

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

Sample Issue

*still make the difference!*



## Work with your preteen to build responsibility together

**Y**ou want your preteen to grow into a responsible young adult, so help her along! You can instill a sense of responsibility in your middle schooler if you:

- **Talk about it.** Teach your preteen that she's responsible for her attitude and the decisions she makes. Help her realize that she has more power than she thinks. She'll be surprised to find out that even little things like her choice of words, tone or body language influence how things will turn out for her.
- **Enforce it.** Insist that your middle schooler take responsibility for her actions. Allow her to experience the consequences of those actions. Don't rescue her every time she messes up. Don't take her forgotten homework to school over and over again.

- **Advocate it.** Let your child know that you value responsibility-related traits like self-control and persistence. When you see these qualities being put into action point them out and discuss them with your preteen.
- **Model it.** There is no better way to teach your middle schooler responsibility than to model it yourself. Let your preteen see you taking responsibility for your own mistakes. "I left the lawn-mower out in the rain, and now it's rusted. I should have been more responsible." She will learn more by your simple admission than she'd learn in an hour of lecturing.

**Source:** Michael S. Josephson, Val J. Peter and Tom Dowd, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, ISBN: 1-889322-42-3 (Boys Town Press, 1-800-282-6657, [www.boystownpress.org](http://www.boystownpress.org)).

## Use modified grounding with your preteen



You ground your child when he breaks a major rule, but he doesn't seem to care. After all, what's so bad about a day away from friends when he has hours to enjoy the TV, computer and CD player?

Try modified grounding instead. Here's how:

- **Write up a list of jobs.** Make sure they're fairly large and not tasks your child already performs.
- **Write a detailed description of each job on an index card.** Be specific: "Clean the garage. Move all the bikes and other big items outside. Sweep the floor. Bring everything back into the garage and arrange it neatly."
- **Tell your child the plan.** Let him know that the next time he's grounded, he's going to remain grounded (which means no computer, TV or CD player) until the chore you've selected has been completed.
- **Follow up.** Be sure your child checks with you after he completes his chore. If it isn't up to par, have him do it again.

**Source:** Kristen Zolten, M.A. and Nicholas Long, Ph.D., "Modified Grounding," Center for Effective Parenting, [www.parenting-ed.org/handout3/Discipline%20and%20Intervention%20Strategies/grounding.htm](http://www.parenting-ed.org/handout3/Discipline%20and%20Intervention%20Strategies/grounding.htm).

# Your little moments together can mean a great deal to your child



Even if it's a stolen moment here or there, the time you spend with your preteen means a lot. Here are several places to find those moments:

- **In the car.** Take your preteen with you when you run errands. Sitting side by side (instead of face to face) may encourage your preteen to open up and talk more.

- **In the kitchen.** Ask your preteen to chop lettuce while you boil pasta. Ask her how her day in school went.
- **At the book store.** Browse the books she chooses. By taking an interest in the things she likes, you demonstrate that you value her.

Source: Gwen Morrison, "Time Together: Spending Quality Time with Your Teen," *Teenagers Today*, [www.teenagers.com/resources/articles/qualitytime.htm](http://www.teenagers.com/resources/articles/qualitytime.htm).

# Give your child a lesson in being respectful toward other people



Does your child know the real meaning of respect? For too many children today, the word has become associated with forcefulness and fear. If you can *force* someone to do something for you, he is *respecting* you.

Of course, this couldn't be farther from the truth. As a parent, part of your job is to teach your child that real respect simply means *treating other people nicely*.

Tell your child to:

- **Be kind to others** no matter what. He should treat people the way he would like to be treated.
- **Speak in a way** that shows he values the listener. Profanity and talking back are not respectful and will not be tolerated.
- **Be careful with his things** and those of others. People usually work very hard to get the things they own.
- **Listen.** He doesn't always have to agree with what others say, but he does have to be polite. He shouldn't interrupt or use rude body language, such as rolling his eyes. This insults the speaker just

as much as if he had used rude words.

Source: Michele Borba, Ed.D., *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues that Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, ISBN: 0-7879-6226-0 (Jossey-Bass, a Wiley imprint, 1-800-956-7739, [www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)).

# Does your child know that school is important?



Are you communicating your family values on the importance of school and education to your child? Answer *yes* or *no* to the statements below to find out:

statements below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. I let my child know** I am excited about the new school year.
- \_\_\_ **2. I tell my child** that school is his job and number one priority.
- \_\_\_ **3. I make it clear** that I expect my child to follow school rules.
- \_\_\_ **4. I attend events** the school holds for parents, even if my child tells me "no one else is going."
- \_\_\_ **5. I ask my child** specific questions about what he is learning and what I can do to help him.

## How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean your child realizes you value school and expect him to do the same. Mostly *no*? Start now to change your answers to *yes*.

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### Middle School Edition

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# Help your middle schooler strive to get a handle on homework



It's only September, but you're already pulling your hair out over your middle schooler's homework. You're not alone.

Studies show that 78 percent of parents believe homework is necessary, and that at least half of parents argue with their kids about it.

Since homework will be part of your middle schooler's (and your) life for the rest of the year, here are a few tips that just might help smooth the way:

- **Don't settle for excuses**, such as "This is so boring!" Some of your middle schooler's assignments may be fun, but others may be routine. However, if she constantly brings home tedious work, talk to her teacher or guidance counselor about it.

