

# 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!*



## Expect your middle schooler to succeed in school and in life

**D**on't just *want* your middle schooler to succeed—*expect* him to succeed! If you have high, yet realistic, expectations for your child, he will rise to meet them.

To help your middle schooler succeed in the classroom and beyond:

- **Don't act surprised** when he succeeds. Did your middle schooler just bring home a B+ on a super-hard science test? Don't seem shocked. Instead, act like you never doubted that he'd do well. "That's great! I knew all your extra studying would pay off!"
- **Support him** when he stumbles. Never belittle your middle schooler when he messes up. Remind him that failure happens to everyone sometimes. Besides,

plenty of other people in the world will be there to criticize him. That's why your constant love and acceptance are so vital. You need to be his "safe place."

- **Keep him out of "victim mode."** When unfortunate things happen, don't always chalk them up to bad luck. It'll make your middle schooler feel as if he's a victim and has no power. Instead, encourage him to learn from his mishaps. When something goes wrong (and it will), ask him what he learned from it. Get him thinking about how he might handle similar situations in the future.

**Source:** Esther Andrews, "Develop Your Child's Genius - Training Your Child for Success," EzineArticles.com, <http://ezinearticles.com/?Develop-Your-Childs-Genius---Training-Your-Child-for-Success&id=20702>.

## Encourage citizenship in your preteen



Middle school children are learning to be more sensitive to the needs of others and to the world around them. Foster

citizenship in your child by suggesting she:

- **Volunteer.** Homeless shelters often need someone to organize lunches for residents. They also need supplies such as soap, shaving cream and flip-flops for the showers. Your child could conduct a neighborhood drive or organize friends to help.
- **Help the environment.** Your child could collect materials to recycle. She could come up with ways for your family to conserve—such as washing clothes in cold water—and oversee these efforts.
- **Make her voice heard.** Suggest your child write to the editor of your local paper. Or have her call or write an elected official to share her views. And set a good example. If you live in the United States, vote in next month's election! Take your child along to the polls.

**Source:** Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best: Character Building for Kids 7–10*, ISBN: 1-57542-063-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).

# Never miss a chance to reinforce learning outside of the classroom



Your preteen's education doesn't just happen at school. It happens everywhere! To reinforce her learning:

- **Have her teach you** a thing or two. Find out what your preteen is studying at school, and ask her to explain it to you. By "retelling" the things she's learning, she reinforces those things in her own head.
- **Put her knowledge into action.** If your preteen just finished tackling fractions in math, have her join you in the kitchen. Show her the real-life importance of what she's learned. "This recipe calls for half a cup of milk, but we only have a 1/3-cup measurer. How can we figure out the right amount?"

- **Expose her to new things.** Every meaningful experience your preteen has—from a zoo visit to a museum trip—impacts her learning. On your next outing, ask her how what she is seeing relates to what she is learning in school.
- **Respect her ability.** Let your preteen use her knowledge and skills to help you. The next time you make a wrong turn somewhere, hand her the map and see if she can figure out a solution.

**"If we don't stand up for children, then we don't stand for much."**

—Marian Wright Edelman

# Reduce the amount of time your child spends in front of a screen



Screens—from TV sets to computer monitors—are here to stay. But that doesn't mean your middle schooler should be

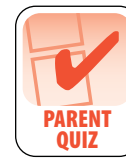
glued to one all day long. So make a point of getting him away from the screen and on the path to a healthful, active life. Here's how:

- **Set limits.** Decide on a reasonable amount of daily computer/TV time—say, two hours—and stick with it. If your middle schooler exceeds that amount, pull the plug on him.
- **Talk to him.** Explain to your middle schooler why you're limiting his screen time. Tell him it's important that he get exercise and fresh air instead of sitting in front of the TV or computer. Just don't expect him to agree with you!

- **Banish the bedroom TV.** Studies show that kids with televisions in their rooms watch an extra 90 minutes of television every day.
- **Walk the walk.** If you don't want your middle schooler to be a couch potato, don't be one yourself. Drop the clicker and grab a tennis racket or baseball mitt.
- **Offer alternatives.** Give your middle schooler other things to do besides sitting in front of a screen. Offer to go biking with him. Or shoot hoops together.
- **Don't use screen time** as a reward or punishment. It'll make the TV and computer seem even more important to your middle schooler.

Source: "Helpful Ways to Reduce Screen Time," National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/screen-time.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/screen-time.htm).

# Are you spending time with your middle schooler?



Middle school children still need their parents, but in different ways than they used to. Are you giving your preteen the right

kind of attention? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_ 1. **Do you invite** your child to spend time with you doing something she is interested in?

\_\_\_ 2. **Do you take advantage** of opportunities when you have your child's undivided attention, such as when you are in the car together?

\_\_\_ 3. **Do you allow** your preteen to invite friends to some family activities?

\_\_\_ 4. **Do you make** a strong effort to share at least one meal a day with your child?

\_\_\_ 5. **Are you happy** for your child when she has experiences that boost her independence, even if you are not doing the activities with her?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are adapting to and accepting your child's changing needs for togetherness. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

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# Discuss successful test-taking strategies with your preteen



Tests for your middle school child are likely to be more frequent, challenging and abstract than they were when he was in elementary school. Your child may benefit from suggestions on how to study for such tests.

To help your child improve test performance, share these strategies:

- **Schedule plenty of study time.** Teachers usually provide advance notice, sometimes up to a week, of when they plan to give a test. Start studying the day the test is announced.
- **Use learning styles** when studying. If your child learns best through talking and listening, he may benefit from reading material aloud. Then ask him to explain it to you. If he learns best by seeing and doing, have him create a diagram, poster or model.
- **Use note cards.** Most students learn best when material is broken down or “chunked” into smaller

pieces. Making note cards, with one relevant fact on each card, is an easy way to do this.

