

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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*still make the difference!*



## Help your middle schooler set mid-year academic goals

It's a new calendar year and a great time to help your child establish goals for the remainder of the school year. While your middle schooler should be the one to set goals, your support and guidance will help.

Encourage your child to do these five things:

1. **Be realistic.** If your student has struggled in the past, bringing every grade up to an A in one quarter may not be a realistic goal. Encourage your child to identify specific areas that need the most improvement, and set goals to address them.
2. **Write down goals.** One study found that when people wrote down their goals, they were 33% more successful in achieving them than those who didn't write them down.

3. **Plan.** Accomplishing goals takes vision, effort and time. If bringing up a science grade will take an extra 30 minutes of study each night, your child may need to cut down on time spent on other activities.
4. **Check progress** every few weeks. How is your child doing? What changes, if any, should your middle schooler make?
5. **Review goals** at the end of the next grading period. Your middle schooler should create a maintenance plan for achieved goals and an action plan for those haven't been met yet.

Source: M. Price-Mitchell Ph.D., "Goal-Setting Is Linked to Higher Achievement," *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, LLC.

## Physical activity is linked to academic gains



Exercise helps middle schoolers build the strong bodies they need for good health. And research links

exercise with other benefits that support performance in school.

Studies show that students who are active perform better in school than students who move less.

Exercise can help:

- **Increase the flow of oxygen** and blood to the brain. This can help your child stay alert and concentrate on learning.
- **Enhance mood.** Exercise is known to increase positive feelings and reduce stress. Stress and anxiety work against school progress.
- **Increase energy** so your child has more stamina to study.
- **Reinforce habits** that help your child do better in school. This is especially true if your child is on a sports team. Sports require players to follow rules, control their bodies and take turns. These actions are also associated with school success.

Source: A. Barbosa and others, "Physical Activity and Academic Achievement: An Umbrella Review," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

## Supervised after-school activities can keep middle schoolers safe



Some families think middle schoolers don't need to be supervised when they are home alone. But studies show that kids with too much unsupervised time on their hands have a higher risk of substance abuse.

One study found that eighth graders who were unsupervised for 11 hours a week were twice as likely to use drugs and alcohol as those under some form of adult supervision.

Where can families find after-school supervision for their kids? Here are some suggestions:

- **Youth organizations.** Scouting, 4-H and many other student organizations have programs designed specifically for middle school students.
- **Volunteer work.** Your child can gain job skills while making

the world a better place. Visit [dosomething.org](http://dosomething.org) for ideas.

- **School activities.** After-school sports and clubs keep kids involved in positive activities.
- **Community centers.** Check out programs for preteens.
- **Neighbors.** Perhaps a neighbor or relative who is home during the day would be willing to check in on your child every few hours.

Source: "Family Checkup: Supervision," National Institute on Drug Abuse and "Keeping Kids Safe and Supported in the Hours After School," *MetLife Foundation Afterschool Alert*, Afterschool Alliance.

**"It's much easier to stay out of trouble now than to get out of trouble later."**

—Warren Buffett

## Promote lasting learning by encouraging note-taking



Experts agree that taking class notes can benefit students in many ways. Students might forget what the teacher says in

class, but they will remember if they have a written record. Reviewing class notes is also an effective way to study for tests.

To get the most from note-taking, your child should:

- **Focus on important information.** Rather than writing down every word the teacher says, your middle schooler should listen for names, dates, times of events and other key facts. And if the teacher writes something on the board, your

middle schooler should definitely include it in the notes.

- **Review and revise notes** at home. Notes taken in a hurry are often sloppy and missing information. Reviewing them allows your child to fill in any gaps and clarify so the notes will be understandable later on. Reviewing notes also helps your child retain the information.
- **Enlist a friend.** If a classmate also takes notes, your child and that classmate can compare notes to ensure nothing was missed.
- **Stay organized.** Encourage your child to keep notes in a binder or notebook with a different section for each class.

## Do you know how to talk about the tough issues?



Middle schoolers often face some sticky situations—from being offered alcohol to feeling pressured by a friend

to skip a class. Are you helping your child make good choices under pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_ **1. Do you talk about** the difficult situations your child may face *before* they occur?

\_\_\_ **2. Do you role-play** different ways to say *no*? "My mom would kill me!" is a favorite standby.

\_\_\_ **3. Have you told** your child you expect honesty—especially about serious issues?

\_\_\_ **4. Do you communicate** your values to your child? Remember: Values are *caught*, not *taught*.

\_\_\_ **5. Do you create** everyday opportunities to talk with your child? Casual conversations often pave the way for more serious talks.

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are having positive talks with your child about tough issues. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Share this system to help your child prepare for unit tests



Some students tend to study by the “seat of their pants” whenever an end-of-unit test approaches. Instead, help your middle schooler develop a system for studying texts and other materials—one that can be used anytime a test looms.

Suggest that your child:

- 1. Start by reading** the first section of the unit. Students are often tempted to race through and finish the whole thing, but tell your child to resist the urge. Students remember more by studying one section at a time.
- 2. Imagine what questions** the teacher might ask about the material in that section. Your child should write down each question on a separate

index card and write its answer on the back of the card.

- 3. Proceed section by section.** If one section is particularly long or tricky, or if your child can think of several questions the teacher may ask about it, suggest breaking that section into smaller parts.
- 4. Identify new vocabulary words.** After making “question cards” for each section, have your child go back through the material and look for unfamiliar words and words in boldface. Your child should write each one on the front of an index card and its definition on the back.

Once your child has a unit’s worth of information-packed cards, it’s time to use them to study for the test. Better yet, you can use them to quiz your middle schooler!

