

Middle School Parents[®]

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

still make the difference!



Help your preteen create habits for a successful year in school

The beginning of the school year offers your child an opportunity to start off fresh. Help your preteen shine in class this year by establishing habits that will help her succeed in school and in life.

Make sure your preteen will:

- **Get enough shut-eye.** Preteens won't succeed if they're snoozing at their desks. So make sure your child gets to bed at a reasonable time each night. And have her unplug before lights-out. That means no TV, loud music or computer in the hour leading up to bedtime. Also, make sure her alarm clock plays soothing music. No one likes to be awakened by a loud, annoying alarm!
- **Eat a healthful lunch.** It's great that your preteen eats breakfast every morning, but don't forget

about lunch! After all, she'll need the midday fuel. So send her to school with a nutritious meal—not a sack full of chips, cookies and soda.

- **Use the right workspace.** Be sure your preteen has a place to do her homework—a desk, her bedroom floor or the kitchen table. It should be quiet, comfortable and well-lit. It should also be as free from distractions as possible. Make sure it's stocked with plenty of paper, pens and pencils.
- **Study ahead.** Don't let your preteen get into the "cramming" habit! If she knows there's a test coming, remind her to review the material a little bit each day. This is much more effective than trying to memorize tons of material the night before an exam.

Model, enforce the three C's to promote respect



Respect is a quality that is sometimes difficult to define. Respect can be many things—but it is *always* the three C's.

Practice these with your child and others, and expect your child to practice them in return. They are:

1. **Communication.** Respectful people ask others for their viewpoints, feelings and opinions. They accept that they may not agree, but that the other person's ideas and needs have worth.
2. **Courtesy.** Manners count, and *please* and *thank you* really are magic words. It is nearly impossible to be both rude and respectful at the same time.
3. **Consideration.** A respectful person moves from asking and listening to another's concerns to actually thinking and acting. When you give your child some "down time" after you know he has had a hard day, that's consideration, and therefore, respect. Or, if your child makes his own breakfast so you can sleep for 30 extra minutes on a Saturday, he is showing respect for you.

Source: John F. Taylor, *From Defiance to Cooperation*, ISBN: 0-7615-2955-1 (Prima Publishing, a division of Random House, 1-800-793-2665, www.randomhouse.com).

Establish bonding rituals with your preteen to stay connected



What's the trick when it comes to bonding with your middle schooler?

There isn't one. Bonding is all about the little things you do together

that remind your child she's special. They don't need to be complicated or expensive. In fact, the simpler, the better. Here are a few to try:

- **Eat breakfast together.** If after-school activities and late work hours make family dinners nearly impossible, do your bonding in the morning.
- **Sneak her a note.** Every so often, slip a short message in your child's backpack. A quick "I love you," or "Good luck on your science test!" may brighten her day.

- **Maintain a bedtime routine.** Brew some decaf tea and chat about your day before she heads upstairs. Or sit at the foot of her bed for a few minutes before she nods off. Talk about what you each have planned for the next day.
- **Give her your time.** If you're crazy-busy during the work week, make a point of slowing down on the weekend. Just be available if she needs you.

"It kills you to see them grow up. But I guess it would kill you quicker if they didn't."

—Barbara Kingsolver

Get involved with your preteen's school to improve achievement



As a parent, you play a critical role in your preteen's education. And one way to make sure that role is effective is to stay connected with his

school. In fact, research shows that kids perform best when their parents are involved with the school and communicate with teachers.

To help yourself do just that:

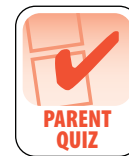
- **Meet your preteen's teachers.** The beginning of the school year is a perfect time to introduce yourself to his teachers. It'll give you a chance to talk about your goals for the upcoming year. And if problems crop up later, you won't be going in to discuss them with a stranger.
- **Get involved in school-related organizations.** Join the PTA or help

with a fundraiser. Not only will it benefit the school, it may give you a chance to work with some of his teachers outside of the classroom.

- **Volunteer.** You don't need to spend long hours in your preteen's classes to make an impact. Just pitch in when you can. If regular classroom time is impossible, how about volunteering once a month in the cafeteria? Or chaperoning a field trip in the spring?
- **Attend parent-teacher conferences.** These sessions are critical for learning about your child's progress, so don't miss them. If you can't attend in person, ask about having a telephone conference.

Source: Darla Binkley and others, "Helping Children Succeed in School: Parent-Teacher Communication," University of Illinois Extension, www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/succeed/09-communication.html.

Are you helping your child make a smooth transition?



The change from elementary to middle school is significant. Take this quiz to see how well you are helping your

child manage this transition. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- ___ **1. Have you and your child** researched your new school? Have you checked out the school's website? Have you reviewed the school handbook?
- ___ **2. Have you reassured your child** that, while this is a big change, you believe he can do well in school?
- ___ **3. Do you ask your child** what he thinks about middle school and listen to his responses?
- ___ **4. Do you plan to attend all** parent events in order to get more information that can help your child?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage your child** to come to you and his teachers right away if he is having any difficulty?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are supporting your child in this transition. Mostly *no* answers? Check the quiz for suggestions on how to help your child move smoothly to middle school.

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Show your middle schooler how to change behavior in five steps



Your child has reached the stage where she will no longer change her behavior just because you ask her to—or, if she does, the change may only be temporary. Instead, you should act as a guide to motivate your child to change her own behavior.

Before your child can change, though, she will have to go through five steps. She must:

1. **Realize there is a situation** that needs to change.
2. **Realize the situation** affects her, so she will want to change.
3. **Work towards a solution.** This may involve learning new skills.
4. **Weigh the pros and cons** of changing the behavior.
5. **Make a final decision** of whether or not to change.

