

Middle School Parents[®]

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Help your middle schooler finish the school year strong

The calendar may be inching toward summer, but it's not vacation time yet! To help your middle schooler stay focused and keep learning through the end of the school year:

- **Be consistent.** Keep enforcing school-year routines for schoolwork and bedtime. Maintain limits for recreational screen time.
- **Insist on attendance.** Your child may be tempted to skip a class, especially on a beautiful warm day. However, attending classes every day—right up until the last day—is one of the best things students can do to be successful in school.
- **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 reviewing 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.

Think about your time in middle school



Do you remember being 13 and going through difficult times? You might have felt clumsy,

nervous, misunderstood or unpopular. It's helpful for you to talk about those experiences with your child.

Many college professors ask students in education classes to do something similar. They ask teachers-in-training to write about how they felt as middle school students.

Why bring up these old feelings? Reliving them helps soon-to-be teachers see into the hearts and minds of the students they will be teaching. They agree that this helps them find common ground with middle schoolers.

This strategy can work for parents, too. The next time your child seems upset, share a story from your middle school years. Talk about how you felt and how you coped, or what you wish you had done. Ask what your child plans to do.

Remember: Middle schoolers are more willing to open up when they think parents can relate to what they are saying.

It's time to give your child's technology skills a little boost



Most adolescents are very savvy when it comes to the latest apps and computer programs.

But there are some additional technology skills that can enhance your child's success in school. Here are a few:

- **Judgment.** Some information your child encounters online will be excellent and helpful. And a lot of it will be trash. Can your child tell the difference? Talk about how to determine if sources are credible. Do they present facts or opinions? Is the information up to date?
- **Planning.** How will the information be used. Will your child add it to a research paper? Use it to gain a deeper understanding of a particular concept or subject?

- **Creativity.** Most students know how to create online presentations and multimedia projects. But are there new ways to present information? Challenge your child to explore and use a variety of presentation tools.
- **Problem-solving.** If your child has difficulty using a digital device, don't immediately step in. Instead, let your student to attempt to solve the problem first.

"Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master."

—Christian Lous Lange,
Historian

Middle schoolers need structure and supervision over the summer



Summer usually offers more freedom for kids—which requires more oversight from parents. During the school year,

parents generally know where their children are and what they are doing during certain hours. That may not be as true during the summer months.

To set the stage for a safe summer:

- **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. Any exceptions need to be discussed and approved by you in advance.
- **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. In general, middle school students should not be spending unsupervised recreational time with high school students—especially with those in the upper grades.
- **Establish consequences** for breaking the rules and make sure those consequences fit "the crime." For example, coming home late may mean your child has to stay home the next afternoon.
- **Keep your child busy!** Sign up for a summer learning program or camp. Help your student research interesting internship opportunities. Your child could even start a business babysitting children, walking dogs or mowing lawns.

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 things down in planners?
- ___ **2. Have you helped** your child develop helpful study habits, such as keeping a tidy work space and doing some review or practice each night?
- ___ **3. Do you talk** about taking school-work seriously? Grades in high school will 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 communicate** with your child and offer support and guidance?

How well are you doing?

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

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Volunteering helps kids make a difference in their community



One valuable way kids can continue to learn during the summer months is by volunteering. Volunteer work keeps

children busy in constructive activities and reinforces the message that they should think of and assist others. And the best part of volunteering is that it also benefits your community!

To find a volunteer activity that is suitable, think about your student's interests. Does your child:

- **Love to read?** Your child could read to a younger child or elderly neighbor. Some libraries may need help with their children's summer reading programs.
- **Want to help those in need?** Your child could start a canned food drive in your neighborhood, or collect and donate personal

items, such as socks, face masks, soap, toothbrushes, deodorant and hand sanitizer to a homeless shelter.

- **Love animals?** Call the local humane society and ask about volunteer opportunities. Could your child spread the word on social media?
- **Care about the environment?** Your child could organize a clean-up of a local park or other public space.
- **Love to play sports?** Your child could volunteer to help out a youth team coach with practices. Maybe a day-care provider would love to have someone teach kids how to play a sport.

Your middle schooler can find even more ideas for volunteering at www.dosomething.org.

Teach your child the value of persistence and determination



Sometimes it seems easier to give up on a tough assignment than to push through and complete it.

However, that won't get your child very far in life.

Persistence and determination are key for success in school. These traits help large projects seem less overwhelming—and grades improve as a result.

To encourage your child to see difficult assignments and complex projects through to the end:

- **Notice progress.** Say things like, "You're really coming along with that. If you keep on like this, you'll have something to be proud of." Your child will love the pat on the back.

- **Teach positive self-talk.** Saying things like, "I am going to do this" or "I know I can do a great job on this," can motivate your child through the most difficult tasks.
- **Be a role model.** If you've been putting off a big chore, decide to see it through. Say, "Today, I am going to work until I get this finished." Then keep your word.
- **Treat your child** to something special when a challenging task is complete. You could watch a movie together or cook a fun dinner. When your child shows persistence through a tough task, it's definitely time to celebrate!

Source: M. Borba, *Parents Do Make a Difference: How to Raise Kids with Solid Character, Strong Minds and Caring Hearts*, Jossey-Bass.

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 different now.

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 child's negative moods persist or if you see worrying behavior, consult a professional.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Make time for reading during summer break



One of the most effective ways students can limit summer learning loss is to read often. But how can you motivate your child to read over the summer months? Try these tips:

- **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 summer 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 J.K. Rowling of the *Harry Potter* series and Rick Riordan of the *Percy Jackson & the Olympians* series have helped to make reading cool among pre-teens. Your child can discover new titles on the YALSA website at booklists.yalsa.net.
- **Challenge your child.** If the teacher hands out a summer reading list, issue a challenge: Reading one or two extra books on the list will earn your child 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.
- **Set an example.** Let your child see you leafing through a magazine or reading a novel.
- **Share what you're reading.** Did you just read an interesting article? Tell your child about it.

Strengthen writing skills and boost creativity with a journal

Middle schoolers are able to consider ideas and think in ways that wouldn't have been possible when they were younger. You can 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, TV 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 story, song or poem.
- **Write about something funny.** Why is it so funny to your child? Which friend or family member has a similar sense of humor?



- **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?

Spend quality time with your middle schooler this summer



Summertime can be wonderful family time. You may see your child more during the day. But even if you don't, you can take advantage of the less stressful evenings.

To spend quality family time together this summer:

- **Establish a weekly family night.** Cook a meal together, talk, play board games. Avoid screen time.
- **Ask for your child's opinion.** Many middle schoolers enjoy current events. Because kids this age tend to be idealistic and

would like to "save the world," they also have strong opinions. Take time to hear your child's thoughts and ideas.

- **Hold regular family meetings** to solve problems and share ideas about fun ways to spend time together.
- **Ask your child to join you** when you go on errands.
- **Participate in family traditions.** If you always camp out in the backyard or have an outdoor movie night, keep doing it. No traditions? Brainstorm with family members and start some.