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Middle School Parents[®]

still make the difference!



Attendance is essential for success in middle school

Regular 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's why being present and on time, every day, is so important:

- **School attendance is required.** Your child should miss school only for illness or emergency.
- **Missing school affects grades.** Students who miss school regularly are more likely to fall behind, struggle to keep up, and experience lower academic achievement.
- **School is where students build friendships and learn to collaborate.** Consistent attendance allows them to participate fully and develop a sense of belonging and connection. To make attendance a family priority:
- **Talk to your child** about why being in school, on time, every day matters. Emphasize that it's important to your family.
- **Plan ahead.** Schedule vacations and medical appointments during school breaks and after-school hours whenever possible.
- **Don't allow excuses.** Don't keep your child home for non-essential reasons. Missing school to avoid a test, catch up on sleep or finish a project can create a cycle of falling behind.
- **Stay connected.** Inform the school if your child will be absent. And if your family experiences difficulties that affect attendance, reach out to the school to find resources and support systems available to help.

Help your child adopt five healthy habits



Healthy habits make it easier for children to do well in school. Is your child getting the nutrition, sleep

and exercise kids this age need? Health experts agree that middle schoolers need to:

1. **Get enough sleep.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends between nine and 10 hours of sleep each night for peak performance in school.
2. **Focus on nutrition.** Children should eat a healthy breakfast every morning and make nutritious choices for school lunches and snacks.
3. **Drink plenty of water.** Brains can't store water, but they need it to work properly. Staying hydrated is one way kids can keep their brains sharp.
4. **Exercise every day.** Adolescents need 60 minutes of daily physical activity—biking, running, shooting hoops, dancing, walking, playing a sport, etc.
5. **Wash their hands regularly.** Hand-washing is an essential part of preventing the spread of many illnesses. And fewer illnesses lead to fewer school absences.

Make positive connections with your middle schooler's teachers



Working with the school helps you form relationships that benefit your child. And some of the most important relationships you forge will be with teachers.

To connect with teachers:

- **Get to know them.** Schedule parent-teacher conferences, and attend meetings and other events for families. Talk to teachers about their expectations. Share what you know about your child's strengths and weaknesses. Exchange contact information.
- **Volunteer.** Ask if there are ways you can support the class and your child's learning. Can you organize a field trip? Can you donate items to the classroom?

- **Show your appreciation.** Teachers are used to hearing from families 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 forget you are on the same team!

"If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself."

—Henry Ford

Responsibility can help your middle schooler fulfill potential



Boost your child's sense of responsibility and you'll help your middle schooler succeed inside the classroom and out.

To instill this quality:

- **Talk about it.** Middle schoolers are responsible for their attitudes and the decisions they make. If things are going wrong, talk about how your child's choices might have contributed to the situation. Your child may be surprised to find out that even little things, like choice of words, tone of voice or body language, influence the way things will turn out.
- **Reinforce it.** Insist that your child take responsibility for actions. That means allowing your middle schooler to experience the

consequences of those actions. For example, don't take forgotten homework or lunch to school over and over again.

- **Advocate for it.** Tell your child that you value responsible traits like self-control and persistence. When your child demonstrates those qualities, point them out and offer praise.
- **Model it.** Let your child see you taking responsibility for your mistakes. Your actions speak volumes. "I left my gardening tools out in the rain, and now they are rusted. I should have been more responsible." Your admission will teach your child more than one hour of lecturing would.

Source: M. Josephson and others, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, Boys Town Press.

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 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 it will be a positive one?
- ___ **3. Do you ask your child** questions about classes, teachers and how the year is going and listen carefully to the responses?
- ___ **4. Do you plan to attend** school events for families to get more information that can help you support your child this school year?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage your child** to come to you and teachers right away at the first sign of 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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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Talk with your child about making important decisions



As middle schoolers face increasing independence, the choices they make carry significant weight—shaping their educational paths and their lives.

Discussing key topics now will help your child make sound judgments later. Engage your child in meaningful conversations about:

- **School.** How does your child feel about school? Does your child take schoolwork seriously? Or, does your middle schooler slack off and do the bare minimum to get by?
- **Friends.** What kinds of kids does your child hang out with? Are they respectful and positive influences? Does your child feel comfortable inviting friends to your home? Why or why not?
- **Your relationship.** Does your child feel comfortable coming to you with problems? If not, what could change that?
- **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 middle schooler feel capable, confident and worthy of love and respect? The self-image students develop has a lasting 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.

Q: My eighth grader struggles with self-confidence, and often says, "I can't do anything right!" This isn't the least bit true. How can I help my child see the smart, capable person I see?

