

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Rolla Public Schools

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## Expect your middle schooler to be successful this year!

**D**on't just *hope* your child will be successful in middle school this year—*expect* it! Studies show that the most successful students have parents who maintain high, realistic expectations of them. What you believe your child is capable of achieving influences your student's academic and social outcomes.

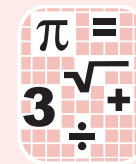
To promote success in the classroom and beyond:

- **Believe in your child.** Don't act surprised when your student succeeds. For example, if your child brings home a B+ on a challenging science test, say, "That's awesome! I knew all of your extra studying this week would pay off!" Not, "Wow! How on earth did you pull that off?"

- **Offer support** when your child stumbles. Remind your student that failure happens to everyone and mistakes help people grow. Be your child's "safe place," and provide constant love and acceptance. Never belittle your child for failure.
- **Empower your child** to take action. When unfortunate things happen, don't chalk them up to bad luck. That will make your child feel like a victim who has no control over situations. Instead, encourage your child to think about the lesson learned. Together, brainstorm ways to handle similar situations in the future.

Source: V. LoBue, Ph.D., "Expect the Best: On the Power of Expectation," *Psychology Today*, John Thomas.

## Help your child overcome math frustration



During middle school, students are introduced to abstract math concepts. If they've missed basic concepts in earlier years, they may find it difficult to keep up in class now.

When this happens, students can become anxious and defensive. Their confidence may decrease, which can cripple their progress.

To help your child:

- **Really listen.** Express sympathy if your child complains, "I don't get it!" Say, "This is challenging, but I know you *can* get it." Ask questions to help your child figure out what is confusing.
- **Get familiar with the math** concepts your child is learning. Review math assignments and look online for additional resources.
- **Encourage your child** to focus on the concept rather than the procedure. This may help your child approach a problem in a new and different way.
- **Make the teacher an ally.** Ask about your child's progress. Are your child's difficulties common for this grade? What resources are available for special help?

## Make positive connections with your middle schooler's teachers



Working with the school helps you form beneficial relationships. And some of the most important relationships you forge will be with teachers.

To connect with teachers:

- **Get to know them.** Schedule parent-teacher conferences, and attend meetings and other events for families. Talk to teachers about their expectations. Share what you know about your child's strengths and weaknesses. Exchange contact information.
- **Volunteer.** Ask if there are ways you can support them and your child's learning. Can you organize a field trip? Can you donate items to the classroom?

- **Show your appreciation.** Teachers are used to hearing from parents about problems. A note or call expressing thanks will make a teacher's day. Let teachers know when your child really enjoys an assignment. Thank teachers who take extra time to help your child.
- **Be understanding.** Teachers are human. They work hard and are often under lots of pressure. Don't forget you are on the same team!

**“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”**

—Helen Keller

## Support your child's learning with these five simple strategies



What's the most effective way to help your child succeed in middle school? The answer is to be engaged in your child's education.

To get off to a great start this year:

1. **Make your home learning-rich.** Keep materials on hand that stimulate your child's mind. From simple art supplies to library books, offer creative outlets for curiosity.
2. **Encourage reading.** Reading for pleasure will help your child build comprehension and vocabulary skills needed to tackle more difficult material. Whether your child reads poetry or science fiction, set aside time for your child to read every day.
3. **Talk about the importance of paying attention in class.** Your child should take notes and participate. Challenge your student to ask at least one question per day in each class. This will help your child remain focused and engaged in learning.
4. **Start homework routines.** Have a set time for homework. Offer your child a quiet place to work. Good study habits will help throughout middle school—and beyond. On days without homework, encourage your child to do some reading or review.
5. **Ask questions.** Show that education is a priority in your family by asking your child about school every day. Then, be sure to *really* listen to what your child has to say.

## Are you helping your child make a smooth transition?



The change from elementary to middle school is significant.

How well are you helping your child manage this transition? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Have you and your child** researched the school? Have you checked out the website? Have you reviewed the school handbook?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Have you reassured your child** that, while this is a big change, you believe it will be a positive one?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you ask your child** questions about classes, teachers and how the year is going and listen carefully to the responses?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you plan to attend school** events for families to get more information that can help you support your child this school year?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you encourage your child** to come to you and teachers right away at the first sign of difficulty?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are supporting your child during this transition time. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Maximize studying by sharing memory-boosting strategies



Memory skills, especially long-term memory skills, are critical for learning. Long-term memory is the “store of knowledge”

we draw on all our lives.

To help your child boost memory power, share these tips:

- **Look at the big picture.** If there is an upcoming test on Chapter Four, your child will want to spend the most time studying that chapter. However, your child should also take a few moments to look at summaries of other chapters. Doing so will illustrate how Chapter Four relates to the whole unit. Understanding the relationship will improve your child’s memory.
- **Put information** on index cards and review the cards frequently. This tried-and-true method really

does make recalling small chunks of information easier.

