

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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West Valley School District #208

*still make the difference!*



## Attendance is a top priority for middle school students

**B**efore the pandemic, roughly eight million U.S. students were considered chronically absent, missing 10% or more of the school year. By spring of 2022, that number doubled to around 16 million, according to the research group Attendance Works.

Strong 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 you expect on-time school attendance every day.
- **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.

Source: J. Mehta, "Three years since the pandemic wrecked attendance, kids still aren't showing up to school," NPR.

## Sleep improves students' school performance



Experts agree: Most middle schoolers aren't getting the sleep they need in order to perform at their best.

One study found that 85% of adolescents get fewer than eight and a half hours of sleep each night. Students this age should be getting nine to 10 hours.

When kids don't get enough sleep, their performance in school suffers. They have difficulty remembering material and concentrating on their schoolwork.

And it's not just the amount of sleep that matters. Researchers say that consistency and quality of sleep matter, too.

To make sure your child gets enough of the right kind of sleep:

- **Set a reasonable bedtime** that results in at least nine hours of sleep each night.
- **Create a bedtime routine** that helps your child relax and fall asleep.
- **Set a screen time curfew.** Studies show that watching TV or using electronics 90 minutes before bedtime delays sleep.

Source: J.F. Dewald and others, "The influence of sleep quality, sleep duration and sleepiness on school performance in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review," *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, Elsevier.

# Consistency is key when it comes to enforcing rules



Middle schoolers pay close attention to the way the adults in their lives treat them.

This includes the way adults enforce discipline. Kids need consistent messages that show authority figures are serious and will follow through.

To promote consistent discipline, follow these guidelines:

- **Agree on rules** and consequences if you are parenting with another caregiver. Being on the same page can prevent your child from taking advantage of either of you.
- **Discuss your rules** with relatives, neighbors or friends before your child stays with them. For example, if you expect your child to be home by a certain time on weekends, make it clear that the rule applies

no matter where your child is staying.

- **Support the school rules** and expectations for students. Make sure you and your child understand teachers' policies regarding tests, assignments and turning in late work. Expect your middle schooler to follow the rules. If you have questions or concerns, contact the teacher.

**“Loving a child doesn’t mean giving in to all his whims; to love him is to bring out the best in him, to teach him to love what is difficult.”**

— *Nadia Boulanger*

# Help reduce the risks of social media for middle schoolers



Middle schoolers are spending an increasing amount of time engaging with social media. While many think it’s a great

way to connect with friends, there are some serious drawbacks.

Middle schoolers’ brains are not wired to use social media responsibly. Their frontal cortex, which is what helps adults manage distractions and plan ahead, is not well-developed yet. This leaves them vulnerable to negative effects of social media such as distraction, sleep loss and depression.

To protect your child:

- **Delay.** If your middle school student isn’t on social media yet, consider waiting.

- **Set limits.** Don’t allow devices at mealtime. Keep devices out of your child’s bedroom overnight.
- **Talk about what is appropriate** to post and what’s not.
- **Stay connected.** Follow your child’s accounts and be sure your student knows you will look at them.
- **Create a family account.** This lets your middle schooler stay in touch with friends, but in a safer space.
- **Schedule family time.** Middle school is a time when your child needs you more than ever. So plan time to do things together—with the devices turned off!

Source: E. Abi-Jaoude and others, “Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health,” *CMAJ*, Canadian Medical Association.

# Have you made academic honesty a high priority?



In a survey from the Center for Academic Integrity, a whopping 95 percent of high school students admitted to participating

in some form of cheating. Are you addressing this with your child *before* high school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you set a positive example** for your child by being honest yourself?
- \_\_\_ **2. Have you spoken** with your child about the school’s honor code and the importance of following it?
- \_\_\_ **3. Have you discussed** different types of cheating, such as finding answers to exam questions online, sharing answers and using apps to do work your child was supposed to do?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you explained** that copying passages from the internet and passing them off as your own work is cheating? So is using ChatGPT to write an essay.
- \_\_\_ **5. Have you talked** about the consequences of cheating?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are showing your child how important it is not to cheat. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Try these strategies to turn your middle schooler into a reader



Is your middle schooler less than enthusiastic about curling up with a good book? Help your child learn to enjoy reading. Not only will it improve language skills, it may turn your child into a lifelong book lover!

To motivate your middle schooler to read:

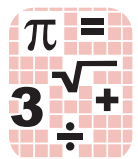
- **Lead by example.** Research shows that *your* reading habits can have a huge impact on your child's reading habits. So, let your child see you reading for pleasure! Instead of turning on a show when you finish work, read an interesting article. On weekends, unwind with an entertaining book.
- **Designate daily reading time.** Set aside a short period of quiet time each day when the music, TV and digital devices are turned off.

Suggest your child use the time to read. Don't force it, though, because it could backfire. Instead, kick back with your own book and see if your child follows your lead.

- **Allow your child to select** reading material. Comics and graphic novels may not be your idea of great literature, but if they inspire reading, they're perfect!
- **Subscribe to a magazine.** Whether your middle schooler is obsessed with horses, fashion, outer space, sports or guitars, there's surely a magazine devoted to that very subject. Look for a quality publication and consider subscribing, or see if the magazine has a free website. Each new issue offers another opportunity to read.

Source: S.L. Arnold, "The secret to influencing kids' reading habits while thinking only about yourself," *Perspectives on Reading*.

# Talented students share their secrets for mastering math



What should middle school students do when trying to solve a tough math problem? They should stick with it.

