

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Central Alberta Regional Consortium  
c/o River Glen School, Red Deer, AB

*still make the difference!*



## Know the difference between an honest mistake and neglect

**L**earning responsibility takes time. So don't expect your preteen to grasp it overnight. But do expect him to take his responsibilities seriously. And also expect him to understand the difference between an honest mistake and neglect.

For example:

- **An honest mistake** would be adding too much detergent to the laundry. The result might be a sudsy puddle on the floor.
- **Neglect** would be your preteen failing to put his dirty clothes in the hamper. The result may be a frantic search for clean clothes before the school bus arrives.

Should you punish your preteen if he makes an honest mistake?

Probably not. Everyone slips up sometimes. Instead you should:

- **Share a laugh** over his soapy (or other) misstep.
- **Help him clean up** the mess (especially if there really are suds everywhere).
- **Show him how to do the job** correctly next time.

But if your preteen neglects his responsibilities, don't ignore the situation. Instead you should:

- **Talk to him** about where he fell short and why.
- **Remind him** that he's an important member of the family. His contributions matter.
- **Enforce a consequence.** Make sure the consequence is related to the responsibility he neglected.

Source: Kate Thomsen, M.S., C.A.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose*, ISBN: 1-57482-199-7 (Search Institute Press, 1-800-888-7828, [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)).

## Look at your preteen's school attendance



This month usually contains a winter break from school. And once your child returns in January, the school year will be about half over. This is a great time to review the first part of the year and make plans for the next. Looking at your child's school attendance should be part of this important process.

Did your child attend school every day unless she was sick or there was a true family emergency? If so, congratulations! Let her know you're proud of her strong attendance. Help her keep up the good work for the rest of the year and beyond. Strong attendance is one predictor of success in school.

If not:

- **Remind your child** that attending school regularly is a priority in your family.
- **Emphasize rest, nutrition and exercise** to stay healthy and stay in school.
- **Consider** the reasons you take your child out of school. Can you make appointments outside school hours?
- **Create consequences** for skipping school. Let your child know that skipping school erodes your trust in her.

## Do you know what motivates your preteen & what doesn't?



Is your preteen living up to his potential at school and at home? If not, don't give up on him! You can motivate him if you:

- **Help him set attainable goals.** Make sure they're clear, understandable and small.
- **Find ways for him to explore** his interests. Not sure what his interests are? Ask him!
- **Praise him when he does well.** On the flip side, offer constructive criticism when he stumbles.
- **Be creative** in getting him help. If he doesn't do well with one-on-one tutoring, for instance, maybe he'd blossom in a study group.
- **Accept him for who he is.** Love your preteen unconditionally.

Be sure you don't:

- **Set unreasonable expectations.**
- **Threaten your preteen** or punish him when he fails to achieve.
- **Enforce too-strict rules.**
- **Think you should ignore** his achievements because achieving "is what he's supposed to do."
- **Criticize him** when he stumbles.
- **Compare him** to higher-achieving siblings or friends.

Source: "Tips for Parenting Underachievers for Parents of Underachieving Teens," About-Underachieving-Teens.com, www.about-underachieving-teens.com/parenting-tips.html.

**"It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."**

—Frederick Douglass

## Listen to your middle schooler to increase communication



Many parents of middle schoolers think their kids don't talk to them enough. Be sure the lack of conversation isn't because of you.

- Many parents suffer from the same problem they complain about in their children—they don't listen. And you aren't listening if you:
- **Take over the conversation.** Your child says, "You know that new kid at school, Jake ..." You say: "Jake! I met his mom at the PTA. They seem lovely. You should call him." Maybe your child was going to share something with you. But she probably won't now.
  - **Always put your child off.** You can't drop everything each time your child calls your name. But if

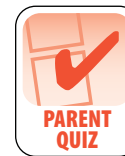
your answer is almost always: "Hold on" or "Just a minute," your child will save what she was going to say—maybe forever.

To increase your chances for conversation with your child, try to:

- **Let your child finish!** Don't just assume you know what your child is going to say.
- **Think ahead** about times when your child can have the floor. For many families, time spent in the car or otherwise doing errands is an ideal time. Be quiet during these times and give your child a chance to break the silence.

Source: Kenneth R. Ginsburg with Martha M. Jablow, "But I'm Almost 13!" *An Action Plan for Raising a Responsible Adolescent*, ISBN: 0-8092-9717-5 (Contemporary Books, 1-877-833-5524, www.mcgraw-hill.com).

## Are you stressing the importance of your child's effort?



Every student is capable of her own "personal best." Are you encouraging your child's very best effort? Answer *yes* or *no*

to the following questions:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you make it a point** to notice effort? "I can see how hard you're working."
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you encourage your child** to take pride in her own effort? "It must make you feel great to know that you hung in there."
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you act as a model** by putting forth good effort? "I am behind on this report but I will finish it by tomorrow morning."
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you point to effort** as the reason for your child's successes? Rather than, "You're so smart," say, "That extra half hour a night of studying has paid off."
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you avoid focusing** too much on results, as long as your child puts forth her best effort?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are encouraging your child to strive for her best. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for ways to motivate your child.

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# Avoid engaging in arguments with your middle schooler



What's the only way to win an argument with your middle schooler? By not having one in the first place. That's

because, when it comes to arguing with a preteen, no one ever wins. Instead, both sides just get angrier, more frustrated or resentful.