# Five strategies for improving communication with your child



Remember that chatty elementary schooler you used to know? Well, that child has likely turned into a guarded preteen. Suddenly, talking with your adolescent may feel like navigating a minefield. Ask one wrong question, and your middle schooler may explode or clam up.

To ensure you are keeping the lines of communication open with your middle schooler:

- 1. Keep your questions brief.** To stay on top of what’s happening in school, avoid *yes-no* questions. Instead, ask open-ended ones: “What are you studying in science this week?”
- 2. Be available.** Your child probably opens up occasionally. When that

happens, it’s crucial that you be there to pay attention—and to *really* listen.

- 3. Don’t be condescending.** Even if your middle schooler’s problems seem minor to you, they are *major* to your child. Belittle them, and your child will be even less likely to share next time.
- 4. Offer alternatives.** Encourage your child to talk to another trusted adult if you aren’t available. Whether it’s a teacher, a coach, a relative or a friend’s parent, your child needs to talk about school and life with someone you both trust.
- 5. Never give up.** These temperamental years won’t last forever, so hang in there. Stay optimistic, and keep being the reliable presence your middle schooler depends on.

**Q:** My eighth-grader is late for everything. This child turns in assignments late and stars projects at the last minute. How can I help my middle schooler break this self-sabotaging habit?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, time management doesn’t come naturally to most middle schoolers. Instead, families must teach them how to plan ahead.

Show your child how to:

- 1. Get organized.** Insist that your middle schooler keep school bags and study spaces tidy. A child who can’t organize belongings is likely to have trouble organizing thoughts and actions as well.
- 2. Prioritize.** Encourage your middle schooler to list tasks under one of three headings: *Must Do*, *Would Be Nice to Do* and *Can Skip This*. Remind your child that items on the must-do list (like schoolwork) have to come first.
- 3. Make a schedule.** After your child sets priorities, it’s time to figure out when to complete those “must-dos.” That’s where a schedule comes in. Some students can plan ahead and draw up a schedule for the whole week. Others need to make a schedule every day.
- 4. Stick to the schedule.** This may be the hardest step of all. Few middle schoolers want to spend a Saturday at the library doing research for an upcoming paper when five of their friends are planning to go see a movie together. Encourage and praise your middle schooler for staying on track. And don’t forget to leave some time in your child’s schedule for fun!



# It Matters: Emotional Intelligence

## Family meetings teach leadership and cooperation



To be successful in school and the workplace, children need to know how to communicate,

listen, cooperate and solve problems with others. Family meetings are one effective way to help your middle schooler practice these skills—while making family life run more smoothly.

For productive meetings:

- **Establish a schedule.** Choose a regular time and place and keep meetings brief.
- **Plan an agenda.** Between meetings, ask family members to write down issues they'd like to address.
- **Set ground rules.** Remove any distractions and have everyone turn off their devices.

During your meeting:

1. **Highlight** family members' accomplishments and positive news. Share compliments.
2. **Encourage participation.** Give each family member a chance to talk uninterrupted. Ask one person to take notes.
3. **Brainstorm solutions** for any family concerns. Consider everyone's ideas.
4. **Discuss expectations** and set weekly goals.
5. **Coordinate schedules.** Review your family calendar and discuss who is doing what this week.
6. **End with a quick team-building** activity. Play a game, or make up a story or sing a song.

After a few meetings, let family members take turns being the meeting leader.

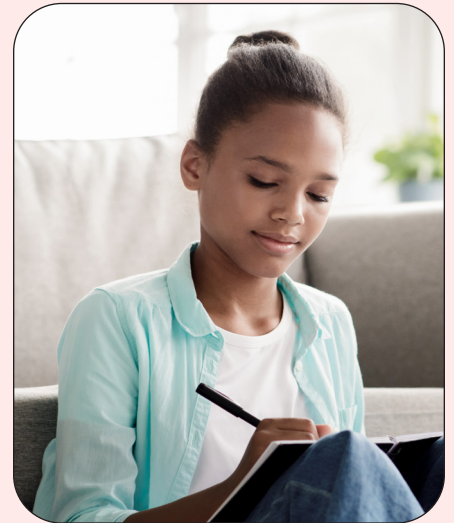
## Promote self-reflection by encouraging journal writing

Students are able to make better decisions in school and in all areas of their lives when they are aware of their emotions, thoughts and behaviors.

Writing in a journal is one effective way for middle schoolers to express their feelings and process their emotions. Encourage your child to write or draw in a journal for a few minutes every day.

If your middle schooler can't think of something to write about, offer these prompts:

- *What's the most fun thing you did today?*
- *What did you learn that was new?*
- *Did anything make you angry? Sad?*
- *What do you like to do when you feel this way?*
- *If you had the power to help anyone in the world, who would you help, and why?*
- *List four true sentences that start with "I will always remember..."*



## Teach your child to recognize and address bullying behavior



In the social structure of middle school, bullying is often difficult for students to recognize.

That's because middle school students tend to be much more forgiving if the bully is one of the "popular" kids.

Talk about bullying and encourage your child to:

- **Focus less** on *who* is bullying and more on *what* is happening. Are the actions dangerous or hurtful? Are the words mean or meant to cause a person sadness, fear or embarrassment? If so, it's bullying—even if the person who is doing it is

someone everybody likes, and the person being bullied is someone who doesn't have many friends.

- **Think about** how it would feel to be in the bullied child's place. When kids "walk in another's shoes," they begin to develop empathy.
- **React appropriately.** Your child should *never* be a bystander. Standing by and watching—or worse, laughing along with the bully—is almost as harmful as the actual bullying itself. Your child should ask the bully to stop, or slip away and tell an adult immediately.

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