- **Focus attention** on the middle part of material, because brains remember the beginning and end parts best.
- **Make the material relevant.** Perhaps your child can visit a historic site or watch a TV program about the subject.
- **Use mnemonics** (an acronym is a mnemonic). Techniques like remembering GEMDAS for the order of math operations can help students recall information.
- **Study and then rest** or sleep. The brain is never asleep. While your child’s body is getting much needed rest, the brain will still be working on sorting out and retaining the material just before going to bed.

# Understand the essential role of middle school counselors



School counselors have become key players on the educational team in middle schools. They also play a vital role in

the pandemic recovery.

Middle school counselors strive to help all students be productive learners. They also assist students to:

- **Develop skills** that will help them navigate changing expectations and environments.
- **Set academic goals.**
- **Select courses** that will prepare them for future classes.
- **Get back on track** after facing academic problems.
- **Build social skills.**
- **Solve problems** with friends. This can include mediation

or counseling sessions for an individual student or a small group.

- **Strengthen coping skills.** This includes skills for dealing with bullies or with grief.
- **Develop study skills.**
- **Make plans for high school** and beyond.
- **Explore and plan** for different careers.
- **Connect with community agencies** in times of crisis.
- **Locate additional professionals** for academic and personal support. Remember to be patient when contacting a counselor. They each deal with many families.

**Source:** “The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors,” American School Counselor Association.

**Q:** My eighth grader struggles with self-confidence, and often says, “I can’t do anything right!” This isn’t the least bit true. How can I help my child see the smart, capable person I see?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** If there’s ever a time when self-doubt and insecurity are likely to rear their ugly heads, it’s during adolescence. Middle schoolers are discovering the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they’re falling short.

Although you can’t make your child’s insecurity go away altogether, you can do things that will boost your child’s confidence. Here’s how:

- **Focus on strengths.** Look for opportunities that will allow your child to experience success. Sign an athletic child up for a sports team. If theater is more your child’s speed, look into a drama club.
- **Give your child responsibilities.** Middle schoolers often gripe about having to take out the trash or wash the dishes, but chores are an effective way to help children feel capable and needed.
- **Avoid harsh criticism.** The messages kids hear about themselves from others affect how they feel about themselves. Be patient when your child makes a mistake and focus on what to do next time.
- **Celebrate effort.** When your child does something nice for the family, or works really hard on a school project, draw attention to it. Tell your child how proud and appreciative you are.



# It Matters: Responsibility

## Help your child develop a sense of responsibility



Boost your middle schooler's sense of responsibility and you'll help your child succeed inside the classroom

and out. To instill this quality:

- **Talk about it.** Middle schoolers are responsible for their attitudes and the decisions they make. If things are going wrong, talk about how your child's choices might have contributed to the situation. Your child may be surprised to find out that even little things, like choice of words, tone of voice or body language, influence the way things will turn out.
- **Enforce it.** Insist that your child take responsibility for actions. That means allowing your student to experience the consequences of those actions. For example, don't take forgotten homework or lunch to school over and over again.
- **Advocate for it.** Tell your child that you value responsible traits like self-control and persistence. When your child demonstrates those qualities, point them out and offer praise.
- **Model it.** Let your child see you taking responsibility for your mistakes. "I left my gardening tools out in the rain, and now they are rusted. I should have been more responsible." Your admission will teach your child more than an hour of lecturing would.

**Source:** M. Josephson and others, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, Boys Town Press.

## Attendance should be a priority for middle school students

**S**trong attendance is as important to your child's school career as the foundation is to a house. Without it, there is nothing to build on. Here are just a few reasons your child should be in school:

- **School attendance is the law.** Every school district requires students to attend. Your child should miss school only for illness or a family emergency.
- **Missing school affects grades.** Studies show that when students miss class regularly, they suffer academically.
- **Peer relationships** often get started at school. A child who misses school often may have fewer friends.

To aim for top attendance:

- **Tell your child** that school is important to your family and that being in class on time every day is a priority.



- **Schedule vacations** during school breaks or weekends.
- **Schedule appointments** for non-school hours when possible.
- **Don't let your child** stay home from school to avoid taking a test, to catch up on sleep or to finish a project.

## Organization skills support your child's academic success



Some middle school students have a difficult time staying organized. And when students become too disorganized, their grades often suffer.

While it's ultimately your child's responsibility to keep track of schoolwork, you can:

- **Make sure your student** has the right tools. Your child should have a separate place to keep assignments for each class. It

could be a notebook, a folder or a binder divided with tabs.

- **Show your child** how to track assignments with a daily planner. In it, your student can write down dates for projects, tests and other school responsibilities.
- **Insist on weekly clean-ups** of your child's study space and backpack. Encourage your student to throw away trash, sort and file papers and restock the area with necessary school supplies.