

Middle School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Reinforce six traits that lead to academic achievement

No two children are the same, but successful students do have some things in common. To develop these traits in your child, encourage her to be:

- 1. Curious.** Curious students won't accept "just because" as an answer. They want to know things. To stoke your child's curiosity, expose her to new ideas and experiences.
- 2. Persistent.** Successful students keep trying until they master tough assignments. They set goals and work diligently to reach them. Acknowledge your child's effort when she puts in long hours studying; don't focus solely on the resulting grade.
- 3. Organized.** Even an academic star will struggle in school if she can't find things. Make sure your child has the tools to help her organize her schoolwork and manage her time, such as calendars, sticky notes and file folders.
- 4. Resilient.** Everyone fails sometimes, but successful students don't let failure derail them. Encourage your child to take responsibility for her actions and create a plan for improvement.
- 5. Open-minded.** Remind your child to listen to the opinions of others and engage in constructive conversations with classmates—even when she disagrees.
- 6. Confident.** When students know the adults in their lives love them and believe in them, the sky is the limit!

Show your child how to enjoy time alone



The middle school years are a peer-driven time of life. This makes things like social distancing and virtual

learning especially challenging for some students.

Remind your child that he can be happy in his own company. Encourage him to engage in pursuits such as:

- **Reading.** Your child is always less likely to feel lonely when he's immersed in a good book, or any other material he enjoys reading.
- **Arts and crafts.** Adolescents are often wonderfully creative and can produce beautiful work when given the time.
- **Exercise.** Suggest your child go for a walk each day. He can listen to music or an audiobook, or just be alone with his thoughts.
- **Cooking.** Growing kids are usually drawn to the kitchen. Cooking is a rewarding experience that involves all five senses. And as a bonus, your child can eat what he creates!
- **Daydreaming.** Let your child know it's OK to spend some time doing absolutely nothing!

Experts offer three strategies to motivate underachievers



It's frustrating when you know your child has the ability to succeed but seems not to want to. This is the trap of underachievement.

Experts suggest parents do three things to get kids back on track:

1. **Show your child you care** about him as a *person*, not just a student. If a long lecture about getting better grades were the trick to motivation, there would be no such thing as an underachiever. Make time to talk to your child about his life, watch a favorite movie with him, play a board game together. This helps him feel valued—a key step in helping him feel motivated.
2. **Recognize improvements.** It might not thrill you if your child

brings home a low C on his history quiz. But if his last quiz grade was a D, he's made progress. A pat on the back with a simple, "You brought your grade up. I believe in you!" can work wonders.

3. **Harness the power of friends.** If your child doesn't want your help, consider enlisting the help of one of his friends. "Grant is in your history class. Maybe the two of you could study for the next test together."

"Positivity, confidence, and persistence are key in life, so never give up on yourself."

—Khalid

Unsupervised time can lead to trouble for middle schoolers



Some parents think their middle schoolers don't need to be supervised when they are home alone. But studies show

that kids with too much time on their hands may be at higher risk of substance abuse.

One study found that eighth graders who were unsupervised for 11 hours a week were twice as likely to use drugs and alcohol as those under some form of adult supervision.

Where can parents who work outside the home find after-school supervision for their kids? Here are some suggestions:

- **Youth organizations.** Scouting, 4-H and many other student organizations have programs

designed specifically for middle school students.

- **Volunteer work.** Your child can gain job skills while making the world a better place. Visit dosomething.org for ideas.
- **School activities.** Whether your child stays after school for sports or a club, he will be involved in a positive activity.
- **Community centers.** Check out programs for preteens.
- **Neighbors.** Perhaps a neighbor or relative who is home during the day would be willing to check in on your child every few hours.

Source: "Family Checkup: Supervision," National Institute on Drug Abuse and "Keeping Kids Safe and Supported in the Hours After School," *MetLife Foundation Afterschool Alert*, Afterschool Alliance.

Are you helping your child work with teachers?



It's normal for middle schoolers to like some teachers better than others. Learning to get along with authority

figures is an important life lesson.

Are you helping your child get along with her teachers? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you remind your child** of her responsibility to be courteous and respectful to teachers?
- ___ 2. **Do you help your child** keep things in perspective? She doesn't have to like a teacher to learn something in that class.
- ___ 3. **Do you help your child** figure out the cause of any problem she's having in a class?
- ___ 4. **Do you encourage your child** to try to work with her teachers on her own to resolve any issues?
- ___ 5. **Do you ask to speak** to a teacher if your child is unable to work through an issue herself?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you're helping your middle schooler learn how to work with her teachers. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Here's why middle schoolers should make time for reading



Most middle schoolers spend more time on assignments than they did when they were in elementary school. With

the increased workload, reading for pleasure may be pretty far down on their list of priorities.

Your child may think that he reads a lot for school and that should be enough. He's wrong! Here are a few reasons your middle schooler should make time for pleasure reading:

1. Reading can make him an expert.

Reading is the best way for your child to learn as much as possible about his areas of interest.

2. Reading can take him places.

Few people can afford to travel every place they'd like to go. But your

child can always travel through a book. And he can gain knowledge to help him set goals to get there in person someday.

