

Middle School Parents[®]

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Atkinson County Schools
Family Engagement

still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler finish the school year strong

Summer may be on the horizon, but the school year isn't over yet! To help your middle schooler stay focused and keep learning through the last day:

- **Be consistent.** Keep enforcing school-year routines for schoolwork and bedtime. Maintain limits on recreational screen use.
- **Insist on attendance.** Your child may be tempted to skip a class, especially on a beautiful warm day. However, absent students miss both new content and important review sessions. Attending all classes gives your child the most opportunity to learn and do well.
- **Set specific goals.** Rather than sending a generic “keep working

hard” message, help your child set a concrete goal. “Science has been challenging all year. How about committing to an extra 15 minutes of studying your notes each night?” Even if it's too late to bring up a grade, it's never too late to reinforce or establish strong study habits.

- **Stay connected.** Don't assume there's nothing meaningful happening just because the school year is winding down. Students are preparing for important tests and completing end-of-year projects. Continue to monitor your child's assignments and keep reading the information that comes from school.

Create a written discipline plan to curb arguments



Some middle school students are respectful and cooperative, while others seem to resist rules and enjoy arguing over every point.

A written discipline plan can help your child improve behavior and limit misunderstandings between you. It is a visual reminder of expectations and the consequences of not following the rules. It also eliminates the need to argue, because you can point to exactly what you both agreed to.

To create an effective plan:

- **Keep it simple.** Too many rules will overwhelm both of you. Think of the top five issues that are most important to you. Post the rules and consequences for those.
- **Involve your child.** A child who needs a written discipline plan is also a child who does not like to give up control. Ask for input about rules and consequences—but remember that you have the final say.
- **Monitor progress.** When you notice that your child is able to stay consistently within boundaries, it's time to review and possibly revise the plan.

Take steps to prevent the abuse of prescription drugs



The fastest-growing drug problem in the United States is prescription drug abuse. Unfortunately, these

drugs are usually easy for middle schoolers to get their hands on—and they're often "free."

To help prevent prescription drug abuse:

- **Talk to your child** about the dangers of taking medicine prescribed for someone else.
- **Be aware** of the prescriptions you keep in your home. Know which medications family members take and monitor their use closely.
- **Consider keeping** prescription drugs in a locked cabinet.
- **Take special care** if someone in your family takes medicine for pain, anxiety or for ADHD.

These are the most popular drugs for kids to sell or abuse.

- **Dispose** of expired or unused drugs promptly. Call your health care provider or search online to find a collection site near you.

Also keep track of your child's use of over-the-counter medicines. Cough and cold medicines are commonly abused by middle schoolers.

Source: "Rise in Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse Impacting Teens," Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

"62% of teens say they choose to abuse prescription drugs because they're easy to get from parents' medicine cabinets."

—National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics

Start talking to your child about the move up to high school



The start of the high school years is a significant milestone for both students and families.

With just a few months to go for some students, it's natural to feel a mix of excitement and nerves.

Most middle schoolers:

- **Feel excitement** about the opportunities high school offers. These include new friendships and more freedom. High school also lets students pursue new interests through a broader range of classes.
- **Feel nervous.** High school standards for academics, behavior and independence are far beyond what most middle schoolers are used to. There will likely be more students, too.

To help your child relax:

- **Tap available resources.** Encourage your child to talk to the school counselor and ask questions. Your child should also talk to neighbors or friends who are already in high school and ask about their experiences. Plan to attend orientation sessions offered by the high school.
- **Talk to your child.** Share some of your own positive high school memories. Discuss the classes your child wants to take and strategies for managing the workload.
- **Encourage your child.** Say how proud you are of your child's growing abilities and that you are looking forward to this new stage.

Are you laying a solid foundation for next year?



Middle school goes by quickly, and before you know it, your child will be heading to high school. Answer *yes* or

no to the questions below to see if you are helping your student get ready:

- ___ **1. Have you worked** together on organization and the need to write responsibilities down in planners?
- ___ **2. Have you helped** your child develop helpful study habits, such as filing returned work and doing some review or practice each night?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about the importance of taking schoolwork seriously? Grades in high school can affect your child's options after graduation.
- ___ **4. Do you monitor** your child's social life and emphasize the need to avoid unsafe and inappropriate activities?

- ___ **5. Do you maintain** two-way communication with your child and offer support and guidance?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are laying a solid foundation for next year and beyond. Mostly *no* answers? Try the suggestions in the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Middle schoolers need structure and supervision over the summer



Summer usually offers more freedom for kids—and requires more oversight from families.

During the school year, families generally know where their children are and what they are doing during certain hours. That may not be as true during the summer months.

