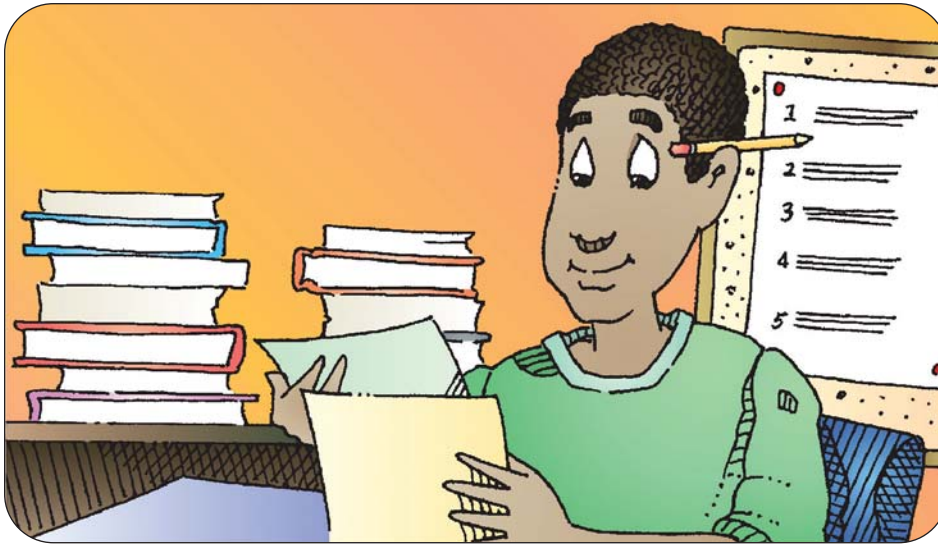


Middle School Parents[®]

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

still make the difference!



Today's good study habits may lead to tomorrow's success

The study skills your middle schooler learns now can help him succeed today, in high school and beyond. You can lay the groundwork for your child's academic success if you:

- **Remind him to break down large projects.** Don't let your middle schooler get rattled by huge assignments. Instead, show him how to break big projects into smaller, more manageable parts.
- **Boost his self-awareness.** Ask your middle schooler to figure out when he's at his best. Then encourage him to do most of his studying during those times. If your teen needs to let off some steam after school, he may want to take a jog or a brisk walk before sitting down to study.

- **Encourage solid study habits.** Have your middle schooler study in the same spot every day. Be sure it's quiet, well lit and stocked with all of the supplies he needs.
- **Help him stay organized.** Create a system for keeping track of important assignments. It might be file folders, a color-coded binder or a kitchen calendar. Whichever he chooses, help him figure out the best way to organize his papers.
- **Teach him to estimate his work time.** Have your middle schooler estimate how long his homework or projects will take. He can then plan his study time accordingly.

Source: "Study Skills for Middle School and Beyond," GreatSchools.net, www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/show_article/CA/700.

Responsibilities contribute to school success



Having responsibilities (in addition to homework and schoolwork) helps your middle schooler see herself as a capable person. This feeling of self-worth will serve her well in school and in life.

Some kids are ready for certain responsibilities before others are. Think of your child's development. Then consider these ideas:

- **Scheduling.** Your child can track her appointments, social activities and extracurricular activities. She should mark them on the calendar and tell you about them. She should also work out with you how she is going to get there and back.
- **Budgeting.** Your child can manage her own expenses. Does she want to buy something? It's her job to figure out how much allowance she has to save, or what odd jobs she has to do.
- **Contributing.** Your child should have a say about decisions that affect family life. Parents have the final word. But ask your child her opinion and consider it.

Source: Jody Johnston Pawel, *The Parent's Toolshop, The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, ISBN: 1-929643-34-9 (Ambris Publishing, 1-888-415-1212, www.parentstoolshop.com).

Set specific boundaries for behavior with your entire family



How your child treats and is treated by members of her family lays the groundwork for how she acts toward others. It's important for your child to be respectful at home and at school.

By establishing rules for acceptable behavior, not only will you be supporting the school, you'll be creating a more peaceful, respectful climate at home. Require your child and other family members to:

- **Speak in polite tones.**
- **Ask before taking** or borrowing someone else's property.
- **Share.** A box of cereal is for everyone, not just your child.
- **Understand that no one** always gets her own way. Families and other groups have to take turns. Give others a chance.

