

# 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!*



## Help your middle schooler stay healthy over the summer months

**E**xperts agree that there is a direct link between student health and academic achievement. And the end of the school year shouldn't signal the end of your preteen's healthful habits!

Over the summer, be sure to:

- **Maintain routines.** Don't throw your preteen's bedtime—or alarm clock—out the window just because it's vacation. Instead, remain on some sort of regular schedule, even if the actual bedtime (or waking time) gets pushed back a little.
- **Encourage your child to move.** Summer break isn't for sitting around, so get your preteen moving! Help your child find an enjoyable activity—such as

jogging, biking, skateboarding, etc.—and encourage it often. Better yet, get the whole family involved. Exercise benefits everyone.

- **Eat dinner together.** Your preteen may be lured outdoors by longer, warmer days, but make sure your family comes together for dinner. Eating together is a terrific way to stay connected.
- **Be a good role model.** Your preteen takes “healthful habits” cues from what you do—not what you say. So don't simply *tell* your preteen how to do positive things for health. Do them for yourself, too!

Source: “Top 10 Ways to Help Children Develop Healthy Habits,” American Heart Association, [www.heart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3030485](http://www.heart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3030485).

## Researchers review effects of screen time



You've heard it before: Too much time in front of a screen is not good for your child. But research published last

December makes that crystal clear. And summer—when kids have plenty of time on their hands—may be the most important time for parents to pay attention.

Researchers reviewed 173 studies dealing with the effect of media on children's health. Results of their review were startling. They showed:

- **Children on average spend** almost as much time each week with media as they do with their parents *and* in school. Media time was almost 45 hours. Parent time was 17 hours. School time was 30 hours.
- **Eighty percent of studies** showed that lots of media time linked up with more childhood obesity, smoking, early sexual behavior, drinking, drug use and poor school performance.

Be sure to set clear limits on the amount of time your preteen is “plugged in” this summer!

Source: Donna St. George, “Media Bombardment Is Linked to Ill Effects During Childhood,” Dec. 2, 2008, *The Washington Post*, [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/01/AR2008120102920.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/01/AR2008120102920.html).

## Coach your child to help without expecting something in return



When your child was younger, he did what you asked for one of two reasons: He wanted to please you (or avoid displeasing you) or he wanted to get something for it. That is the moral reasoning of a young child.

But now your child is reaching a new stage of moral reasoning. He should be working on “doing the right thing” because it is beneficial to more people than just himself.

Here are ways to encourage this:

- **Remind him** that others count on him. “I know it’s hard to make it to soccer practice on time every day. But your teammates really need you. I appreciate your effort and I know how much your coach appreciates your dedication.”

- **Phrase your requests** in terms of helping the family. Example: “Can you help the family by taking out the trash?”
- **Remind him to consider** the feelings of others. “I wonder what your teacher would think if you wrote her a note thanking her for a great year.”

Source: Thomas Lickona, *Raising Good Children*, ISBN: 0-553-37429-X (Bantam, a division of Random House, 1-800-733-3000, [www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/index.html](http://www.randomhouse.com/bantamdell/index.html)).

**“Children seldom misquote you. They usually repeat word-for-word what you should not have said.”**

—*Author Unknown*

## Be absolute when speaking to your child about drinking, drugs



Now that your child is getting older, there are many topics—curfew, free time, chores—that are open to negotiation with your child. Some things, however, are still non-negotiable. They include alcohol and drug use. It is your job as a parent to present them as such. Some tips:

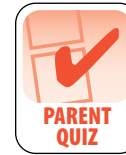
- **Be explicit, but give reasons.** “Underage drinking is not acceptable in our family. Neither is illegal drug use. Both are very harmful to your health. We will *never* condone them.”
- **Do not expect your child** to experiment. Yes, many young people do. But plenty of others do not! This is not some “rite of passage.” One night of experimentation can

harm your child. Be clear to your child that experimenting is a huge risk. Do not say, “Be careful.” Say, “Do not do it.”