The key to a safe summer is to strike the right balance between structure and freedom. Here's how:

- **Establish rules with your child** at the beginning of summer. Rules should cover *exactly* where your child is allowed to go, with whom and when. Be clear that any exceptions need to be discussed and approved by you in advance.
- **Help your child create** and follow a daily schedule. Among other things, the schedule should include regular times for sleep, meals, exercise and chores.
- **Do not allow your child** to “go hang out with friends.” Ask, “Which friends?” Your child shouldn't be hanging out with anyone you don't know under circumstances you haven't discussed.
- **Establish consequences** for breaking the rules that relate to the misbehavior. For example, coming home late may mean your middle schooler has to stay home the next afternoon.
- **Keep your child busy!** Sign your student up for a summer learning program or camp. Together, research interesting internship opportunities. Your middle schooler could even start a business babysitting children, walking dogs or mowing lawns.

These strategies can help your middle schooler retain learning



It can be challenging for students to remember what they have learned. That's because the human brain is wired to forget.

To help your middle schooler improve memory and recall:

- **Be sure your child understands** the material. It's difficult to memorize something if you don't quite know what it means. Ask your child to explain it to you.
- **Make it personal.** Discuss connections between the topic and things in your child's life. Is a book character like Uncle George?
- **Set it to music.** Encourage your child to make up a tune or simple rhyme to remember names, dates or math formulas.
- **Encourage your child to draw** a picture or make a diagram about the information. Suggest including a written caption.
- **Surround your child** with the material. For a history topic, help find books, movies and songs about that topic, too. Search YouTube for entertaining videos that explain difficult concepts.
- **Be thorough.** Remind your child to read through all class notes when studying. Afterward, your child can go back and try to recall and restate the information.
- **Sleep on it.** The brain processes and stores information during sleep. Suggest that your child review essential information just before going to bed.

Q: My sixth grader is getting moodier and more scattered by the day. I'm worried that the transition to seventh grade is going to be awful. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: First, relax. It's normal for preteens to become moody and scattered—especially as they move to seventh grade.

This is partly because seventh grade isn't *just* another year of middle school. It's often a dividing line between childhood and adolescence. From a changing body to changing emotions, your child is keenly aware that things are going to be different.

To help your child weather these changes and thrive in seventh grade next fall:

- **Maintain an even keel.** Your child probably speaks like an adult one minute and fusses like a toddler the next. What's going on? Puberty. The more you can keep steady—and not get angry or upset—in the face of volatile moods, the better.
- **Hold your child accountable.** While it's developmentally normal for kids to test the boundaries, it doesn't mean they have a free pass. Actions still have consequences. So if your child is disrespectful or chooses to break a rule, enforce the consequence—every time.
- **Be flexible.** Many things change in seventh grade, including children's interests. Be reasonable if your child wants to ditch old activities for new ones.

If your middle school student's negative moods persist or if you see worrying behavior, consult a professional.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Make time for reading during summer break



Reading for pleasure is linked to a lifelong love of learning. It opens up a world of imagination and adventure, encouraging curiosity and a thirst for knowledge.

However, it can be challenging for middle schoolers to maintain a consistent reading habit over the summer. To boost your child's motivation to read:

- **Make the most of the library.** Encourage your child to check out more than books. Look at the magazines and periodicals available on the library's website. If you are planning a trip, ask your child to download a few audiobooks to listen to as you travel.
- **Find out** what other kids are reading. Authors such as Rick Riordan of the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series have helped to make reading cool among preteens. Together, explore new titles on the YALSA website at www.ala.org/yalsa/book-media-lists.
- **Offer a challenge.** If the teacher hands out a summer reading list, that your child read one or two extra books on the list to earn a special treat.
- **Encourage your child** to start a summer reading group. Members can share books, then get together in person or online to discuss what they've read.
- **Share what you're reading.** Did you just read an interesting news or magazine article? Tell your child about it.

Share journal prompts to keep your child writing this summer

Middle schoolers are able to consider ideas and think in ways that wouldn't have been possible when they were younger. Support these emerging thinking skills by encouraging your child to record thoughts and ideas in a summer journal.

Grab a notebook and suggest that your student:

- **Make lists** of favorite songs, shows, books, meals or celebrities. It's fun for kids to look back on these later to see how their opinions have changed.
- **Try fiction.** Encourage your child to write a short story.
- **Try writing forms of poetry** like haiku, limericks, or free verse.
- **Write about something funny.** Why is it so funny to your child? Which friend or family member has a similar sense of humor?



- **Describe a friend,** teacher or family member in detail—including their personality, appearance and interesting quirks.
- **Record observations** and thoughts on a particular day.
- **Write about an ideal day.** How would it be different from a typical day? How would it be the same?

Fill unstructured time with enjoyable family activities



With school out for the summer, your child will likely have more unstructured time. To make the most of this time, plan some fun activities together:

- **Get active.** Take advantage of the long, warm, summer evenings. If you and your child both like an 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 for the family to do together. Then, schedule time to do them.
- **Plant a summer garden.** Involve your middle schooler in the planning, planting, watering and harvesting.
- **Make memories.** Take photos to record your summer. Spend an evening together making a slide show or putting the photos in an album or scrapbook.