Here's how you can guide your child through each step:

1. **Make your child aware** that you see a problem—she is getting poor grades in school, for example.

2. **Ask your child how she feels** about the situation. Does she realize that her grades will affect her future school success? If she earns poor marks, she may not be eligible to participate in after-school sports, either.
3. **Brainstorm with your child.** Help her think of possible solutions. She could add 30 minutes to her study time. She could ask her teacher for extra help after school.
4. **Have her list** the pros and cons of making the change. Con: If she adds more study time, she will have less time to hang out with her friends. Pro: If she earns better grades, she will have the opportunity to get involved in sports.
5. **Talk about her decision.** Ask your child what she has decided to do and offer your support to help her stick with her plans.

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

Make reading an important part of your family's everyday lifestyle



You probably already know that nothing will help your child in school more than reading. It's the cornerstone of every subject.

Stop at nothing to promote reading! Here are some ideas:

- **Put it on your schedule.** Find times when the whole family is usually home. Wednesday night? Early Sunday afternoon? Schedule a half-hour for family reading time.
- **Make sure your child** has a library card. Visit the library often.

- **Know the books** your child's peers are reading. Whatever the "must-read" book, encourage your child to read it. Afterwards, ask her what she thought of it.
- **Give your child a gift card** to a bookstore for her birthday or another holiday. Then plan a parent-child bookstore outing. You each choose a book and then enjoy a favorite snack together afterward.

Source: Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith & 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).

Q: I've heard so many horror stories about the preteen years that I'm dreading middle school more than my sixth-grader is! How can I help him navigate these next few years?

Questions & Answers

A: Relax. While it's true that kids undergo lots of changes during adolescence, those changes don't need to be negative. For every preteen who becomes defiant, another becomes independent. For each one who starts avoiding Mom and Dad, another discovers that parents aren't so bad after all.

To make your middle schooler's preteen and teen years as smooth as possible:

- **Stay informed.** Read up on common preteen issues (ask your local librarian for book suggestions or look online). Knowing what to expect will help you be prepared.
- **Keep talking.** Let your middle schooler know he can always come to you with questions about his body, his feelings or school. The more you communicate, the more comfortable he may be about bringing things up with you.
- **Empathize.** Try to remember what your own preteen years were like. (Scary, isn't it?) Keep in mind that he's probably experiencing some of the same struggles and doubts you did.
- **Be alert.** Understand the warning signs that your preteen may have a serious problem. These include extreme weight changes, mood swings, sleeping difficulties or a sudden drop in grades. If you see a red flag, step in and get help.

—Maria Koklanaris,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Responsibility

Set goals to help your child take responsibility



The beginning of a new school year is a natural time to set goals. But who should be doing the goal-setting?

At this age, it should definitely be your child. Setting goals helps him take charge of his own learning.

Provide support and guide your child as he sets goals. Encourage your child to:

- **Be realistic.** If your child has struggled in the past, bringing every grade up to an A in one quarter may not be a realistic goal. Encourage him to identify his most important needs, and set goals to improve those.
- **Write down goals.** Much research shows that putting a goal in writing increases the chances of getting it done.
- **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.
- **Check.** Reevaluate goals every few weeks. How is your child doing? What changes, if any, should he make? At the end of the quarter or semester, your child should review his goals. He should figure out a maintenance plan for met goals, an action plan for goals not met and an exploration plan for possible new goals.

Source: Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, ISBN: 0-684-85609-3 (Fireside, a Simon & Schuster company, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

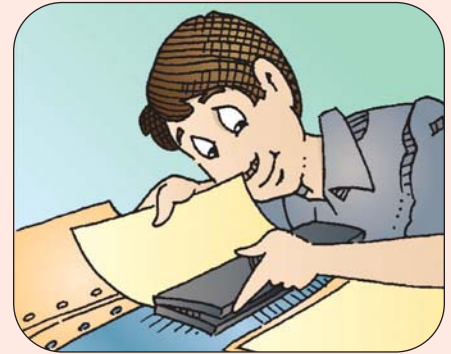
Help your child be successful, responsible with organization

Preteens—especially boys—can have a hard time staying organized. But if they become too disorganized, their grades may suffer. In fact, if you're not sure which class your preteen is struggling in most, check his backpack. Chances are, his sloppiest folder goes with his most troublesome course.

While it's ultimately his responsibility to organize his schoolwork, there are ways you can help.

To keep your preteen organized:

- **Make sure he has** the right materials. Your preteen should have separate binders (with paper) for each class.
- **Keep a hole-punch handy.** Have your preteen punch holes in any



handouts, etc., so he can add them to the correct binder.

- **Give him a daily planner.** He can use it to keep track of projects, assignments and tests.

Source: Alan Finder, "Giving Disorganized Boys the Tools for Success," *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/2008/01/01/education/01boys.html.

Encourage responsibility by expecting regular attendance



Your child misses so much when she isn't in school. She can make up the work, but she can't reproduce the classroom experience.

If your child isn't in class, she is not asking questions. She is not participating in class discussions. She is not listening to an explanation the teacher may make in "a teachable moment," and then may not make again for some time.

Catching up on work in middle school can be more difficult and take more time than doing so in elementary school. Once your child is behind, she may stay there.

Require your child to be in school unless she is ill or there is a family emergency. You can also:

- **Discuss with your child** all the reasons why she must be in school.
- **Schedule vacations** or appointments after school hours and on weekends.
- **Promote healthy habits** such as enough sleep, proper nutrition and daily exercise.
- **Avoid making excuses** for your child and support the school's attendance policy.
- **Seek help from teachers** or doctors if your child has persistent fears about going to school.