

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

*still make the difference!*



## Don't let spring fever affect your child's attendance

**F**ever is a reason to keep kids home from school. Spring fever, however, doesn't count.

The first rule for academic success is a simple one: Students need to be in class. That's true even on warm spring days when students would rather be anywhere else.

Poor attendance can lead to these problems, now and in years to come:

- **Poor grades.**
- **Having to repeat a grade.**
- **Dropping out of school.**
- **Trouble with the law.** Children with too much time on their hands may be tempted to try illegal activities.

Families play an important role in making sure children's attendance is on track. To reinforce your middle schooler's attendance:

- **Share your expectations.** Your child should be in every class on time every day. Say that school is your child's most important job, and showing up is essential.
- **Be firm.** Don't let your child skip school for frivolous reasons. Being tired or unprepared for a class are not valid excuses.
- **Make sure** teachers know how to contact you if your child is absent.
- **Work with the school** if you discover your child has been skipping school or classes. There may be a bigger problem going on.

Talk to your child first, then to teachers and other school staff if necessary. Many attendance problems can be solved when parents and schools work together.

## Encourage connections with classmates



The middle school years are a time in students' lives when people their own age are often more important to them than anything else.

And that's OK. Forming friendships with kids at school can help children feel more connected to school. So encourage your child to:

- **Say hello** to new students or any student who seems friendly. A smile is usually a sign that a child is open to a new friendship.
- **Look for classmates** with similar interests. Clubs and activities can be a haven for kids who need help making friends. It's hard to spot a child of similar interests walking through the halls, but in a chess club meeting, it's a safe bet that the other kids like playing chess, too.
- **Develop friendships** that have potential. The strongest friendships involve spending time together outside school. If your child has been eating lunch with the same three students for the last month, suggest asking them over to your home to hang or to join your family in a weekend activity.

# Model and enforce the three C's to teach your child respect



Respect can be many things—but it always involves the three C's: communication, courtesy and consideration. Practice these with your child—and expect your child to practice them in return:

- 1. Communication.** Show your child that 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. Explain that *how* a person says something is as important as *what* they say!

- 3. Consideration.** Explain that a respectful person not only asks about and listens to others' concerns, but also thinks about and acts in response to them. When you give your child downtime after a hard day, that's consideration, and shows respect. Likewise, if your child makes breakfast so you can sleep in on a Saturday, your child is showing respect for you.

**“One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”**

—Bryant H. McGill

# Talk with your child about making important decisions



As middle schoolers continue to mature, they are able to make more decisions on their own. And those decisions can have lasting consequences—for education and for life in general.

Although parents ultimately can't make their children's choices for them, discussing key topics now enables kids to make smart decisions later. Discuss choices about:

- **Your relationship.** Does your child feel comfortable coming to you with problems? Does your child consider you an ally or an enemy?
- **Drinking and drugs.** Have you given your middle schooler the facts about drugs, alcohol, smoking and vaping? Does your child understand the risks of experimenting with harmful substances?
- **Self-image.** Does your child feel capable, confident and worthy of love and respect? How much middle schoolers value themselves will have a huge impact on the decisions—big or small—they make for years to come.

Source: S. Covey, *The 6 Most Important Decisions You'll Ever Make: A Guide for Teens*, Touchstone.

# Are you giving your child the right kind of attention?



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 supporting your middle school student in age-appropriate ways:

- 1. Do you make plans** to spend time together doing something your child is interested in?
- 2. Do you take advantage** of times when you have your child's undivided attention to connect and have conversations? Trips in the car are great for this.
- 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. Do you keep** directions and explanations simple and to the point so your child doesn't tune you out?

**How well are you doing?**

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

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,  
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
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# Retain authority to maintain the boundaries your child needs



Middle schoolers often look more like young adults and less like young children. They can understand

concepts that escaped them a year ago. However, they are still children. Your middle schooler needs you to provide adult guidance, not just be another friend.

Here's how to care for your child with authority:

- **Insist that your child** speak politely to you and others. If your child is rude, walk away and say that you will respond when your child decides to speak respectfully.
- **Require your child** to follow your rules. Middle schoolers shouldn't have a huge list of rules, but they should have a few important ones that must be followed. Agree on

consequences and enforce them every single time.

- **Do not try to be the cool parent** in the neighborhood. Be kind and caring to your child and your child's friends, but remember that you are not "one of the girls/boys." Children lose respect for adults who act like children.
- **Avoid oversharing.** Some things are more appropriate to discuss with another adult.
- **Do not make decisions** based on what would please your child's friends. They might like it if you paid for them all to see an R-rated movie, but is it a wise parenting choice? Trust yourself as the adult and make decisions accordingly.

Source: C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*, Broadway Books.