3. Reading can make him laugh.

Appreciating the humor in books helps develop your child's thinking skills. It also improves his own sense of humor.

4. Reading can turn him into a detective.

A cold winter day is a perfect time for your child to grab a cup of hot chocolate and dive into a great mystery.

5. Reading can introduce him to people like himself.

In books that feature characters his age, your child is likely to encounter people that think the way he does and face the same issues he is facing.

Preparing for chapter tests is easier with a study system



If your child tends to study by the "seat of her pants" whenever an end-of-chapter test approaches, it's time to overhaul her habits! Help her develop a system for studying textbook chapters—one she can use anytime a test looms.

Suggest that your child:

1. Start by reading the first section of the chapter.

She may be tempted to race through and finish the whole thing, but tell her to resist the urge. She'll remember more if she studies one section at a time.

2. Imagine what questions her teacher might ask about the material in that section.

If she can't think of any questions, she should read it again.

3. Write down those questions.

Have her jot down each one

on a separate index card and write its answer on the back of the card.

4. Proceed section by section.

If one section is particularly long or tricky, or if she can think of several questions the teacher may ask about it, suggest she break that section into smaller parts.

5. Identify new vocabulary words.

After she's made her "question cards" for each section, have her go back through the chapter and look for unfamiliar words and words in boldface. She should write each one on the front of an index card and its definition on the back.

Once your child has a chapter's worth of information-packed cards, she can use them to study for the test. Better yet, you can use them to quiz her!

Q: I know I'm deciding too many things for my middle schooler. How can I help him start making choices for himself without letting him make poor ones?

Questions & Answers

A: Here's the short answer: You can't. Learning to make good decisions—and learning lessons from the bad ones—is part of growing up. So when your middle schooler makes a poor choice, don't see it as "letting" him fail. Instead, view it as allowing him to figure out what good decision-making is.

Of course, there are certain areas where your child should not be allowed to decide things for himself. These include:

- Health safety.
- Drugs and alcohol.
- Chores.
- School attendance.

Other areas, however, can be open for discussion—at least to a degree. Here are three:

1. **Studying.** Doing homework is non-negotiable. But be flexible about *how* your child does it. If he claims he works best sprawled on the floor listening to music, let him try it. His grades will reveal whether he's correct.
2. **Bedtime.** If you've insisted on the same bedtime for years, revisit the issue. Let your child weigh in on an appropriate bedtime. If it's reasonable, allow it—as long as he gets at least nine hours of sleep each night.
3. **His room.** If you argue with your child about keeping his room clean, stop. Assuming it's not so horrible that the health department intervenes, let him decide how tidy things should be.

It Matters: Building Character

Show your child the many ways to exhibit respect



In a class of many people, each student's actions affect the others. It's difficult for teachers to create a positive

learning environment in the absence of respect.

Talk to your child about the importance of being respectful to others. Teach her to demonstrate respect by:

- **Believing in herself.** Respect begins with self-respect. Your child should act in ways that make her proud of herself.
- **Being on time.** Promptness demonstrates respect for people's time. Your child should arrive on time for classes and other commitments.
- **Listening to and being polite** to others. This includes parents, teachers and classmates. Your child should address teachers properly by saying, "Good morning, Mrs. Foster."
- **Paying attention** to her body language. When she smiles, nods and makes eye contact she is showing people that she respects them.
- **Being someone others can trust.** Your child should do what she says she will do and take responsibility when she makes a mistake.
- **Understanding that learning** is important. It is a way to better herself. Your child should pay attention in class and participate.
- **Realizing that she can learn** something from almost every person she meets—even if she disagrees with them.

Your middle schooler's success begins with a positive attitude

A positive attitude can motivate your child to put in the effort he needs in order to succeed—and can keep him going even when he feels like giving up.

To foster a positive attitude in your middle schooler:

- **Help him focus** on the things he can change. A negative attitude often results from feeling helpless. For example, your child probably can't change the material in his classes. If that were his goal, he would feel helpless and negative. But he *can* change how much he prepares. That can lead to success and a positive feeling of empowerment.
- **Encourage him to think** of others. It's amazing how doing something good for another person can lift a person out of a bad mood.



Challenge your child to bring a smile to someone else's face as often as he can.

- **Suggest that he keep** a gratitude journal. In it, he can write about things that make him feel grateful and happy.

Talk to your child about the value of being dependable



Dependability is vital in school and the workplace. It matters little how talented or smart someone is if that person cannot be counted on. It is the person who shows up on time and puts forth effort who will do well and be considered for advancement.

Encourage your child to:

- **Do what she says she will do.** At school, she should turn her work in on time. If she is part of a group, whether in a class or in an extra-curricular activity, she should do her part. Others may succeed or

fail based on whether she pulls her weight.

- **Make amends.** Everyone makes mistakes. It's part of life. But your child should also try to correct her errors. If she lets someone down, she should say: "I'm sorry. I won't let it happen again. How can I make it up to you?"
- **Be cheerful.** Showing up and doing the job is important. But if your child does it while scowling and muttering under her breath, she likely won't be asked again. And that's how valuable opportunities are missed.