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Middle School Parents

still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler set or renew academic goals

Now that the school year is well underway, you and your child probably have a better idea of where his strengths are and where he needs to improve.

Over the winter break, take some time to help your child establish goals for the remainder of the school year. While he should be the one to set his goals, your support and guidance will help him succeed.

Encourage your child to do these five things:

1. **Be realistic.** If he has struggled in the past, bringing every grade up to an A in one quarter may not be a realistic goal. Encourage him to identify his most important needs, and set goals to improve those.
2. **Write down goals.** One study found that when people wrote down their

goals, they were 33% more successful in achieving them than those who didn't write them down.

3. **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.
4. **Check his progress** every few weeks. How is he doing? What changes, if any, should he make?
5. **Review his goals** at the end of the next grading period. Your child should figure out a maintenance plan for goals he's met, an action plan for those he hasn't and an exploration plan for new goals.

Source: M. Price-Mitchell Ph.D., "Goal-Setting Is Linked to Higher Achievement," *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC.

Shift school responsibilities onto your child



Middle schoolers don't morph into responsible young adults overnight. But they may not turn

into them at all if their parents always do everything for them.

Students in the middle grades are generally capable of taking responsibility for:

- **Making lunches.** Give your child a lesson in how to load up her lunch bag. Lay down some basic rules about what's OK—or not OK—to pack, and insist that she prepare her lunch the night before—even if she's learning remotely.
- **Waking up on time.** Show your child how to set an alarm clock. In the morning, let the alarm wake her up. (Act as her "backup alarm" until she gets the hang of it.) If she's too quick to hit "snooze" and doze off again, have her place the clock across the room from her bed so she'll have to get up to turn it off.
- **Keeping track of assignments.** Ask about your child's homework. But don't question her constantly about her progress. Be clear that turning work in on time is her responsibility.

Don't fall into the trap of being a friend instead of a parent



Your middle schooler is growing up before your eyes and may look more like a young adult than a child. But remember:

She is still your child and not your peer. She needs you to be the responsible adult—and you need her to respect you and your rules.

To avoid falling into the friend trap:

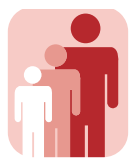
- **Require your child** to be respectful to you and other adults. Don't continue a conversation with her if she is being rude. Walk away and agree to talk to her when she is ready to speak respectfully.
- **Insist that your child** continue to follow your rules. Middle schoolers don't need a long list of rules—just a few important ones that *must* be followed, whether they are at home or elsewhere.

- **Don't try to be the "cool parent"** in the neighborhood. You should be kind and caring to your child and her friends, but you are not "one of the gang." Children lose respect for parents who act like children.
- **Do not make decisions** based on what would please your middle schooler and her friends. It's important to always trust yourself as the adult and make decisions accordingly.

"The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering."

—Benjamin Spock

Recognizing bullying isn't always easy for middle school students



You may think it is easy for kids to recognize bullying. But in the social structure of middle school, it is not so simple.

That's because middle school students tend to be much more forgiving if the bully is one of the popular kids.

As you talk with your child about bullying, encourage him to:

- **Focus less on *who*** is bullying and more on *what* is happening. Are the actions dangerous or hurtful? Are the words mean or meant to cause a person sadness, fear or embarrassment? If so, it's bullying—even if the person who is doing it is someone everybody likes, and the victim is someone who doesn't have many friends.
- **Think about** how he would feel if he were in the victim's place. Would it make a difference to your child if the bully were a popular student? Or would he be hurt no matter who the bully was? Encouraging your child to "walk in another's shoes" is an important step toward building empathy.
- **React appropriately.** Your child should *never* be a bystander. Standing by and watching—or worse, laughing along with the bully—is almost as harmful as the actual bullying itself. Your child should ask the bully to stop or slip away and tell an adult immediately.

Source: *Bullying—Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program*, The Parent Institute.

Do you know how to talk about the tough issues?



Middle schoolers often face some pretty tough situations—from being offered alcohol to feeling

pressured by a friend to skip a class. Are you helping your child face difficult issues head on?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you talk about** the difficult situations your child may face *before* they occur?

___ **2. Do you role-play** different ways to say *no*? "My mom would kill me!" is a favorite standby.

___ **3. Have you told** your child you expect honesty—especially about serious issues?

___ **4. Do you communicate** your values to your child? Remember: Values are *caught*, not *taught*.

___ **5. Do you create** everyday opportunities to talk with your child? Casual conversations often pave the way for more serious talks.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are having positive talks with your child about tough issues. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Give your child opportunities to make valuable contributions



The myth that middle schoolers are lazy is just that: a myth. The truth is that adolescents want to be useful and feel like their contributions matter.

Help your child find ways to contribute in the community year-round. Not only will it make him feel good about himself, it may help nurture his sense of responsibility toward people around him.

Your child could:

- **Join a service organization.** Whether national or local, service organizations can be perfect places for middle schoolers to make a difference and connect with other students who share similar interests.
- **Be a caring neighbor.** Is your older neighbor stuck at home because of a recent snowfall? Have your

child grab a shovel and get busy. The same goes for bringing in a sick neighbor's trash can from the curb. Point out ways your child can take the initiative and pitch in. Responsible actions contribute to the overall well-being of his community.

