

Middle School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler handle end-of year assignments

Your middle schooler is probably facing an array of tests and year-end projects as this school year draws to a close. For some students, this workload can be daunting.

Encourage your child to:

- **Remember** that schoolwork is a priority. Some kids like to do assignments as soon as they get home from school. Others work better after some time to unwind. Still others are at their best later at night. Whenever your middle schooler likes to work, completing assignments on time should still be the top priority.
- **Keep track of key dates.** Few students can remember when all of their assignments need to be turned in without writing

down due dates. However, many students get out of the habit of writing everything down in a planner. Remind your child to do this and to check the planner daily.

- **Jot down reminder notes** during the school day. Writing “Bring history notes home tonight” on a sticky note and sticking it to the front of a notebook really can help your child remember to bring the notebook home.
- **Limit distractions.** The TV, the phone and the internet may not be a problem when your child has less of a workload. But at the end of the school year, when more things may be due at once, your child will need to make a stronger effort to avoid distractions.

Ease your child’s anxiety about high school



Students who will be going to high school next year may feel a bit nervous. Use the next few months to help ease the transition.

To support your child:

- **Visit the new school together.** There may be a special day planned for rising freshman to visit. If not, call the school to schedule a tour.
- **Talk to current high school students.** Have your child ask them “What do you wish you had known before starting high school?”
- **Learn more** about the types of extracurricular activities offered at the high school. Your child can check the school’s website and talk to current students.
- **Promote learning** over the summer. Encourage your child to write about experiences in a journal and read at least one novel recommended for ninth graders.
- **Reassure your child.** Rather than talking about how challenging high school is going to be, remain positive. Say things like, “I know you’re going to be successful in high school.”

Encourage responsible choices about digital device use



According to the Pew Research Center, 54% of students say they spend too much time on their phones and other mobile devices. They feel pressured to respond immediately to social media posts, text messages and other notifications.

This technology “addiction” can have a negative effect on students’ learning, academic performance and mental health.

Parents can help middle schoolers manage device time responsibly by asking them to:

- **Spend one day tracking** the times they pick up screen devices, the amount of time they spend, and what they do.
- **Make better choices** the next day. Brainstorm ways to accomplish

this. Your child could check the phone only during specific times and limit online gaming time.

- **Establish technology-free times.** These are times when devices should be turned off or out of reach—during study time, family mealtime, bedtime, etc.

Source: J. Jiang, “How Teens and Parents Navigate Screen Time and Device Distractions,” Pew Research Center.

“Media use in tweens and teens has grown faster since the start of the pandemic than it has over the four years prior to the pandemic.”

—*The Common Sense Census*

Positive peer pressure benefits students and families alike



Parents often think of peer pressure as a negative force. But that’s only true if your child is feeling pressured in negative ways.

Help your middle schooler experience positive peer pressure by suggesting activities that allow your child to meet other kids with shared interests and your family’s values. Here’s how:

- **Encourage your child** to invite friends to your home when you will be there. It’s beneficial for you to know your child’s friends, and this is an effective way to do it! Make your home a favorite hangout spot by offering movies, games and a variety of snacks.
- **Encourage participation** in extracurricular activities. This is probably the easiest way for your child to meet a positive peer group. Check the school website and online to find a worthwhile activity that may interest your child.
- **Research volunteer opportunities.** Your child could join a local service club or youth group.
- **Seek out the parents** of your child’s friends. Talk with them about the rules they keep and the values they share with their children. You will probably have some things in common. And you’ll be ready with the facts when your child tells you “everyone else” is allowed to stay home from school on Friday!

Are you keeping track of your child’s social life?



Middle schoolers put a high priority on their social lives, which tend to kick into high gear during the summer.

Fewer responsibilities often lead to a lot of hanging out with friends.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you’re ready to keep your child safe this summer:

- ___ **1. Do you know** your child’s friends?
- ___ **2. Do you have** current contact information for the families of your child’s friends?
- ___ **3. Do you always ask** your child “Where will you be and who will you be with? What will you be doing and what time will you be home?”
- ___ **4. Have you arranged** for your child to participate in organized summer activities such as swim team, camps and volunteering?
- ___ **5. Do you research** movies and activities to make sure they are appropriate before your child attends?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are prepared to keep track of your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Five ways to spend quality time with your child this summer



Summertime can be wonderful family time. You may see your child more during the day.

But even if you don't, you can take advantage of more relaxed evenings to spend quality time connecting with your child and providing enriching experiences.

Experts agree that children who spend quality time with their parents tend to perform better academically. To make the most of your time together this summer:

1. **Set aside at least one evening** each week as Family Night. Cook a meal together, talk, play board games. Avoid screen-based activities.
2. **Ask your child's opinion.** Many middle schoolers enjoy current events. Because kids this age tend

to be idealistic and want to "save the world," they often have strong opinions. Take time to listen to your child's ideas.

