

Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed in Middle School



Research shows that early adolescence is one of the most critical periods in a child's life. It is during these years that children need a lot of adult support. Schools and families both have important roles to play in helping middle school children learn. But every study finds that families have the biggest influence.

The problem is that middle school families are already very busy, so how can they find the time to help their children succeed in school?

Here are some proven tips for making the time to help your child.

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TIPS ON FINDING MORE TIME

Some families seem to fit more things into a day than others do. No, they haven't found a way to stop the clock—they've just discovered strategies for using time more efficiently. Here are three ways to find the time to help your child:

1. Set priorities

Make a to-do list each day, and look for ways to carve out more time. Instead of going to the gym, maybe you could take a walk or bike ride with your child. Have a choice between cooking a fancy dinner or talking with your child about school? Make sandwiches or heat up leftovers, and talk.



2. Spend one-on-one time

"Quality time" is important—and so is the quantity of time you spend with your child. Your child needs time to talk with you—time to see and hear how you would apply your experience and your values to the problems your child is facing. There's nothing like spending time alone with a family member to make a child of any age feel special. Try making an appointment to spend some time alone with your child each week. Write it on your calendar. Then treat that appointment as seriously as you would an important business meeting.

3. Use the 'off' button

You probably have more time than you think, but it's being stolen from you and your child by electronics! So what can you do?

- **Turn off the television.** Record any shows you and your child just can't miss.
- **Turn off the phone notifications.** Set aside time each evening when no phones are allowed. It's helpful to keep them out of sight, too—it will be less tempting to check them.
- **Turn off the computer.** It's amazing how much time can be lost searching the Internet, emailing and instant messaging.

Use your media-free time to help your child with homework, to read together or just to talk.



Use Car Time

The time you spend alone with your child in the car is a wonderful opportunity to have meaningful conversations and a real influence. Think about it. There are sensitive issues you (and your child) want to discuss—from the changes puberty brings to concerns about what your child wants to do in the future. In the car you don't have to make eye contact. Your child can't "leave the room." No one can overhear you. You can go around the block again if you need more time. It's perfect.



Try these tips:

Turn off the car radio and put away cell phones. Ask, "What would you like to talk about?" And then listen quietly. Repeat the question with a silent glance if necessary, but be quiet. Listen ... wait ... and don't be surprised if you end up having the best conversation you've had in years. The privacy of the car and really listening are the secrets.

Volunteer After Hours

It's great if you can help out at school. But you don't always have to make time during the day to be involved in your child's education. Check with your child's teachers to see if there are things you can do at home or after the school day. For example:

- **Collect and send in materials** a teacher needs for a class project.
- **Create a list of community resources** that support what a class is studying.
- **Prepare food from a country** your child's class is studying.
- **Recruit other families** to volunteer.
- **Enlist businesses** to donate to a school fundraiser.
- **Put together "Welcome Kits"** for families new to your school.

And try to attend school events held in the evening such as band concerts, plays, athletic events or art fairs.



Exchange Notes With Your Child

Here's a great way to keep the lines of communication open with your child and build self-esteem and writing skills at the same time.

When you have a few free moments throughout your day, write a note to your child. Compliment your child on a job well done, write about the things you are doing at work or just say "I'm thinking about you." And ask your child to write to you.

You can exchange notes in the morning before school or right before bedtime. Middle school children need to be reminded often that their families love them. Notes are another way to say, "I love you."



Five Years From Now ...

Remember, five years from now, your child won't remember the night you left the dishes in the sink. But you'll both treasure forever the memory of the walk you took together to look at the night sky.

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