Questions & Answers

A: If there's ever a time when self-doubt and insecurity are likely to rear their ugly heads, it's during adolescence. Middle schoolers are discovering the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Although you can't make your child's insecurity go away altogether, you can do things that will boost your child's confidence. Here's how:

- **Focus on strengths.** Look for opportunities that will allow your child to experience success. Sign an athletic child up for a sports team. If theater is more your child's speed, look into a drama club.
- **Give your child responsibilities.** Middle schoolers often gripe about having to make their beds or wash the dishes, but chores are an effective way to help children feel capable and needed.
- **Avoid harsh criticism.** The messages kids hear about themselves from others affect how they feel about themselves. Be patient when your child makes a mistake and focus on what to do next time.
- **Celebrate effort.** When your child does something nice for the family, or works really hard on a school project, draw attention to it. Tell your child how proud and appreciative you are.

Expect your middle schooler to have a successful school year!



Don't just *hope* your child will be successful in middle school this year—*expect* it! Studies show that the most successful students have families who maintain realistically high expectations of them. Your confidence in your child's capabilities influences your student's academic and social outcomes.

To promote success in the classroom and beyond:

- **Express confidence in your child.** Don't act surprised when your middle schooler succeeds. For example, if your child brings home a B+ on a challenging science test, say, "That's awesome! I knew all of your extra studying this week would pay off!" Avoid undermining your child's efforts with surprised remarks like, "Wow! How did you manage that?"
- **Offer support** when your child stumbles. Remind your student that failure happens to everyone and mistakes help people grow. Provide a foundation of unconditional love and acceptance.
- **Empower your child** to take action. When unfortunate things happen, don't chalk them up to bad luck. That will make your child feel like a victim who has no control over situations. Instead, encourage your child to think about the lesson learned. Together, brainstorm ways to handle similar situations in the future.

Source: V. LoBue, Ph.D., "Expect the Best: On the Power of Expectation," *Psychology Today*, John Thomas.

It Matters: Schoolwork

Share tips to boost study skills and memory



The ability to recall information, especially long-term, is crucial for learning. Long-term memory is the “store of

knowledge” we draw on all our lives. To help your child boost memory power, share these tips:

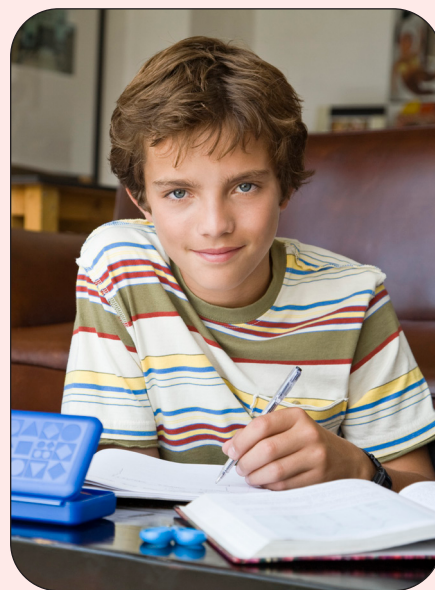
- **Look at the big picture.** If there is an upcoming test on Chapter Four, your child will want to spend the most time studying that chapter. However, your child should also take a few moments to look at summaries of other chapters. Doing so will clarify how Chapter Four relates to the whole unit. Understanding the relationship can help your child remember the material.
- **Put information** on index cards and review the cards frequently. This tried-and-true method really does make recalling small chunks of information easier.
- **Focus attention** on the middle part of material, because brains remember the beginning and end parts best.
- **Make the material** relevant to your child’s life. Perhaps your child can visit a historic site or watch a video on the subject.
- **Use mnemonics.** Techniques like using the acronym GEMDAS to remember the order of math operations can make recall easier.
- **Study and then rest** or sleep. While the body is getting rest, the brain will still be working on sorting out and retaining the material your child studied just before going to bed.

Support your child’s learning with five simple strategies

What’s the most effective way to help your child succeed in middle school? The answer is to be engaged in your child’s education.

To get off to a great start this year:

1. **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 curiosity.
2. **Encourage reading.** Reading for pleasure will help your child build the comprehension skills and vocabulary needed to tackle more difficult material.
3. **Talk about the importance** of paying attention in class. Challenge your student to ask at least one question per day in each class to improve focus.
4. **Establish study routines.** Have a set time for homework. Help your child find a quiet place to work. On days without assignments,



encourage your child to do some reading or review.

5. **Ask questions.** Show that education is a priority in your family by asking your child about school every day. Then, be sure to *really* listen to what your child has to say.

Organization skills contribute to your child’s academic ability



Some middle school students have a difficult time staying organized.

And when students become too disorganized, their grades often suffer.

While it’s ultimately your child’s responsibility to keep track of schoolwork, you can:

- **Make sure your student** has the right tools. Your child should have a designated place to keep assignments for each class. It

could be a notebook, a folder or a binder divided with tabs.

- **Show your child** how to track assignments with a daily planner. In it, your student can write down dates for projects, tests and other school responsibilities.
- **Insist on weekly clean-ups** of your child’s study space and backpack. Encourage your student to throw away trash, sort and file papers and restock the area with necessary school supplies.