community centers.** If your community does not have a preteen program, perhaps a group of volunteers could start one.
- **Volunteering.** Your child can gain job skills while making the world a better place.
- **Youth organizations.** Scouting, 4-H and many other student organizations have programs designed for middle school students.

Source: *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours*, Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED355007.pdf.

Is your child taking on more responsibility?



Being responsible is the key to success in middle school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are

encouraging your middle schooler to take more responsibility:

- ___ **1. Do you expect your child to care for his personal needs, including getting himself up for school?**
- ___ **2. Do you expect your child to do chores at home, such as taking out the trash?**
- ___ **3. Do you expect your child to do his homework on his own, only helping him when he is genuinely stuck?**
- ___ **4. Do you expect your child to take advantage of opportunities to improve his work, such as staying after school for extra help?**
- ___ **5. Do you expect your child to use basic time-management tools, such as an assignment notebook and a calendar?**

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are fostering responsibility in your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Study finds that physical fitness may lead to higher achievement



You know the benefits of exercise for your child's body. Exercise helps your child stay at a healthy weight.

It promotes strong heart and lung function. And it helps your child sleep better. But it turns out that exercise might also help your child do better with schoolwork.

A study from the American College of Sports Medicine found that:

- **Students who were physically fit** did better on tests.
- **Boys who were at a healthy weight** and could do more curl-ups did better on reading tests.
- **Girls with strong muscles** and heart-lung function did better on math tests.
- **Girls with strong heart-lung function** tended to also have good reading scores.

To help your child improve her physical fitness:

- **Encourage your child** to participate in a sport she enjoys.
- **Remember that 60 minutes** of exercise a day is recommended for children to be at their healthiest. Your child can break it up into 20 minutes three times a day.
- **Exercise with your child** whenever possible. A 30 minute daily walk is a great idea.
- **Get into a habit** with your child of building movement into your day. If you have to go upstairs, take the stairs instead of the elevator. If you're driving, park in a space that requires you to walk a bit to your destination.

Source: "Study Links Physical Fitness, Academic Performance for Middle-Schoolers," American College of Sports Medicine, www.acsm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=About_ACSM&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&CONTENTID=14761.

Your child can improve writing skills with revision & resources



Not every student is a born writer. But kids who write well tend to do better in middle school than kids who don't.

To help your child improve his writing, have him:

- **Read it aloud.** After he completes a writing assignment for class, ask your child to read it to you. (If just the thought of this makes him cringe, at least have him read it aloud quietly to himself.) Suggest he mark any clunky or ungrammatical passages as he goes.
- **Revise it.** Even a good draft can almost always be improved with careful revision. So have him go back through his work to see

where it can be tightened up, expanded or clarified.

- **Ask for help.** If his work still seems a little flat or weak, encourage him to look for help online. Find a reputable writing site and, together, explore its ideas for improving his writing.
- Beyond that, remind your child that one of the best ways to become a stronger writer is simply to read a lot. The more he surrounds himself with words, the more examples he'll see of solid writing. And that can only help when it's time for him to put pen to paper.

Source: R. Kavanagh, "Help Middle School Students Improve Writing Skills," EduGuide.com, www.eduguide.org/library/viewarticle/1813.

Q: My seventh grader used to be so confident, but recently she's been saying things like, "I just don't fit in!" or "I'm so weird!" How can I help her feel good about herself again?

Questions & Answers

A: The best way to help your daughter is to acknowledge that maybe she really doesn't fit in right now. Middle school is a time of enormous change and growth for kids, and it could be that your child is starting to "march to her own drummer" and become her own person.

And that's okay.

As long as she isn't socially isolated, struggling in class or being bullied, there's nothing wrong with letting her blossom into her own quirky, unique person.

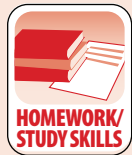
To support her along the way:

- **Respect her evolving views.** You don't have to agree with your child's opinions, but don't belittle them, either.
- **Be tolerant** of her quest for individuality. Don't nix her choice of clothing, hairstyle or entertainment just because it's not your taste. As long as it isn't inappropriate or offensive, let her embrace what she likes.
- **Spend time together.** Do something you both enjoy. But don't expect her to like a certain activity just because you do—or because she did when she was younger.
- **Teach her not to fear failure.** Everyone stumbles occasionally, and that includes your child. Remind her that missteps aren't horrible. They can be chances for growth.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

Support your child's work on research projects



Research projects can be overwhelming for some middle schoolers. These projects often involve reading non-fiction texts that contain challenging vocabulary. In addition, they require a great deal of organization—which doesn't come naturally to most adolescents.

Here are some ways to help, without doing the project for your child:

- **Help your child find** related material. Try a fiction book that explores themes that are similar to those in the project. This may help your child develop interest in what she is studying. A book with a lower reading level may help, too. It can increase your child's understanding of the concept. She can relate this understanding to her research material.
- **Review the texts** with your child. Some material is very important, such as items in boldface, or items featured in questions at the end of chapters. Point these out to your child.
- **Remind your child** to watch the calendar. Help her set weekly deadlines. With each deadline, she can accomplish one goal toward getting the project completed. Then she can use the final week to concentrate on details and wrap up the project.

Source: "The Research Report Blues," Scholastic.com, www.scholastic.com/resources/article/the-research-report-blues.

Give your child encouragement and control over homework

You might have a difficult time finding a middle school student who simply adores doing homework. But your child can have a positive feeling about his homework, and much of that depends on whether he feels he has control over it.

A study found that middle schoolers have definite preferences about homework. They would rather:

- **Do homework** somewhere besides home.
 - **Do homework** when their peers are around.
 - **Have their parents** be less involved with their homework.
- So what can you do to support your child? You can:
- **Check your child's achievement** at school. Is he doing fairly well? If so, consider allowing him to



choose where he completes homework, on occasion.

- **Provide encouragement.** Say things like, "I see you are getting your homework done on a regular basis. Your teachers say you have turned in homework every day this month. It's great to hear about your hard work."

Source: C. Jarrett, "A preliminary psychology of homework," BPS Research Digest, <http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.com/2011/03/preliminary-psychology-of-homework.html>.

Tackle that test anxiety with preparation, positive thoughts



It's the day of the big exam. Is your child suffering from a "mystery stomachache" or other complaint? He could have a case of test-taking anxiety.

Help him do his best—and panic as little as possible—on test day by encouraging him to:

- **Avoid cramming.** Regular study sessions leading up to an exam are much more helpful than frantic cramming.

- **Dismiss negative thoughts.** Anytime a discouraging, "I can't do this" thought creeps into his head, suggest he change it to, "I've studied hard and I can do this!" Positive self-talk often leads to positive results.
- **Keep things in perspective.** No single test has the power to make or break his future. Period. That bears repeating sometimes.

Source: "Test Anxiety," TeensHealth, http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/test_anxiety.html.