- **Think of others.** Ask about their day. Offer support or congratulations when appropriate. Don't accept behavior such as:
 - **Physical violence** in any form.
 - **Screaming** and yelling.
 - **Insulting** other family members.
 - **Stealing** from family members.
 - **Treating family property** or areas with disrespect.

Source: Renie Howard, *Parenting at the Speed of Teens*, ISBN: 1-57482-845-2 (Search Institute, 1-800-888-7828, www.search-institute.org).

“Being considerate of others will take your children further in life than any college degree.”

—Marian Wright Edelman

Practice calming skills if your preteen suffers from test anxiety



In elementary school, your child may have worried about getting a poor grade on a test—if he worried about tests at all. But in middle school, kids begin to have the sense that test scores can affect their futures. And some freeze up whenever a big exam, such as a standardized test, is put in front of them.

Help your child reduce test anxiety by reminding him to:

- **Be prepared.** He can ask his teacher for tips on what to study. Then he can study for 15 or 20 minutes a day—more if the test is coming up soon—as far in advance as possible.
- **Talk to the teacher.** If your child is especially nervous, he should

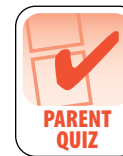
share his concerns with the teacher. She may be able to talk to him about the test format and reassure him that he is, indeed, well-prepared.

- **Practice calming techniques.** He can try deep breathing to take himself mentally to a relaxing place, counting backward from 100—anything that works for him. He can use these techniques before he studies and right before he takes a test.

The idea of standardized testing may make you jittery, too. But try not to pass that on to your child. Say something like, “You're prepared and I believe you will do your best. I'm proud of you.”

Source: Leslie Garisto Pfaff, “Test-Time Jitters,” *Parents*, (Meredith Corp., 212-499-2000, www.parents.com).

Do you support your child during homework time?



Middle school is a time of increased expectations, which may mean more homework. While you should *never* do homework for your middle schooler, you should offer your support.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are supporting your child during homework time:

- ___ **1. Do you have a well-lit, quiet place** for your child to do homework?
- ___ **2. Do you keep up to date** on what your child's teachers expect?
- ___ **3. Are you available** during homework time as often as possible?
- ___ **4. Do you help your child use homework resources**—the Internet, a study group or a study buddy?
- ___ **5. Do you let your child's teachers know** if homework is consistently too difficult for your child or takes longer than the teacher intended?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are giving your child the right amount of support for homework. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions on supporting your child.

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Your middle schooler's weight may be linked to school success



Researchers say students who are significantly overweight may not perform as well in school. A study in the medical

journal *Obesity* found that overweight middle school students:

- **Had lower reading scores** on standardized tests.
- **Were more likely to have** at least six detentions.
- **Missed more school.**
- **Had lower scores** on physical fitness tests.
- **Were less likely** to play on sports teams.

One author of the study said that the overweight students may have suffered from low self-esteem. They were unhappy and had poor self-images. As a result, they may have been less likely to come regularly to school. Children with low self-esteem are also less likely to try to get along with their peers and teachers.

You can help your child maintain a healthy weight if you:

- **Serve fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein.**
- **Buy fewer (or no) snacks** containing high amounts of sugar, fat and salt.
- **Encourage** drinking of water rather than soda.
- **Limit meals** at fast-food restaurants. These tend to be high in calories, fat and salt.
- **Encourage regular exercise.** Middle school students should get about an hour of exercise daily. This can be in the form of 20 minutes, three times a day.

Speak to your child's doctor if you need more information about ways to encourage a healthy diet and activity level.

Source: Stuart M. Shore and others, "Decreased Scholastic Achievement in Overweight Middle School Students," *Obesity*, a Research Journal, www.nature.com/oby/journal/v16/n7/abs/oby2008254a.html.

Encourage your preteen to grow into a person of good character



Your preteen may have been born with certain personality traits, but think of his character as a work in progress. In other words, the kind of person he'll eventually become is still being shaped.

To help your preteen grow into a person of good character:

- **Be a strong role model.** Make sure your behavior demonstrates the values you're promoting.
- **Offer gentle reminders.** Give your preteen low-key prompts when he slips up. "I won't worry about reminding you to finish your homework. I know you're responsible enough to do it on your own."

- **Demand honesty.** If your preteen breaks a rule and lies about it, add an extra consequence—one for the broken rule and one for the lie.
- **Notice positive behavior.** If you see your preteen demonstrating good character, praise him!
- **Find ways for him to give back.** Sign your preteen up to serve at a soup kitchen or animal shelter. Enroll him in a volunteer group. While you're at it, sign yourself up, too. Afterward, talk with him about the experience.

