

# Middle School Parents®

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## Overcome learning problems by focusing on strengths

Success is contagious. So if your middle schooler struggles in a certain class, point out how well things are going in another one. This technique helps students transfer their strengths to subjects they find more challenging.

Follow this five-step process:

1. **Ask what class** your child is doing the best in. The key is to get your student to feel confident and focus on current accomplishments.
2. **Have your child list reasons** why that class is going so well. What is your child doing that has led to success? This list can be the start of a plan for doing well in other classes.
3. **Add some positive notes** of your own to the list. Examples could be that your child is a good listener, doesn't give up easily or always completes assignments on time.
4. **Brainstorm together** and make a plan. For example, "One of the reasons you earned a high grade in math is that you always asked questions after class if there was something you didn't quite understand. What do you think might happen if you did the same in your science class?"
5. **Have update meetings.** Pledge that you and your child will meet together once a week for an update. Ask for specific examples of the strengths your child used. Talk about the results and discuss strategies for where to go from there.

## Try strategies that improve overall wellness



Many families are busy and stressed—which can have a negative impact on children's health and grades. While it's nearly impossible to lead a stress-free life these days, you can work to make your home a haven away from the daily grind.

To help your entire family feel mentally and emotionally well:

- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories on a regular basis.
- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach family members to take deep breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music whenever they are feeling stressed.
- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report at least one good thing (no matter how small) that happened that day. Try to do this during a family meal.
- **Have everyone pitch in.** Chores go so much more quickly when everyone works together. Have a family chore time and then reward yourselves by doing something fun as a family.

## A study group can enhance middle schoolers' learning



Does your child enjoy working with classmates? If so, studying with a group may be a valuable addition to the work your child does independently.

To form an effective study group, your child should:

- **Choose participants carefully.** Members should be in your child's classes and devoted to doing well in school. Avoid potential conflicts—romantic interests may not be the best choices for a study group. Between four and six students is an effective size.
- **Be clear about the purpose.** Study groups are for improving schoolwork. That can't happen if students are only socializing.

Have group members schedule separate social time every few weeks to reward themselves for their hard work.

- **Set regular meeting times** and adhere to them. If a student needs to miss a session, it should be for a valid reason. Pick a neutral meeting place, such as the library. Or, rotate between homes.

**“It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed.”**

—Napoleon Hill

## Teach your child the difference between a mistake and neglect



Learning responsibility takes time. So don't expect your middle schooler to grasp it overnight. But do expect

your child to take household and school responsibilities seriously. Make sure your child understands the difference between an honest mistake and neglect.

For example:

- **An honest mistake** would be completing the even-numbered problems on the math worksheet instead of the odd-numbered ones; or taking the trash and recycling to the curb on the wrong night.
- **Neglect** would be failing to do the math assignment or household chore at all.

Should you discipline your middle schooler for an honest mistake?

Probably not. No one is perfect and it's only natural to slip up from time to time.

However, if your child *neglects* a responsibility—whether it's schoolwork or a household chore—don't ignore the situation. Instead:

- **Talk to your child** about what happened and why.
- **Remind your child** that school is the number one responsibility.
- **Make it clear** that your child's contributions make a difference to the family.
- **Enforce a consequence.** It's best to agree on the consequence ahead of time and to make sure it is directly related to the responsibility that was neglected.

**Source:** K. Thomsen, M.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose: Navigating the Middle Years*, Search Institute Press.

## Are you staying involved in your child's life?



Some middle schoolers seem to close more than their bedroom doors.

They also close parents out of important parts of their lives. Here's a quiz that will help you open those doors—and maintain the lines of communication. See how many questions you can answer:

1. **Can you name the students** who eat lunch with your child? Write one name: \_\_\_\_\_.
2. **Do you sometimes listen** to your child's music? Name a favorite song or group: \_\_\_\_\_.
3. **Do you know the names** of your child's teachers? Name a favorite teacher: \_\_\_\_\_.
4. **Do you know** who your child texts regularly? Name two friends: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. **Do you discuss** world events that may be worrying your child? Name one of your child's current concerns: \_\_\_\_\_.

### How well are you doing?

Ask your child. Share your answers and talk about them. Then see if your child can answer some similar questions about you.

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# Have a discussion with your middle schooler about bullying



Experts say that middle school is the prime time for bullying. Studies show that nasty behavior seems to boost kids' popularity.

The bullies of today aren't just your typical schoolyard bullies. They also include the:

- **Verbally abusive bully** who calls people names and spreads rumors.
- **Social bully** who gets others to exclude or reject someone.
- **Cyberbully** who posts cruel or embarrassing comments and photos on social media or in group chats.

Talk to your middle schooler about the importance of taking a stand against all forms of bullying.

If your child is being bullied:

- **Discuss it gently.** Your child may be scared or embarrassed. Make it clear that what is happening is not your child's fault.

- **Be supportive.** Assure your child that you will help resolve the problem.
- **Ask for help.** A teacher or guidance counselor might have a solution you haven't thought of.