# Organization is the key to staying on top of schoolwork



Middle schoolers may have assignments in six or more classes, after-school activities and busy social lives. Organization is

critical to managing everything and can make the difference between doing well in school and sinking.

To help your child get organized:

- **Have a weekly planning meeting.** Sitting down with your child for five minutes each Sunday to plan the week ahead can make the days go more smoothly. Bring your family calendar to the meeting and write down important deadlines and events.
- **Make sure your child** is using a planner to keep track of schoolwork and activities. Encourage your

middle schooler to check it before leaving school to see which materials to bring home.

- **Have your child** make a daily checklist of tasks to complete when starting schoolwork at home. Suggest also making checklists for long-range projects that outline the steps and their deadlines.
- **Choose places to keep** specific belongings—especially things that get misplaced frequently. School notebooks and other items to bring back to school might be kept in a box by the front door.
- **Expect your child to put** things away in their designated spots. Set an example by doing this with other household items. Have a place for keys, purses, mail, etc.

**Q:** My middle schooler does well on tests and quizzes, but is really lazy about completing daily assignments. How can I get my child to take schoolwork seriously?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** It's important that students complete the assignments that teachers assign. Although quizzes and tests may have a larger impact on overall grades, it's schoolwork that reinforces knowledge on a daily basis.

To help your child take daily schoolwork more seriously:

- **Say how you feel.** If you haven't spelled it out yet, do so now. "I've noticed that you blow off your assignments quite a bit. That's not OK, so let's figure out how to change the situation."
- **Enforce a daily work time.** Brainstorm together to find a time that works best—and make sure your child sticks to it. "Your work session starts at five o'clock. No arguments." If your child doesn't have any work to do, that time can be used to review notes, get started on a long-term project or read.
- **Tie schoolwork to privileges.** "When you finish writing your history paper, you may go outside and play basketball with your friends." To show your middle schooler you're serious, check that the work is actually completed.
- **Follow up at school.** If your home strategies don't work, get the teachers involved. Say you'll be checking with them each week to see whether your child is turning in completed assignments. If your child isn't, enforce appropriate consequences at home.

# It Matters: Schoolwork

## Learn about the four types of assignments



While doing a math assignment, your child asks, “Why do I have to do the same kinds of problems over and over? I’m tired of them!”

It’s true that teachers sometimes assign repetitive schoolwork, and it’s helpful for families and students to know why. Here are four common kinds of assignments—and the reasons teachers use them:

- 1. Practice assignments.** Doing the same kind of work repeatedly helps students remember a skill. This is especially true when it comes to learning math, word definitions and vocabulary.
  - 2. Preparation assignments.** This is a way to introduce students to new topics. For instance, middle schoolers might read a book about animals before studying animal families.
  - 3. Extension assignments.** Students need to be able to connect separate topics. For example, they might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events.
  - 4. Creative assignments.** Teachers like to challenge students to use different skills to show what they’ve learned. For instance, your child might be asked to build a model for science class.
- Of course, all schoolwork builds responsibility and self-discipline—and even if students don’t see a reason for an assignment, they still must do it.

Source: M. Martin and C. Waltman-Greenwood, *Solve Your Child’s School-Related Problems*, HarperCollins.

## Goals can help students stay motivated until year end

It can be difficult for some students to stay motivated. Setting goals is one way to help them remain engaged with schoolwork. But who should be doing the goal-setting?

In middle school, it should be your child’s responsibility to set goals and take charge of learning.

Encourage your child to:

- **Be realistic.** Bringing every grade up to an A by the end of the year may not be a realistic goal. Instead, help your child identify the most important need and set specific goals to address that. For example, “I want to raise my science grade from a C to a B.”
- **Write down goals.** Putting a goal in writing increases the chances of achieving it.
- **Plan.** Accomplishing goals takes vision, effort and time. If bringing up a science grade will take an extra 30 minutes of study each



night, your child may need to cut down on time spent on other activities.

- **Check.** Review goals every few weeks. How is your child doing? What changes, if any, should be made?

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

## How to help your child with schoolwork without taking over



It’s difficult to watch kids struggle with assignments. Some parents find it so difficult that they actually do assignments for their children. But schoolwork is the student’s responsibility.

There are ways, however, to support your child’s effort:

- **Help study.** Call out vocabulary words or use flash cards together.
- **Help plan.** Teach your child to divide large projects into small parts. For a big report, your child

will have to do research, write an outline, write a rough draft and do revisions. Schedule due dates for each part.

- **Help organize.** Encourage your child to use calendars, assignment notebooks, folders, binder tabs and other organizers.
- **Help clarify.** If you understand an assignment your child is confused about, discuss it together. Assist with sample problems. If the assignment confuses you too, have your child review it with the teacher.