3. **Hold regular family meetings** to solve problems and discuss plans. Brainstorm ideas about fun ways you can spend time together.
4. **Take your child along** on errands and visits to friends and relatives. Your child may not always want to go, and that's OK. But compromise on a schedule that includes your child some of the time.
5. **Participate in family traditions.** Traditions bond children to their families. If you always go to the same park to watch fireworks or attend summer sports events in your town, keep doing it. No traditions? Create some together.

Offer journal prompts to encourage your child to write



It's crucial for your child to keep writing skills sharp over the summer. Journaling is a great way to do this. Share a few

of these writing prompts to get your child's creative juices flowing:

- **If you could solve** any problem in the world, what would it be?
- **Write about three values** that are important to your family.
- **Write a poem** about your favorite activity or hobby.
- **Write about the best vacation** you ever took.
- **Would you rather jump** out of a plane or go scuba diving? Why?
- **Write about a time** when someone helped you.
- **Write a poem about love** and what it means to you.

- **Write about a rule at school** or at home that you'd like to replace.
- **Write about your favorite show.**
- **How would your best friend** describe you?
- **What is your favorite way** to be creative?
- **Why is respectful behavior** important for getting along with others?
- **Write about the most important** thing in your life.
- **If you could live inside** any video game, which would you choose?
- **What is your favorite thing** about yourself?
- **Write about a goal** you recently reached. How did you do it?
- **Write about something** your parents always tell you.

Source: J. Schoenberg, "31 Fun Writing Prompts for Middle School," *Journal Buddies.com*.

Q: My child has always been shy. I thought it was a phase but, if anything, it seems to be getting worse. My middle schooler is a good student and a great artist. However, in a group of peers, my child just freezes up. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Your child is not alone. In fact, some studies show that most students are shy—at least in some situations.

Experts tell us that shyness doesn't go away. So the way you help your child manage it is critical. Focus on the positives. Your child is probably a great listener and may have good insights into people. Emphasize those strengths—and help your child develop additional skills that will make life a bit easier.

To address shyness:

- **Give reassurance.** Many shy kids think they're the only person in the world who has trouble in social situations. Let your child know that lots of kids suffer from shyness.
- **Encourage your child** to share opinions and to be more vocal in family settings.
- **Have your child practice** looking people in the eye and smiling when they meet.
- **Help your child prepare** a question or two to ask when meeting someone new.
- **Find ways for your child** to work with others in small groups. Is there an art club at the school or community center? Could your child paint the sets for the school play? Learning to use and focus on strengths can help your child develop more confidence and grow up to be a capable young adult.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Summer contests inspire learning, healthy risks



There are many opportunities for middle schoolers to keep learning during the summer months.

And without the demands of school, they can choose what they'd like to learn more about.

Entering a summer contest can allow your child to spend time developing talents and interests.

Contests can also:

- **Motivate students to excel.** Whether the subject is art, writing, photography or science, the idea of a competition may motivate your child to produce a “personal best.”
- **Boost confidence.** Win or lose, your child will have taken a healthy risk and put forth effort. Be sure to emphasize this. “You worked so hard. You got your entry in on time and tried something different. You should feel really proud of yourself.”

To find a suitable contest:

- **Check with the school.** Sometimes, companies that sponsor contests for students will send materials and entry forms directly to schools.
- **Head to the public library.** Librarians often know about contests for students.
- **Search online.** Check out www.weareteachers.com/student-contests-competitions to start. Research any group offering a contest before you allow your child to enter. You should never have to pay a fee or provide personal financial information to enter.

Make sure your middle schooler keeps reading over the summer

When kids don't read over the summer, they are at risk of losing some of their “word smarts.” To keep your middle schooler reading over summer break:

- **Walk the walk.** Make reading a part of your daily life. Let your middle schooler see you leafing through magazines or choosing a novel over a TV show.
- **Read a few young adult books yourself.** By exploring books written for middle schoolers, you may get a better feel for what's going on in your child's life. Ask a librarian for suggestions.
- **Share what you're reading.** Did you just come across an interesting article in the news? Tell your middle schooler about it.
- **Respect that your child's interests are changing,** and help find books that reflect new interests.



- **Don't panic.** Adolescence is all about change, so it's normal for your middle schooler to lose interest in reading for a while. Just continue being enthusiastic about books and reading, and chances are that enthusiasm will return.

Encourage activities that lead to meaningful learning



Middle schoolers can find themselves with too much time on their hands when school is out. Here are some ideas

to keep your child busy and learning:

- **Give your child a small research project.** Do you need to find the best price and model of a small appliance? Ask your child to research the options online.
- **Help your child learn to cook.** Challenge your student to choose recipes and prepare a simple family meal at least once a week.
- **Be a tourist in your town.** Ask your child to research interesting local places. Then visit and let your child be your tour guide. **Consider whether your child is ready to earn some money outside the home.** If so, pet care, babysitting or helping a neighbor with yard work can help boost responsibility.
- **Start a book club.** Let your child pick a book. Read it together and set a date to talk about it. Or, suggest your child start one with some friends.