If your child is the one bullying:

- **Say that you will not tolerate** bullying behavior.
- **Ask what your child** was trying to accomplish. How might your child meet that goal in the future without hurting people?
- **Help your child figure out** how to make amends to the person.

If your child witnesses bullying:

- **Role-play ways to react.** Your child could say, "That's not OK," or walk away with the person being targeted.
- **Encourage your child to report it** to school staff immediately.

**Source:** *Bullying: Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program* Resource Kit, The Parent Institute.

# Never miss a chance to reinforce learning outside the classroom



The more families can connect what their middle schoolers are learning in school to the world beyond school, the more

motivated their children will be!

To support learning at home:

- **Have your child teach you** a thing or two. Find out what your child is studying at school, and ask for an explanation. When students "retell" the things they are learning, they reinforce those things in their own minds.
- **Demonstrate its value.** If your middle schooler just finished tackling fractions in math, head to the kitchen. Show your child the real-life usefulness of fractions. "This recipe calls for half a cup of

milk, but we only have a 1/3-cup measurer. How can we figure out the right amount?"

- **Expose your child to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from grocery shopping to a museum visit—has an impact on learning. On your next outing, challenge your child to connect the experience to something learned in school.
- **Put knowledge into action.** Let your child use skills to help you. For example, the next time you make a wrong turn somewhere, have your child look at a navigation app to get you back on track.
- **Encourage your child to use logic.** Are you working on a puzzle or riddle? Ask your child to help out.

**Q:** I'd like to volunteer to help chaperone an upcoming school field trip, but my child is begging me not to do it. Should I just scrap my plans so my child won't be embarrassed?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Schools really rely on family volunteers—especially at the middle and high school levels, where the number of parents willing to pitch in tends to drop. Still, you don't want your efforts at school to cause a war at home.

To keep the peace:

- **Hear your child out.** Don't ignore complaints. Sit down and talk about it. "I realize you don't want me chaperoning the field trip, but I'd like to know why. Is there something specific that you're worried about?"
- **Validate your child's feelings.** There's huge social pressure to fit in during middle school, so remember that when listening to concerns. "Are you afraid your friends will think you're weird if they see me on the field trip?" If your child says yes, ask this question: "Would you think it was weird if your friends' parents volunteered? Or would it be no big deal?"
- **Compromise.** Don't abandon your commitment to be involved, but do respect your child's feelings. If you've talked it out and your child is still nervous about having you on a field trip, sign up for something else instead. Perhaps you could volunteer in the library or assist the front office staff.  
And if you happen to see your child when you are at school, don't make a big deal out of it. Just give a smile and walk away!



# It Matters: Test Success

## Students should keep learning after the test



Your child probably knows that a test is an assessment of what students have learned.

But does your child know tests are also a way to learn?

Unless your child gets a perfect score, each test should be a learning experience. Educators agree that proper review after a test is one of the most effective ways to improve scores on future tests.

To learn the most from tests, encourage your middle schooler to:

- **Jot down thoughts** about the test after taking it. What did your child struggle with? What did your child know best?
- **Review the graded test** and make notes about which answers were right and which were wrong. Your child should correct wrong answers and figure out why they were wrong and how to make them right. If this is a struggle, have your child check with the teacher.
- **Recognize the types of errors** made. Mistakes generally come in three forms: carelessness, confusion and lack of preparation.
- **Make adjustments.** To reduce careless mistakes, your child could read each question twice, think about the question before answering and check work before turning in the test.

For mistakes based on confusion or lack of preparation, the solution is asking for help and more studying. Instead of cramming, your child should study material over several days.

## Middle schoolers can tackle any test with this six-step process

While there are specific ways to approach specific kinds of tests, there are some general strategies can help students do their best on most tests.

Encourage your child to:

1. **Read the instructions twice** to ensure understanding.
2. **Underline direction words** such as *compare, list, describe, define* and *summarize*.
3. **Skim all the questions** quickly before starting, and decide how much time to spend on each question.
4. **Read each question carefully** when beginning the test. Then your child should think about the answer *before* reading any choices provided.
5. **Skip a question** if unsure of the answer. If the test format allows,



your child should answer the “easy” questions first. Then your child can come back to the others.

6. **Allow time to go back** and check answers. Do they make sense?

## Test success begins with a checklist and study schedule



Middle schoolers have to keep track of lots of information for each of their classes. This is especially important

at test time.

It is challenging for students to do well on a test if they don't know when the test is, what to study or which materials they need.

This is where a test checklist can help. To create one, your child should write down the:

- **Name** of the class.
- **Date** of the test.
- **Topics** the test will cover.

- **Format** of the test.
- **Materials** needed to study—handouts, notes, study guide. Your child should also create a study schedule that takes the following factors into account:
  - **How many days** in advance to begin studying.
  - **How much time** to devote to studying each night.
  - **How well your child knows** each topic—will it take relearning or will a review do it?
  - **What (if anything) to do** besides reading—perhaps take notes from the book or make flash cards.