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# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

*still make the difference!*



## Community service benefits students in the classroom

**S**tudies show that students who participate in community service tend to have better grades and more interest in school than others.

When middle schoolers take part in community service, they also gain strong positive feelings about themselves and their place in society.

Students who volunteer:

- **Have higher self-esteem**, are more responsible and feel more connected to their community.
- **Are more likely to stay in school.** Volunteers tend to have regular attendance and perform well.
- **Have improved mental health.** Volunteering reduces stress, strengthens the immune system and increases happiness.

- **Develop strong social skills**, as they learn how to work with different types of people.
- **Build skills that help in school**, such as leadership, time management, problem solving, communication and dependability.
- **Meet mentors**, such as the heads of agencies or businesses who can serve as references.
- **Are less likely** to take negative risks, such as doing drugs.

To find local volunteer opportunities, encourage your middle schooler to contact the school counselor, local libraries, religious organizations and community service groups.

Source: "Middle Schoolers May Benefit Academically from Extracurricular Activities," NYU Steinhardt News.

## Share effective note-taking tips with your child



Taking effective class notes is an important skill for middle school success—and it's one students will use even

more in high school and college.

Share these note-taking tips with your middle schooler:

- **Be brief.** Students shouldn't write down every word. They should focus on the main points and important details or examples.
- **Develop a system** of abbreviating and using symbols for key words, and highlighting phrases the teacher emphasizes.
- **Edit notes after class.** Students should read over their notes and expand on them where necessary while the information is still fresh in their minds. Then they can write short summaries of the most important points covered in that day's class.

If something in the notes is confusing, students should ask a classmate or the teacher for clarification.

- **Study notes.** Studying notes each day helps middle school students remember the material so they are prepared for the next class, assignment or test.

# Use positive discipline to create a change in your child's behavior



By middle school, your child has probably learned to tune out negative discipline, such as yelling. And you have probably realized that it doesn't work anyway.

Experts recommend families take a positive approach instead. In return, you may see a positive change in your child's behavior before school ends for the year.

Here's how to get started:

- **Be generally pleasant**, regardless of your child's mood. Smile. Show affection with a hug.
- **Send positive messages**. If your child asks to go to a friend's house, don't say "Not until your room is clean." Instead, say "Sure you can, as soon as your room is clean."
- **Notice what your child does** right and compliment behavior.

- **Say *please*** when you ask your child to do something.
- **Offer thanks** when your child does something helpful or nice for you or the family.
- **Trust your child**. If your child has been generally trustworthy, give the benefit of the doubt. Believe what your child says.

**"It's not our job to toughen our children up to face a cruel and heartless world. It's our job to raise children who will make the world a little less cruel and heartless."**

—L.R. Knost

# A self-editing checklist can help your child improve writing



It's hard to help middle schoolers with their writing assignments. By nature, adolescents are very sensitive to criticism and suggestions for improvement.

So when your child asks you to review a writing assignment, first focus on what you like about it. A catchy title. The introduction. Clear descriptions. Your favorite sentences.

Then, share this editing checklist so your child can improve writing independently:

- **I've read** through the entire piece to see if it makes sense.
- **I've focused** my writing on one important topic or idea.
- **The title** fits the piece.
- **The introduction** clearly states the main idea of the paper.
- **My points** flow logically from one to the next.
- **I used** a variety of transitional words.
- **I replaced** vague words with specific ones.
- **I deleted** unneeded words by combining short sentences.
- **I shortened** sentences that were too long and wordy.
- **I replaced** overused words.
- **I indented** new paragraphs.
- **I used** the correct subject verb agreement.
- **I checked** spelling, punctuation and capitalization.
- **I've given credit** to my sources and formatted citations correctly.

# Do you support your child during study time?



Middle school is a time of increasing expectations, which may include more schoolwork. While you should never do assign-

ments for your middle schooler, you should support your child's effort.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are helping in effective ways:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you find** a well-lit, quiet place for your child to work?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you stay** informed about what your child's teachers expect?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you try** to be available to answer questions and help your child solve problems during study time?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you remind** your child to use available resources—the internet, a study group or a study buddy?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you let** teachers know if assignments are consistently too difficult for your child, or if they take longer than the teacher intends?

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are supporting your child's schoolwork efforts. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions on handling study time.

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# Help your middle schooler think about the world of physics



Physics may seem like one of the most challenging sciences, but it's also with us all the time in our everyday lives. Help your child stop and notice.

Thinking about science in real-life terms can help students master the subject. The key is to translate the language of science into the language of middle schoolers. For example:

- **Rest.** This is the state of the gum wrapper or pile of books your child leaves on the counter or the floor. An object is at rest when it is simply lying there and not moving at all.
- **Inertia.** This is your child's state after dropping the item. Your child knows picking up the item and putting it away is the right thing to

do, but doesn't feel like it. Inertia is a fancy term for resisting a change from one state to another.

- **Force.** This is what *you* add to the mix. Force makes change happen. When you tell your everything must be picked up before going out this weekend, you exert a force. This force overcomes the inertia. Your child moves and picks up the items.
- **Mass.** This is one indicator of how hard your child will have to work at cleaning up. Smaller objects (the gum wrapper) that are lighter have less mass and are easier to move. Bigger objects (a stack of books) that are heavier have more mass and are more difficult to move.