- **Think like a teacher.** What are the most important pieces of information in this unit? What are the concepts this unit is presenting? What parts of this unit will help me understand material that is coming up in the next unit and beyond? Practice looking for these keys to what your child needs to know. Hint: items in bold, or concepts the teacher refers to often, are almost always important.
- **Form a list** of the important facts and concepts. Use it to make up practice tests for yourself.
- **Save the last day of studying** for review. Trying to learn new concepts now is cramming and crammed material is typically forgotten as quickly as it is learned.

Source: William R. Luckie and Wood Smethurst, *Study Power: Study Skills to Improve Your Learning and Your Grades*, ISBN: 1-57129-046-x (Brookline Books, 1-800-666-2665, www.brooklinebooks.com).

# Encourage your middle schooler to write with a little persuasion



Loves to argue. Insists he is right. Great at explaining why you are wrong. Does this sound like your middle schooler? Believe it or not, these traits, although annoying, can help your child improve his writing.

Persuasive writing is an important type of writing that seeks to bring the reader to the author's point of view. Encourage your child to practice this skill by having him:

- **Write an editorial** to your local newspaper about something that interests him.

- **Write a letter to a candidate.** He can share an opinion about one of the issues being debated.
- **Write to you** to persuade you to give him a certain privilege he wants.
- **Write to a teacher** about why there should be no homework this weekend.
- **Write to a friend** about why it is better to go bowling than see the new movie opening tomorrow.

Source: Jane Bell Kiester, *Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test*, ISBN: 0-929895-93-2 (Maupin House Publishing, Inc., 1-800-524-0634, www.maupinhouse.com).

**Q:** With schoolwork, friends and sports competing for her time, my eighth grader is constantly going, going, going! She doesn't complain, but I worry that she's too stressed. What can I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** First, remember that a little stress is normal (and usually harmless). To figure out whether your child's stress is too much, ask yourself:

- **Is she always tired** or irritable?
- **Does she have trouble sleeping** or concentrating?
- **Does she seem unhappy?**
- **Is she becoming angry** or self-critical?

If the answers are *yes*, then your child may indeed be overly stressed. To help get her stress level back under control:

- **Acknowledge the problem.** Don't pretend there's no reason for her to feel stressed. "I understand how hard you work to do well in all your classes. It's really tough, isn't it?"
- **Help her set reasonable goals.** Is she striving to be a straight-A student, a star lacrosse player and everyone's best friend? Encourage her to tone down her expectations. Remind her that she can't be all things to all people.
- **Be there for her.** Let her know that she can come to you when she feels overwhelmed or unable to cope.
- **Scale back her schedule.** If necessary, adjust your child's calendar for her. You may not be able to limit her school-related responsibilities, but you can rein in her extracurricular activities, if need be.

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Working With Your School

## Understand the important role of school counselors



When you were in middle school, you may not ever have met a guidance counselor. A generation ago, counselors often worked only in high schools. Their job was to help students choose courses and plan for after graduation.

Guidance counselors still do those things in high schools. But now they do much, much more. And they have also become a key part of the educational team in middle schools. Your child's counselor takes the view that your child needs good mental health, as well as good physical health, to be a productive learner.

Middle school guidance counselors can offer your child help with:

- **Academics** and study skills, including organization.
- **Solving problems** with friends. This can include mediation.
- **Making decisions.**
- **Coping skills.** This includes skills for coping with bullies.
- **Setting goals.**
- **Making plans** for high school and beyond.
- **Counseling sessions** either for just your child or in a small group. This can include grief counseling.
- **Organizing support** if your child or your family is facing a crisis.
- **Making referrals** to other professionals.

Source: "Why Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association, [www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=231](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=231).

## Get the most out of this year's parent-teacher conferences

**Y**es, parent-teacher conferences are often brief. But they're extremely important, too. To get the most from a meeting with your preteen's teacher:

- **Write down questions.** Is there something in particular you need to discuss with your preteen's teacher? Jot it down ahead of time.
- **Be prompt.** Arriving late may delay conferences after yours.
- **Stay focused.** Don't waste time chatting about things that have nothing to do with school.
- **Be open-minded.** Really listen to what your preteen's teacher has to say. Her insight matters.
- **Control yourself.** Keep your emotions in check when talking



to the teacher. Remember: The two of you are partners in your preteen's education.

- **Take notes.** Don't assume you'll remember everything.

Source: Peggy Gisler, Ed.S. and Marge Eberts, Ed.S., "Ten Tips for a Successful Parent-Teacher Conference," Family Education Network, <http://school.familyeducation.com/parents-and-school/parent-teacher-conferences/38585.html?detoured=1>.

## What should you do if your child complains about a teacher?



Your child has several teachers with different teaching styles and personalities. You can expect her to complain about one of them occasionally. But investigate if complaints become strong and frequent.

Here's what to do:

- **Find out** if the problem stems from the teacher's expectations and assignments. Students commonly "hate" teachers who are too "hard," too "demanding" and give "too much homework." Your child may just have to get used to it. Teachers expect more of middle schoolers.

- **Talk with your child** about her behavior. She may need to adjust her behavior in this teacher's class. For example, she may need to talk less to her friends in class. Also make sure that your child speaks to the teacher with respect.
- **Schedule** a conference with the teacher. Get her side of the story and share your child's. Usually, parents and teachers can work something out.
- **Ask to speak** to an administrator, if you are truly getting nowhere.

Source: Tom McIntyre, *The Behavior Survival Guide for Kids*, ISBN: 1-57542-132-1 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com)).