

# Middle School Parents

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Atkinson County Schools  
Family Engagement

*still make the difference!*



## Have a family discussion about academic honesty

The research is in on students and cheating, and the news is sobering.

In a nationwide survey of 43,000 secondary students, 59 percent admitted to cheating on tests and assignments. Studies also show that:

- **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.
- **Cheating doesn't carry** much of a stigma anymore. Students don't feel the shame in it that they once did.
- **The more pressure** students feel to earn higher grades, the more likely they are to cheat.
- **Cheaters often think** they'll be at a disadvantage if they don't cheat because "everyone else" does.
- **Cheating is easy**, thanks to technology. Students can download papers

or projects and pass them off as their own. They can text pictures of test questions to friends.

- **Kids tend to begin** cheating at games in elementary school. Academic cheating tends to start in middle school.

Talk with your kids about cheating. Say you expect honesty at all times. Be clear that cheating includes:

- **Copying homework** from another student.
- **Receiving or giving help** during a test.
- **Copying work** without giving the source.
- **Handing in a project** or paper that was completed by someone else.

Source: *Plagiarism: Facts & Stats: Academic Integrity in High School*, Plagiarism.org.

## Writing letters helps your child build vital skills



Middle schoolers are more likely to send a text than to sit down and write a good old-fashioned

letter. Yet letter writing is still a very useful skill. Writing letters helps middle schoolers:

- **Practice sentence structure**, grammar and punctuation.
- **Strengthen memory** and storytelling skills. Most people share their experiences when they write letters.
- **Boost social skills**, especially if the letter is a thank-you note.

Here are three strategies to get your child writing:

1. **Keep a writing basket** in a visible spot. Fill it with everything someone would need to write a letter—paper, pens, envelopes, stamps and an address book.
2. **Challenge your child** to write one letter every week. And if he says he has no one to write to, remind him that any relative would love to get mail from him.
3. **Collect postcards** when your family visits new places. Ask your child to write about his experiences and send the cards to relatives and friends.

## Middle schoolers need adult guidance navigating social media



According to Common Sense Media, middle schoolers spend more than 4.5 hours on screen media entertainment every day. And a good portion of that time is spent on social media.

Middle schoolers need guidance and support as they learn to navigate the world of social media. To help your child:

- **Learn about her online activity.** Ask her how often she checks her social media accounts and which ones she uses the most. Download the apps she uses most often. Learn how they work. And check to see if your child has one account she shows you and another she shares with friends.
- **Set standards for online behavior.** Your child shouldn't post anything on social media that she wouldn't want you or her friends' parents reading. Remind her that nothing

online ever goes away so she should think carefully before she posts anything.

- **Encourage her to limit her followers.** Kids want to be popular, and they sometimes add followers at random. To protect privacy, your child should know who is following her online.
- **Build in digital downtime.** Be a role model yourself—put the phone away at meal time. After dinner, go for a walk or read a book.

**Source:** A. Wichard-Edds, "5 Ways Parents Can Help Kids Balance Social Media with the Real World," *The Washington Post*.

**"Social media is an amazing tool, but it's really the face-to-face interaction that makes a long-term impact."**

—Felicia Day

## Middle schoolers like to have a sense of control over homework



You might have a difficult time finding a middle school student who loves doing homework. But you can help your child develop a positive attitude about it. The key is to give him a feeling of control.

Research shows that middle school students have definite preferences about homework. They would rather:

- **Do homework** somewhere other than at home.
- **Do homework** when their peers are around.
- **Have their parents** be less involved with their homework.

So what can you do to support your child? You can:

- **Check your child's achievement** at school. Is he doing fairly well? If so, consider allowing him to choose where he completes homework, within reason.
- **Let your child try studying** with a friend, in person or online. Keep an eye on the study session.
- **Provide encouragement.** Say things like, "I see you working hard on your homework. That's why you make progress!"

**Source:** H.Z. Kackar and others, "Age and gender differences in adolescents' homework experiences," *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Elsevier.

## How well is your child adjusting to middle school?



Ideally, your child is well on his way to a successful middle school transition. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are supporting him during this transition.

Have you talked with your child about:

1. **How well he has learned** the logistical aspects of the school, such as classrooms, online content platforms and health and safety precautions?
2. **Whether he thinks** he is keeping up with his classes?
3. **How he feels** about each of his teachers?
4. **His social life?** A child who is content with his friendships is more likely to have a positive middle school experience.
5. **Your family's values** and how he would handle pressure to try drugs or alcohol?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child transition well to middle school. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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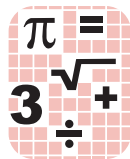
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# Ask questions when your child gets stuck on math problems



Middle school math can be challenging for students and parents alike! If your child gets stuck on math homework,

it's helpful to think of yourself as a *guide* rather than as a teacher. You don't need to have the answers to show him how to tackle his homework effectively.

To help your child figure things out, ask him:

- **What specific problem** are you working on? This will help him focus on one task at a time, rather than become intimidated by an entire sheet of equations.
- **What do the instructions say?** Have him read the directions out loud to you. It's possible that he

missed key words the first time he read them.

- **Are there parts** of the instructions you don't understand? Suggest that he check in his textbook or ask a classmate for clarification.