So how can you avoid arguing with your middle schooler when discussing something that may set him off? Here's how:

- **Say what you need to say** and say it only once. Avoid lectures or endlessly rehashing something you've already said.
- **Schedule your conversation** wisely. If you know a certain issue is likely to lead to arguing, tackle it during a specific low-stress time for both of you.
- **Don't start a conversation** you know you can't finish. If you're

bolting out the door for work, don't suddenly bring up a touchy topic with him.

- **Don't take the bait.** It may be hard, but don't let yourself be drawn into an argument with him.
- **Don't respond** to any ridiculous claims.
- **Let him have the last word.** Don't tolerate rudeness, but do let him conclude the conversation when possible.

And if, despite your best efforts, your middle schooler continues arguing with you? Walk away. Staying there and fighting isn't going to resolve anything, and it may leave you both feeling worse. Remember, arguing doesn't solve problems—it creates them.

**Source:** Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D., *Surviving Your Adolescents*, ISBN: 1-889140-08-2 (Child Management, Inc., 1-800-442-4453, www.parentmagic.com).

# Stick to your beliefs—don't give in to parent peer pressure



Peer pressure is not just for children and teens. Parents fall victim to it, too. And when they do, they make it even easier

for their children to go along with the crowd, usually for the worse.

To avoid giving in to parent peer pressure:

- **Listen to your instincts.** Are you completely comfortable with what your child is asking? If not, then say *no*. Or at least explore the matter further.
- **Call other parents.** Yes, your child will hate this. Too bad. "Everyone else's parents are letting them!" is a line children have been using for

years. And yet it still works on some parents who may have used the same line when they were children. Make a few phone calls and you will probably discover that everyone else's parents are *not* letting them.

- **Stand firm.** Once you make a decision that you are sure is right for your child and your family, stick with it. Your child won't admit it now, but there are few better models for a child than a parent who adheres to principles and values.

**Source:** David Walsh, *Why Do They Act That Way?* ISBN: 0-7432-6077-5 (Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

**Q:** My eighth grader is so hard on herself! She complains that she can't do anything right, which isn't true at all. How can I help her see that she's a smart, capable person?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** If there's ever a time when self-doubt and insecurity most rear their ugly heads, it's during adolescence. Preteens are discovering the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Although you can't make your child's insecurity go away altogether, you can help her see just how smart and competent she is. Here's how:

- **Find the right outlets.** Let your child experience success by putting her where she's most likely to succeed. If sports are her thing, sign her up for softball or tennis. If she enjoys theater, let her join the drama club at school.
- **Give her responsibilities.** She may gripe about having to clean the garage or empty the dishwasher, but make her do it anyway. Chores are a great way to make your child feel needed because doing them helps the whole family. They may make her more responsible, too.
- **Praise her accomplishments.** Did your middle schooler just do something wonderful? Congratulate her! Show her that you noticed her achievement, whether it was getting a good grade on a quiz or setting a beautiful table for dinner. With a little help from you, your preteen will see herself as the wonderful person she is!

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Study Skills

## Share methods to strengthen your child's recall



People need *recall* to quickly remember and use information they once learned and then stored away in mem-

ory. Recall helps your child with tests and learning new material.

Here are two strategies to improve your child's recall:

1. **Classify.** Your child should classify lists of facts before learning them. Social studies facts could be classified as people, events or dates. Group each fact into the right category. He should know how many facts he has in each category. Then when it is time for your child to remember, he can think: "People. There were seven in the category." If he has studied, this should jog his memory.
2. **Place.** Teach your child to take new information and "place" it in the setting that he knows best. If your child has to learn the stages of plant growth, he can place this concept in his bedroom. He could make a card with notes and a picture about the first stage, and tape it to his door. The second stage notecard could go on the desk, next to his door. The third stage notecard could go on the dresser next to the desk. Now when he wants to remember this information, he can visualize his room. He can recall the place each piece of information is in. This helps him "see" the information in his mind.

Source: William R. Luckie & Wood Smethurst, *Study Power*, ISBN: 1-57129-046X (Brookline Books, 1-800-666-2665, www.brooklinebooks.com).

## Try a study group to enhance your middle schooler's learning

**M**any kids enjoy sharing knowledge with peers and gaining knowledge from them in turn. If your child does, a study group may be a valuable complement to the work she does on her own.

Here are some tips for setting up a study group:

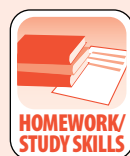
- **Choose participants carefully.** They should be in your child's classes and devoted to doing well in school. Avoid potential conflicts. Romantic interests or rivals may not be the best choices for a study group. Size matters, too. Between four and six students is a good size for a study group.
- **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 meeting times** and be strict about them. The study group should be a commitment. Once students get in the "groove" of studying together, they rely on each other. Students should have a reason for being absent, such as illness. Pick a neutral meeting place, such as the library. Or, rotate between houses.

Source: Ron Fry, *How to Study*, ISBN: 1-5641-4075-X (Career Press, 1-800-227-3371, www.careerpress.com).

## Teach your middle schooler how to take effective notes



Your child can't do a good job studying his notes if he doesn't have good notes to study!

Help him master

note-taking by teaching him to:

- **Be an active listener.** Remind your middle schooler to pay close attention to what the teacher is saying.
- **Focus on the key points.** He shouldn't try to write down *every* word the teacher says.

- **Ask questions.** If he doesn't understand something, encourage him to raise his hand.
- **Use the proper supplies.** His notebook should be big enough to fit what he's writing down.
- **Leave extra spaces** between major points. That way, he has room to go back and fill in new information if the teacher adds something later.

Source: "Note taking and in-class skills," Cook Counseling Center, Virginia Tech, www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/notetake.html.