- **Find a workable routine.** Pay attention to your child's study habits. Then help her create a homework routine that fits those habits. She can't work on an empty stomach? Offer her a healthy snack before hitting the books. She's too antsy to focus right after school? Give her an hour for exercise first.
- **Don't stress out.** Most students struggle with homework at least sometimes, so don't worry if your child does, too. Don't expect her to be perfect when it comes to homework. Homework lets teachers know where students need additional instruction.

**Source:** Anthony W. Jackson, P. Gayle Andrews, Holly Holland and Priscilla Pardini, *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others*, ISBN: 0-8077-4476-X (Teachers College Press, 212-678-3929, www.tcpres.com).

# Show your middle schooler how to become a lifelong reader



Your middle schooler will have a better chance of becoming a lifelong reader if he can find personal meaning in the books he reads.

That doesn't mean every story has to be familiar. It means helping your child become interested in the story's characters, setting and plot so that he wants to know more about them. Here's how:

- **Do some research.** Many of the books teachers assign your child will not be set in modern day. Have your child check the Internet or the library for information about the times and places in the book. This may help him feel more comfortable with it.

- **Ask your child** to put himself "in" the book. Once your child has begun the book, ask what he thinks about the situation so far. How are the characters handling things? What would he do if he were in their place?
- **Suggest that your child be** a "book detective." Is there a quote she finds meaningful? An incident that rings particularly true or false?
- **Find out** how the book has affected him. Would he like to try another book by the same author? How about one with a similar style? Or is he ready for something completely different?

**Source:** Marguerite C. Radenich and Jeanne Shay Schumm, *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, ISBN: 1-57542-006-6 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, www.freespirit.com).

**Q:** Now that my child is in middle school, I'm afraid I won't be "in the loop" about things like homework and tests. How can I keep tabs on what she's doing without seeming nosy and getting too involved?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Remember, it's your job—and your right—to know how your daughter is doing, so you're not being nosy. You're being a good parent! Still, you don't want to be overbearing.

To stay on top of how your middle schooler is performing in school:

- **Talk to her.** Have her tell you about her classes. The more you know about her courses, the more comfortable you'll feel asking about them.

If your child doesn't want to talk about school every day, set aside 10 to 15 minutes for a once-a-week chat. It will give her a chance to fill you in on how she's doing. And if there's a problem brewing, you'll have a chance to hear about it in advance.

- **Read everything** that comes home. Make a point of looking at each handout stuffed in your middle schooler's backpack. It's a good way to stay informed about upcoming standardized tests, school events, etc.
- **Touch base with her teachers.** If your child's school doesn't hold a back-to-school night, send a note to her teachers and introduce yourself that way. Give them your phone number and email address, and ask them to do the same.

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Working With Your School

## Attendance must be a top priority for your preteen



Strong attendance is as important to your preteen's school career as the foundation is to a house. Without it, there is nothing to build on.

It would be nearly impossible to list all the reasons your middle schooler must be in school. Here are just a few:

- **School attendance is the law.** Every school district requires students to attend. The only exceptions are illness or family emergency.
- **Missing school is terrible** for classroom performance. Most children have trouble keeping up if they miss more than a few days. And other students pay the price, too. Teachers have to spend extra time helping students who were absent catch up in class. This takes away from teaching new material.
- **Peer relations** often get started at school. A child who misses school may have fewer friends.

To aim for top attendance:

- **Tell your child** that school is important to you and the family. You expect her to be in school.
- **Don't take your child** out of school to baby-sit other children.
- **Don't take your child** out of school to do errands.
- **Schedule appointments** for non-school hours whenever possible.

Source: "Is your child missing out? School Attendance: Information for Parents," Department for Education and Skills, United Kingdom, Dfes Publications, [www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance/uploads/PARENTS%20LEAFLET%20FINAL%2012-12-2005.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolattendance/uploads/PARENTS%20LEAFLET%20FINAL%2012-12-2005.pdf).

## Help your preteen get excited about being in middle school

**A**ttendance should be a top priority, but your child will have a more satisfying school experience if school is a place where he *wants* to go and not just a place he *has* to go.

Your attitude about learning and your involvement with the school affect how your child feels about it. Here are some ideas to build school excitement:

- **Ask your child about school.** Go beyond, "How was school today?" That question usually produces a one-word answer. Ask, "How much did you already know about your science lesson? What will you need to learn?"
- **Appear at school.** Meeting your child's teachers is as important as ever. They have many students. Be there so they know who you are and who your child is.



- **Branch out.** Middle school offers many new options for students. They may have a choice of electives and extracurricular activities. Encourage your child to participate in activities that interest him.

Source: Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland, *What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future*, ISBN: 1-57542-027-9 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

## Encourage your child to help make school a better place



The late President John F. Kennedy famously said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." This also applies to your child's school.

At school, your child receives an education. But she can also give something back. This giving back happens when your child's presence makes the school a better place to be.

It's not as hard as you might think. Your middle schooler can

give back to her school in many ways, including:

- **Following the school rules**—even when no one is looking.
- **Being respectful** to adults and her peers.
- **Making her classes** a better place to learn by paying attention, raising her hand to make a constructive comment and asking thoughtful questions.

Source: Rosemarie Clark, Donna Hawkins and Beth Vachon, *The School-Savvy Parent: 365 Insider Tips to Help You Help Your Child*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).