

Middle School Parents[®]

May 2024
Vol. 27, No. 9

Dr. Selma Wells

still make the difference!



Help your child maintain motivation and momentum

As the school year winds down, middle school students tend to get a bit restless and start daydreaming about the summer break. But summer isn't here just yet.

Remember: The last few weeks of school are just as important as the rest. It's vital for middle schoolers to be in school and stay focused so they can finish the school year strong.

To motivate your child to keep working hard:

1. Stick to routines. It's easy to get wooed by warmer temperatures and more daylight. If you find yourself letting your child put off schoolwork longer and longer and stay up later and later, it's time to get back on track. Morning comes

as early as ever, and if your middle schooler doesn't get enough sleep at night, it will be difficult to focus during class.

2. Show your interest. By this point of the school year, families are pretty familiar with what goes on at school. However, don't stop asking about it. Let your child know that you care and still want to hear about assignments and classes.

3. Maintain expectations. Remind your child that if grades begin to slip near the end of the year—or if your child stops completing assignments—there will be consequences. The thought of missing an anticipated event or activity may inspire your child to buckle down.

Show your child how to handle disappointment



Life doesn't always go as planned. Whether your middle schooler earns a low grade on a test or finds

out that social plans have been canceled, learning to accept and move beyond disappointment is a necessary part of school and life.

To help your child bounce back after things go wrong:

- **Ask, "How are you feeling?"**
Often, middle schoolers tend to either overreact or to clam up entirely. Help your child express disappointment using words.
- **Be sympathetic and supportive.**
Say, "I'm so sorry that event was canceled. I know you are disappointed. What else could you do?" Asking questions instead of just fixing things gives your middle schooler the opportunity to learn recovery skills.
- **Demonstrate coping skills.**
It may not be easy to share your personal disappointments. But it's one of the most effective ways to show your child how to be resilient. "I am so disappointed that I didn't get that promotion," you might say. "I'm going to keep trying."

A strong vocabulary is key for middle school reading success



In middle and high school, the reading material is more complex and contains advanced vocabulary. Having a

broad vocabulary will give your child an advantage.

To focus on building vocabulary over the summer months, encourage your child to:

- **Read every day.** Middle schoolers should read a variety of materials—novels, short stories, news articles, magazines and websites. The more reading material children take in, the more words they will encounter. Encourage your child to look up unfamiliar words and learn their meanings.
- **Talk.** Introduce new words when you have conversations with your

child. “I am excited to start my new job tomorrow, but I am also *apprehensive*.” This is a great exercise for everyone in the family.

- **Practice.** Reading and hearing all these new words may not mean much if your child doesn’t use them. Challenge your child to use one or two new words a day.

Source: C. Snow, “Building vocabulary to improve reading in middle school,” Harvard Graduate School of Education.

**“One forgets words
as one forgets names.
One’s vocabulary needs
constant fertilizing or
it will die.”**

— Evelyn Waugh

Encourage your child to find and enter a contest this summer



There are many opportunities for students to keep learning during the summer months. And without the demands

of schoolwork, they can choose what they’d like to learn more about.

Entering a summer contest can allow your middle schooler to spend time developing talents and interests. Contests can also:

- **Inspire excellence.** Whether your middle schooler enjoys art, writing, photography or science, the idea of competing against others may motivate your child to produce a “personal best.”
- **Boost self-image.** Even if your child doesn’t win the contest, taking a healthy risk and working hard is

something to celebrate. Say something like, “You worked so hard. You submitted your entry on time and tried something different. You should feel really proud of yourself. I know I’m proud of you.”

To find a suitable contest:

- **Check with the school.** Sometimes, companies that sponsor contests for students will send materials and entry forms directly to school principals or counselors.
- **Ask a librarian.** Librarians often know about contests for students.
- **Search online.** Research any sponsor offering a contest before you allow your child to enter. You should never have to pay a fee to enter or provide personal financial information.

Are you preparing your child for a safe summer?



Summer is prime time for fun and also for taking risks—especially for middle schoolers, who may not always be in sight

of an adult. Are you doing all you can to make sure your child is healthy and safe over the summer? Answer yes or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you require** your child to wear sunscreen and insect protection when playing outdoors?
- ___ **2. Do you insist** that your child wear a helmet when on a bike, scooter or skateboard?
- ___ **3. Do you consider** your child’s maturity before assigning chores, such as mowing the lawn with a riding lawn mower?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to drink plenty of water when playing or exercising outdoors in the heat?
- ___ **5. Do you look** for supervised activities that will keep your child busy and active?

How well are you doing?

Mostly yes answers mean you are preparing for a safe summer for your middle schooler. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

**Middle School
Parents**
still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May.
Copyright © 2024, The Parent Institute,
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.,
an independent, private agency.
Equal opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Five strategies help students make the most of study time



Unfortunately, not all middle school students know how to study effectively. Those that don't may spend more time than they need to on their schoolwork. Or, they may get frustrated and stop studying completely.