- **Support a cause.** He could collect goods for a local shelter or host a bake sale to raise funds for a charity. Help him do some research and make a plan.
- **Write letters of thanks.** Encourage your child to write a thank-you note to a public servant, such as a fire fighter. He'll learn how nice it feels when one responsible member of society applauds another!

Source: E. Medhus, M.D., *Raising Everyday Heroes: Parenting Children to Be Self-Reliant*, Beyond Words Publishing.

Playing board games builds skills and promotes learning



During quarantine, many families played board games for fun. But did you know that board games also reinforce skills that inspire learning and thinking. These games give children a chance to:

- **Follow directions.** Students in middle school still need to practice this skill—just ask any middle school teacher!
- **Use logic, reasoning and strategy.** For success with many games, your child will need to decide which move to make or card to play. This kind of decision making will be helpful in higher math and science classes.
- **Read, write, spell** and boost their vocabulary. Some board games

are all about creating words and word puzzles. For others, your child must read and understand questions and clues.

- **Create and spot patterns.** Learning how to recognize, remember and apply patterns is directly related to success in math.
- **Focus and pay attention.** Taking turns, planning strategies and monitoring opponents all require focus and attention. Your child will sharpen these skills as she plays.
- **Negotiate and communicate.** Some board games, such as Monopoly, require players to make deals and alliances in order to move forward. Playing these games teaches kids how to collaborate with others.

Q: I know that attendance is important, but we're planning to travel over the holidays, and my seventh grader will miss a week of school. How can I keep her from falling behind?

Questions & Answers

A: First, take a look at your itinerary. Is it possible to alter your plans so your trip falls within the school's break? That's the only way to ensure your child won't miss out on important learning.

If your travel dates are written in stone, though, here are three things you can do to help your middle schooler stay on top of things:

1. **Talk to her teachers.** Well in advance, explain the situation to each of them. If they're planning to assign readings or worksheets right after break, see if your child can get started now. Find out which teachers maintain updated classroom websites, and see if your child can follow each day's lesson from afar. But keep in mind: Teachers are under no obligation to adjust to your vacation schedule.
2. **Focus on learning** while you are away. Look at your trip as a learning opportunity. Explore museums and cultural or historical attractions and discuss them as a family. Try to immerse your child in educational activities she might not get at home.
3. **Set aside time** for reading and writing. Even if your child has no official work to complete while she's away, insist she read for pleasure and write about her trip in a notebook. A vacation from school should not be a vacation from learning!

It Matters: Homework & Study Skills

Share useful tips for mastering reading material



In middle school, your child is required to read material that is more complex. This can be challenging for many students. Remember, reading is a learned skill and, like any other skill, it can be improved with practice.

To help your middle schooler do better with reading assignments:

- **Encourage him to read for pleasure often.** The more your child reads, the more he'll be able to read smoothly and accurately. This is called *fluency*, and it is an important step toward reading comprehension.
- **Teach him to read actively.** Looking at the words on a page isn't enough for many students. They need to be focused and engaged with the content. Taking notes while reading is the perfect activity to suggest. Just the act of taking notes often improves reading comprehension. It's even more effective if your child studies his notes after reading. He can also use index cards or sticky notes to mark important pages.
- **Focus on vocabulary.** One reason middle school texts and fictional works are challenging is that they introduce unfamiliar vocabulary. Tell your child not to simply skip over words. When he comes across a word he doesn't know, he should stop and look up the definition. Then he should write the word and its definition on an index card.

Source: "Middle School Reading: Improving Your Seventh and Eighth Grader's Reading Comprehension," Math & Reading Help, American Library Association.

Test-taking strategies can raise your child's test scores

Standardized tests are a necessary part of your child's education. The next time one of these exams looms, help your child prepare by sharing these test-taking strategies:

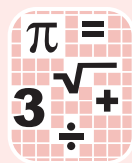
- **Answer easiest questions first**—if the test allows your child to answer questions in any order. Once she gets past those, she can go back and focus on the tricky ones.
- **Read the entire question.** If she's being timed, your child may be tempted to race through the test. Remind her to slow down and read questions carefully.
- **Pick out key words in questions.** She should note key words like *including*, *except* and *compare*. They help define what's being asked.
- **Consider each available answer.** Even if your child feels certain that the first answer she sees is correct,



she should read through the rest. It's possible that another answer is stronger.

- **Make an informed guess.** She should eliminate answers that are obviously wrong and then choose from the remaining options.

Show your child how to make the most of middle school math



Many students move up to pre-algebra or algebra in middle school. Even if your child is not taking these courses, he will be exposed to some of the concepts. To prepare your child to do his best in higher-level math, encourage him to:

- **Make the best use of class time.** He should pay attention to the teacher, take notes and follow along with handouts.
- **Go over class notes** each day, even if the teacher doesn't give homework. Students get the most out of

notes when the class is fresh in their minds.

- **Look in the textbook.** He should look for additional examples of problems and read explanations of how to solve them.
- **Ask for help.** No one should do your child's homework but your child. However, if he knows a friend or family member who is familiar with the concepts, he can ask for a demonstration.
- **Talk to the teacher immediately** if he's confused. He should ask what extra help is available.