Source: Rita Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D. and John Sommers-Flanagan, Ph.D., "Building Your Child's Character: Challenges and Solutions," American School Counselor Association, www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=482.

Q: I try to give my eighth grader "her own space" when it comes to her bedroom, but the place is a disaster area! There are clothes and school things everywhere—especially on her desk. How can I restore order while still giving her some control?

Questions & Answers

A: It's wise to give your child some freedom for maintaining her bedroom, because it can be an important way for her to learn responsibility. But it sounds like things have gotten out of hand. And if she uses the desk in her bedroom to do homework, she needs to have it organized.

To restore order to your child's bedroom without completely taking away her independence:

- **Respect her opinion.** You don't need to like your child's approach to taking care of her room, but don't ridicule it, either. Instead, agree to disagree. "It looks like we're not going to see eye-to-eye on this."
- **Be clear.** Tell your child exactly what you expect as far as the state of her room goes. "It's fine if your dresser is a little messy and cluttered, but your desk needs to be organized and neat so you can keep track of your school papers."
- **Brainstorm solutions.** Ask your child to think of ways to meet the standards you've set for her room. For instance, she might suggest adding a few storage bins or shelves to help her keep her desk organized.
- **Hold her accountable.** If your child refuses to meet the standards you've set, enforce a consequence.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Reading

Connections can improve reading comprehension



By middle school, much of your child's school success will depend on reading comprehension.

Comprehension is much more than having your child recognize the words he is reading. It means that he *understands* the meaning of what he is reading.

To improve your preteen's comprehension, you can:

- **Make connections.** A connection happens when your child reads something that reminds him of something he has seen or done. When the reading material has meaning it will make him think. Help your child look for books or articles that are about or refer to his favorite things, places or memories.
- **Encourage more reading.** The more your child reads, the easier it will become for him. And the easier reading is, the more energy and interest he has left over to focus on the meaning of what he reads.
- **Ask questions** about what he's read. "Can you tell me a funny part of the book?" "Who was the main character?" "What kind of personality does she (or he) have?" "Does she remind you of anyone you know?" "How do you think the book will end?"

Asking questions like these will help your middle schooler think about what he reads and improve his comprehension.

Source: David Booth, *Reading Doesn't Matter Anymore*, ISBN: 1-55138-202-4 (Stenhouse Publishers, 1-800-988-9812, www.stenhouse.com/html/home.htm).

Boost your middle schooler's reading skills with a book club

Kee your middle schooler out of the "reading doldrums." Encourage her to join a book club! Book clubs are excellent for boosting reading skills and can:

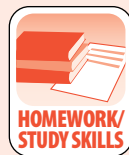
- **Expand your child's horizons.** A book club can expose her to titles and topics she otherwise might not choose.
- **Teach her to appreciate books.** Maybe those stories she once called "boring" aren't so bad, after all.
- **Inspire her to write.** An engaging book discussion can be a perfect jumping-off point for your middle schooler's own short story.
- **Introduce her to new people.** Who knows? She may end up with a few bookish new friends.



- **Sharpen communication skills.** As your child talks about books, she will become a stronger communicator.

Source: "Lifelong Benefits of Joining a Book Club," TheReadingClub.co.uk, www.thereadingsclub.co.uk/lifelong-benefits-of-joining-a-book-club.html.

Make sure your preteen knows how to use reference books



Yes, it's the Internet age. But reference books remain key sources of information. Every child should know how to use them.

Help your child learn to use each of the following:

- **Dictionary.** Words are in alphabetical order. Find spellings, meanings, usage and how to pronounce words.
- **Atlas.** This is a book of maps that also gives other information about cities, counties and countries, such as population.
- **Newspaper.** Many papers are now available online. But

reading a daily print edition is still a great habit for your child to adopt.

- **Thesaurus.** This book offers *synonyms*—words that mean the same thing as other words. It is especially useful when your child is writing.
- **Encyclopedia.** This is a book of knowledge on many subjects. If your child is looking for something recent, going online may work best. But for established subjects, encyclopedias are still useful.

Source: The Staff of the Princeton Review, *Know it All! Grades 9-12 Reading*, ISBN: 0-3757-6374-0 (Princeton Review, 1-800-738-4392, www.K12princetonreview.com).