- **Are there things** you've learned before that may help you here?

If your child is still hopelessly stuck (and you are, too), encourage him to look for help online. If his teacher has a website, he should look there first. He can also search sites like YouTube and find instructional math videos to watch.

If your child still isn't able to figure it out, have him turn in as much of the work as he was able to complete. Then, encourage him to ask his teacher for help.

# Help your child find a balance between school and activities



Many middle schoolers are excited to dive into extracurricular activities—especially now that pandemic restrictions

have eased.

This is mostly good. Activities are fun and build friendships. They teach respect for peers and adult leaders. They steer children away from simply “hanging out.” And they can be an important part of a successful college application.

But there can be too much of a good thing. Academics are the most important part of school. To help your middle schooler find the right balance:

- **Encourage her to prioritize.** Which activities has your child enjoyed in past years? Which benefited her the most? Ask her to think honestly about these questions. Don't settle

for a terse “I loved doing everything!” response. If your child is going to make smart choices about extracurricular activities, she'll need to evaluate them candidly.

- **List the pros and cons.** Once your child has narrowed down her favorites, have her list the pluses and minuses of each one. For instance, lacrosse was fun, but it consumed too many weekends. Help her see each activity with a clear and critical eye.
- **Devise a plan.** Keeping each activity's pros and cons in mind, help your child select one or two to join this fall. In a few weeks, reassess the situation. If she's already struggling in a class, make some changes. But if she's thriving? She may have struck the right balance!

**Q:** My eighth-grade daughter is late for everything. She turns homework in late. She starts projects at the last minute. How can I help her break this self-sabotaging habit?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, time management doesn't come naturally to most middle schoolers. Instead, parents must teach them how to plan ahead.

Show your daughter how to:

1. **Get organized.** Insist that she keep her backpack, room and desk neat. A child who can't organize her belongings is likely to have trouble organizing her thoughts and actions as well.
2. **Prioritize.** Encourage your child to list everything she has to do under one of three headings: “Must Do,” “Would Be Nice to Do” and “Can Skip This.” Remind her that items on the must-do list (like schoolwork) have to come first.
3. **Make a schedule.** After your child sets her priorities, she needs to figure out when she can actually do those “must-dos.” That's where a schedule comes in. Some kids can plan ahead and draw up a schedule for the whole week. Others need to make a schedule every day.
4. **Stick to the schedule.** This may be the hardest step of all. Few children want to spend a sunny day doing research for an upcoming paper when five of their friends are planning to ride bikes to a nearby restaurant. Encourage and praise your child for staying on track. And don't forget to leave some time in the schedule for fun!



# It Matters: The Home School Team

## What if your child doesn't like a teacher?



One way that middle school differs from elementary school is in the number of teachers students

have. Adapting to the different personalities and teaching styles of multiple teachers can be challenging. Middle schoolers may dislike teachers who they feel are too tough, give too much homework or give hard tests.

Here are a few strategies for handling your child's dislike of a teacher:

- **Don't jump** to take your child's side. Unless you are in class each day, you don't know that your child's "horror stories" are true. Talk to your child to find out exactly what the teacher says or does to inspire his dislike.
- **Remember** that it's not the teacher's job to be popular. Your child doesn't have to *like* the teacher's personality to *learn* from her and show her respect.
- **Realize** that in most cases, your child will need to accept the situation. Middle school is more challenging and rigorous than elementary school. Your child may have to study harder and work longer.
- **Talk to the teacher.** If you believe there may be a personal issue between a teacher and your child, ask the teacher for a conference. Listen to her side, calmly give yours and work out a plan to go forward.

**Source:** M. Hartwell-Walker, Ed.D., "When a Teacher and Child Don't Get Along," Psych Central.

## Prepare to get the most out of parent-teacher conferences

**P**arent-teacher conferences are often brief in middle school.

To make the most of them:

- **Talk with your child** before the conference. Does she have any concerns about the teacher or the class?
- **Make a list.** Write a few notes about the topics you'd like to cover so you don't forget them.
- **Start on a high note.** Begin the conference by saying something positive. An upbeat start sets the tone for productive teamwork.
- **Don't be defensive.** If the teacher has concerns about your child, ask for specific examples of the problem. Keep an open mind.
- **Develop a plan.** If your child's teacher mentions a problem, ask him for ideas on solving it.



- **Schedule a follow-up meeting.** This will give you a chance to discuss whether the problem has gotten better.

## Being involved benefits you and your family in three ways



Family engagement at the middle school level is just as important as it was in elementary school. Students' grades,

test scores, attendance and behavior all tend to be better when parents are aware of what is going on at school.

But your child is not the only one who benefits when you are engaged. Here are three ways being involved also benefits you:

1. **You understand more** about how the school works. Perhaps you come from an area where the school system is different from the one where you are currently

living. Being involved helps you become familiar with the local education system.

2. **You learn whom to contact** if you have concerns. You know your child's teachers. You know the counselor and are familiar with the administrators.
3. **The school** will have a better understanding of you and your family. Perhaps English is not your first language. Perhaps you need support. School staff may be able to direct you to agencies who can help. If they know what is going on at home, they can better respond to your child at school.