Share these strategies to help study time pay off for your middle schooler:

- 1. Take class notes.** Writing down what the teacher emphasizes can help your child see what the teacher thinks is important. Reviewing class notes each evening will also improve your child's memory of the material.
- 2. Break it up.** Research shows that studying material in several short study sessions spaced out over time is more effective than one long study session.
- 3. Study similar subjects at different times.** Putting new information
- 4. Avoid getting sidetracked.** If your child's mind tends to wander during study time, suggest keeping a notepad nearby. That way your middle schooler can jot down reminders or random thoughts to consider later and then get right back to studying.
- 5. Eliminate distractions.** The TV, a phone and a growling stomach will all distract your middle school student. Have your child turn off unneeded digital devices and take care of hunger and thirst before sitting down to study.

Build a relationship that supports academic success



Studies show that positive adult influence is critical to children's success. Children who have healthy adult role models:

- **Feel more secure** and optimistic than children without role models.
- **Are more likely** to feel happy.
- **Are nine times more likely** than other kids to earn straight A's.
- **Are less likely** to cheat on tests.
- **Are more likely** to believe in their own future success.
- **Get to know your child.** Take time to find out what makes your child tick and find ways to support interests.
- **Offer specific praise.** Middle schoolers sometimes get a bum rap. They're often seen as moody troublemakers. Look for the positive. When your child does something great, say so!
- **Listen.** Don't dismiss your child's problems or opinions because your child is "just a kid." Pay attention when your middle schooler tells you something. Your willingness to listen may be the biggest motivator of all.

What's the secret to being a solid role model for your middle schooler? There isn't one. Instead, there are some common sense things you can do to keep your child motivated and feeling loved. Here are a few:

Source: "Healthy Parent-Child Relationships," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

Q: My middle schooler is having a great school year. However, the thought of starting high school next fall seems to be overwhelming. Is there anything I can do to make the transition go smoothly for my child?

Questions & Answers

A: Absolutely! Although you can't guarantee your child won't worry, there are several things you can do this summer to help your child prepare for the move to high school:

- **Listen carefully.** When your child talks about fears regarding high school, pay attention. It may help you identify the real problem. For example, you might assume your child is worried about handling more difficult schoolwork. It could turn out, though, that your child is really worried about meeting new people and finding extra-curricular activities.
- **Help your child practice time management skills.** High school means more classes and a bigger workload. Give your child a calendar or a planner and recommend using it to keep track of summer activities and appointments. This will reinforce the habit of planning time and writing things down.
- **Check out the school website** and social media platforms together. Find out what types of activities may be available for ninth graders. Learn about some of the policies and procedures your child will be expected to follow.
- **Encourage your child to talk** to a current high school freshman. Hearing first-hand about how high school differs from middle school may ease your child's anxiety—and yours!

It Matters: Summer Learning

Limit mindless screen time to boost well-being



Middle schoolers spend an average of seven hours each day in front of screens for entertainment alone.

And that time typically increases during the summer months.

Kids are streaming shows, playing online games and scrolling through social media. All of this screen time leaves less time for important physical and mind-building activities.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute recommend setting limits on recreational screen time because too much can affect:

- **Maturity.** Middle schoolers should use part of the summer to take on new responsibilities, learn new hobbies and explore new interests. Binge watching a series on Netflix won't get your child very far on that journey.
- **Health.** Time spent in front of a screen is time kids are not spending on healthier pursuits, such as exercise. Studies link overindulging on screen time to obesity, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol—each of which puts your child at risk of heart disease.
- **Social skills.** Many students in middle school socialize with friends on social media. However, face-to-face interaction is necessary, too. Keep in mind that your child needs to spend screen-free “real life” time with friends and family.

Source: T. Bahrapour, “Teens who spend less time in front of screens are happier—up to a point, new research shows, *The Washington Post*.”

Unstructured time provides opportunities for family fun

With school out for the summer, children will likely have more unstructured time. Help your child make the most of this time by using it for fun activities together:

- **Get active.** Take advantage of the long, warm evenings. If you and your child both like a physical activity, such as biking, do it together. Or, just walk and enjoy each other's company—as well as the conversation that happens more naturally at these times.
- **Celebrate the weekend.** Encourage your child to make a list of low-cost activities you can do together. Then, schedule time to do them.
- **Plant a summer garden.** Involve your child in the planning, planting, watering and harvesting.



- **Make memories.** Take photos to record your summer. Spend an evening together writing captions, making a slide show or putting the photos in an album.

Offer your middle schooler purposeful writing activities



Summer vacation is a good time to help your middle schooler learn two important things about writing. First, writing has a purpose. It is not something teachers make up to torture their students! Second, writing can be a lot of fun, especially when it's about an interesting topic.

Encourage your child to write:

- **A review of a book.** This is different from a book report. Reviews should focus on whether your child liked the book, why or why not, and whether your child would recommend it to others.

- **Trivia questions** about a favorite sport or topic of interest. This is a wonderful way to show what an “expert” your child is.
- **A letter to the editor**, or an online review for a company. Offering feedback, whether it is positive or negative, is a common purpose for writing. Have your child share feedback about something.
- **A letter**—on paper. Have your child make Grandma's day, or that of another relative or family friend.
- **Fan fiction.** Your child can choose favorite characters from any kind of media and then put them in a brand new story.