That's the advice of students who took part in a well-known math competition. These kids have shared their strategies for doing well in a subject that can sometimes trip up their peers.

So what do these students do that can help your child with math? They:

- **Think about the concept.** Instead of simply memorizing something long enough to pass a test, these students try to understand the concept behind the problem. That way, they can solve similar problems in the future.

- **Practice.** Once they figure out how to solve a type of math problem, these students practice. Just as an athlete or a musician practices a new skill, so should a math student.
- **Focus.** Most of these strong math students say they study alone. Some do admit that their study time includes a few distractions. But they make math their focus.
- **Never give up.** What if they can't figure a problem out? If one thing doesn't work, they try another approach. Many also ask a teacher for extra help. If they're still stuck, they may search online for explanations of the concept.

Source: L. Loewus, "Survey: Habits of Talented Math Students," *Education Week*.

**Q:** My middle schooler gets stressed about everything—from schoolwork to current events. How can I help my child better manage anxiety and learn how to go with the flow?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Middle school is full of big changes, so it's normal for your child to get anxious from time to time. However, if the stress itself—rather than whatever set it off—is becoming too much, it's time to step in and take some action.

To help your child better manage everyday stress:

- **Teach your child to recognize** the warning signs. Some kids grind their teeth or bite their nails when they start to feel anxious. That's when they should take action. Stress is more manageable when it's caught early.
- **Help your middle schooler** create an action plan. If your child is stressed out over an upcoming project, demonstrate how to break it into small parts. A big task is daunting, but a series of smaller ones may not be.
- **Encourage healthy habits.** A healthy diet and adequate sleep can help ease anxiety.
- **Suggest ways** for your child to blow off steam. Exercise, reading or shooting hoops in the driveway may be all your child needs to calm down.
- **Say that you are** on your child's side. Stressed-out kids often feel like the weight of the world is on their shoulders. So let your child know you're available for help and support.
- **Talk to the school counselor** or pediatrician if your child's anxiety persists or becomes difficult to manage.



# It Matters: Motivation

## Link academic success to your child's future



It's a new academic year, which means it's time for a fresh start. To set your middle schooler up for suc-

cess, turn your family's focus to the importance of education.

Studies show that the best way to help middle school students succeed in school may be to remind them that doing well is about more than getting good grades. It's about reaching their future goals.

Middle schoolers are at a great age to begin thinking about their futures. And even though they're pushing away from their parents, they still take parents' guidance seriously. In fact, "lack of guidance" is a big reason capable students don't continue their education after high school.

After reviewing data from 50,000 students over a 26-year period, researchers also found that, by middle school:

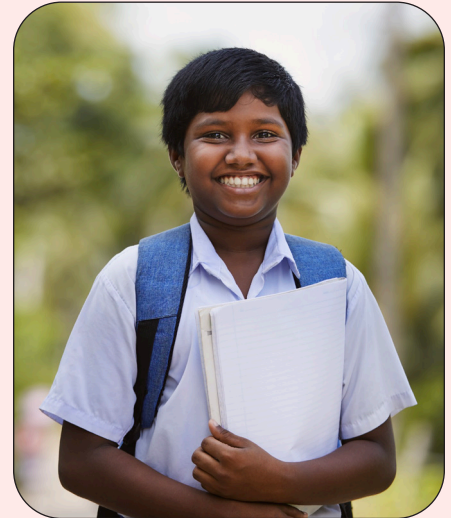
- **Kids begin losing interest** in grades. Help your child set learning goals and celebrate progress.
- **It's challenging for families** to build relationships with teachers. Even if you can't meet a teacher at the school building, staying in touch via emails and phone calls will help you work together to benefit your child.
- **Family engagement still matters.** And stressing the long-term benefits of doing well in school matters even more.

**Source:** N.E. Hill and D.F. Tyson "Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement," *Developmental Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

## Inspire your middle schooler to work hard and succeed

**A** motivated student is a dedicated student. To boost your child's desire to do well in school:

- **Help your student get organized.** It's tough to stay motivated when notes and assignments are scattered all over the place. Help your child create a system for sorting and filing schoolwork.
- **Nurture curiosity.** Learning happens everywhere, not just during classes. Encourage your child to explore outside interests. If your child likes art, for example, check out an art exhibit together.
- **Offer feedback.** When you see your child working hard, acknowledge it and celebrate progress! If your child does well on a project, talk about how effort has paid off.
- **Be patient with your child.** Chances are, you're not always



motivated to work. So don't expect your middle schooler to be consistently gung-ho about school. When your child is less than enthusiastic, be supportive and encouraging.

## Middle school students share what they need from families



When children feel loved and supported at home, they are more motivated to learn.

Studies consistently show that children who enjoy strong relationships with their families:

- **Feel safer** and have a sunnier outlook than kids who don't.
- **Are less likely** than other kids to cheat on a test.
- **Feel healthier** and happier than other kids.
- **Believe they will be successful.**
- **Are more likely** than other kids to excel academically.

What's the best way to show your child your love? When asked in a survey, students said they'd like their parents to:

- **Take** an interest in schoolwork.
- **Listen** to them when they talk.
- **Avoid** comparing them to others.
- **Spend** more time with them.
- **Avoid** lecturing about mistakes.
- **Treat** them with respect.
- **Set** reasonable rules and limits.
- **Notice** when they do things right.
- **Offer** guidance.

**Source:** A. Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others*, Teachers College Press.