**Source:** D. and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes, Grades 6-8: It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's Done!* Kaplan Publishing.

# Talk to your child about the importance of academic integrity



The research is in on students and cheating, and the news is sobering. In a nationwide survey of 43,000 secondary

students, 59 percent admitted to cheating on tests and assignments.

Studies also show that:

- **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.
- **Cheating doesn't carry much** of a stigma anymore. Students don't feel the shame in it that they once did.
- **The more pressure** students feel to earn higher grades, the more likely they are to cheat.
- **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 technology. Students can text answers and download entire papers or projects online.
- **Kids tend to begin** cheating at games or sports in elementary school. Academic cheating sets in during middle school.

Let your middle schooler know you expect honesty at home and in class. Remind your student that cheating includes:

- **Copying homework** from another student.
- **Sharing questions and answers** during or after a test.
- **Copying words and ideas** of others without giving credit to the source.
- **Handing in a project** or paper that was completed by someone else.

**Source:** *Plagiarism: Facts & Stats: Academic Integrity in High School*, Plagiarism.org.

**Q:** My seventh grader tends to put things off. If there is a big paper due, my child waits until the night before—sometimes, until very late on the night before. How can I help my child break the procrastination habit?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** We all put some things off. But when it gets to be a habit, as it has for your middle schooler, procrastination can have serious consequences.

To help your student put an end to the procrastination habit:

- **Ask why your child** puts things off. Some students are afraid of failing. Some like the thrill of dashing something off at the last minute. An others are simply unmotivated. Whatever the cause, your child needs to work on changing this habit before getting to high school.
- **Help your child** divide large projects into smaller tasks and set deadlines for each task. Your child may still wait until close to each deadline to finish that part, but bit by bit progress will be made. And once your child gets started on a project, it may be easier to keep working.
- **Encourage your child** to use small rewards as motivation. As your child finishes each task or assignment, it's time to take a ten-minute break and do something enjoyable, such as listening to music, walking around or reading an article.
- **Help your child** connect assignments to long-term goals. For example, learning how to study and getting better grades will help your middle schooler meet the goal of being successful in high school and in college.



# It Matters: Mental Health

## Keep an eye on your child's well-being



Half of middle schoolers say feeling depressed, stressed or anxious is their biggest hurdle when it comes to learn-

ing, according to a recent survey. While occasional sadness and stress are normal, it's important for families to be alert to potential problems.

Here's how to stay in the loop:

- **Do mental "temperature" checks.** Talk to your child regularly about school, friends and activities. Ask, "What was the best thing that happened to you today? The worst?" Find good times to chat, such as in the car, on a walk or at bedtime.
- **Be aware of influences** in your child's life. Get to know your child's friends. Encourage your child to invite them over, or offer to drive in a carpool. Set rules for social media use and other online activities.
- **Know the warning signs.** It can be difficult to tell if your middle schooler's bad mood is a normal part of growing up—or if there's a problem. Pay close attention to symptoms like:
  - » **Losing interest** in favorite activities.
  - » **Low energy.**
  - » **Changes in sleeping** or eating habits.
  - » **Avoiding family** and friends.

If you're at all uncertain about your middle schooler's mental well-being, talk with your child's teachers, school counselor and pediatrician.

*Source: Insights From the Student Experience: Emotional & Mental Health, YouthTruth Student Survey, Fall 2022.*

## Four ways to help your middle schooler strengthen resilience

**R**esilience is the ability to adapt well in difficult times. And it's a skill that can be learned. To build resilience, encourage your child to:

1. **Build relationships.** Have your child join clubs, teams or other groups of peers with shared interests. Stay in touch with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Remind your child that teachers, coaches and the school counselor are there to support students.
2. **Stick with comforting routines.** Kids feel secure when they can rely on certain things being the same, such as a nightly video chat with a best friend or a family breakfast every Saturday morning.
3. **Be positive.** This includes "editing" negative statements and thoughts. If your child says, "I doubt I'll get a role in the play," suggest saying "I'm going to practice my lines every day until tryouts" instead.



4. **Help others.** Volunteering in the community, tutoring younger students or reading aloud to a younger sibling can give your child something to feel good about when times are tough.

*Source: "Resilience for teens: 10 tips to build skills on bouncing back from rough times," American Psychological Association.*

## Boost your child's self-image to improve mental health



For many children, self-esteem tends to plummet as the teen years approach. Kids with low self-esteem

are more at risk of developing anxiety, depression and other mental health problems.

To improve your child's self-image:

- **Get your child's opinion.** What does your child think about that new law? What should your family do this weekend? Children feel valued when adults seek their input.

- **Focus on effort.** When you look over tests or report cards, start by commenting on what your child did well and acknowledging effort. "You worked really hard to bring up your math grade."
- **Support interests.** You may have imagined raising a star athlete, but your child's passion is playing the trumpet. Show support by asking what songs your child is learning and attending band concerts.

*Source: "Ways to Build Your Teenager's Self-Esteem," American Academy of Pediatrics.*