- **Do not approve of “friends”** who drink or use drugs. You can’t control who your child spends time with at school. But if you know a peer drinks or uses drugs, you can tell your child that she is not allowed to socialize with this peer outside of school. If your child does so, she will be disobeying you, and consequences should follow. Again, the reason is her health—research shows that children who hang around users are more likely to use.

Source: Paul Coleman and Richard Heyman, *The Big Book of How to Say It KIDS*, ISBN: 0-7352-0177-4 (Prentice Hall Press, 1-800-847-5515, <http://us.penguin.com>).

## Are you keeping track of your child’s social life?



Middle schoolers put a high priority on their social lives and they kick into high gear during the summer. Warm weather and fewer responsibilities often lead to a lot of “hanging out.”

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you’re ready to keep track of your child this summer:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you know** your child’s friends?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you have** correct contact information for the parents of your child’s friends?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you know** where your child will be, who she will be with, what she will be doing and what time she will be home?
- \_\_\_ **4. Have you encouraged** your child to participate in summer activities such as swimming, camps and volunteering?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you research** movies and activities to make sure they are appropriate before your child goes?

### How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are keeping track of your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Encourage your preteen to think about consequences of decisions



As a parent, you've had more life experiences than your child. So it's natural to tell your child what you've learned. But to your child, this is no more than a lecture. He tunes out.

Keep him engaged and involved. Here are a couple of ideas to try:

- **Role-play.** Look for a situation where you can encourage your child to think about decisions and consequences. A news story involving middle or high school students could offer a good opportunity. Ask your child, "How do you think that happened?" After he answers, say, "I wonder what (the person involved) could have done instead?"
- **Map it.** This is a great way to help your child make choices. At the top of a piece of a paper, write one choice on the left, the other on the right. Starting with the left choice, pose a question to your child.

Write it down. Example: "Your choice here is to stay home from your friend's party so you can finish your English paper. But suppose your friend gets angry. How would you handle that?"

Continue for several more questions and answers until your child gets a full understanding of the results of that choice. Then do the same thing with the choice on the right. Example: "Your choice is to go to the party. But then your paper isn't finished. Now what do you do?"

When you've done both sides, talk with your child about the results. Even if he doesn't make the "right" choice, he is now aware of consequences because you helped him figure them out, not because you lectured him.

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, 1-800-262-4729, www.mcgraw-hill.com).

# Trying to teach your preteen respect? Lead by example!



Respect is something best learned over time—and by example. In other words, don't *tell* your child about respect.

Show her what it looks like:

- **Model it.** Let your preteen see you treating others respectfully. Your example may inspire her to become a more respectful person.
- **Obey rules.** Do you fudge your preteen's age so she can order off the kids' menu? Do you let her stay home from school because she is tired? Don't. Your preteen is watching you, so show her that you respect and follow the rules.

- **Be honest.** When you make a mistake, own up to it. It'll show your preteen that you respect the truth.
- **Support her.** Whether your preteen is competing in the science fair or on the softball field, be her biggest fan. If she messes up, encourage her to keep trying—never belittle her.
- **Be polite to her.** Don't save *please* and *thank you* for company! Use these magic words with your preteen, too. And when you go into her bedroom? Knock first.

Source: Steve McChesney, "Respect: How to teach it and how to show it," [teachnology.com](http://teachnology.com), [www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/respect](http://www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/respect).

**Q:** My seventh grader is worried about getting certain teachers next year and eager to get others. Should I step in so he ends up with his "dream schedule"? Or should I stay out of it?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** It's probably best that you stay out of it. Part of growing up is learning how to deal with your circumstances, no matter what they are. Allowing your child to deal with his—including his "teacher circumstances"—may go a long way toward helping him mature.

Your child might not be thrilled with his classes at first, but who knows? His "worst" teachers may ignite a spark and turn out to be some of his best instructors yet.

*Part of growing up is learning how to deal with your circumstances, no matter what they are.*

There are a few cases where it might be a good idea to intervene. For example:

- **Your child has** had ongoing problems with one teacher. If your child consistently had trouble with a teacher this year, and nothing—including conferences with that teacher or the principal—resolved things, it may be wise to request a different instructor next year.
- **A certain teacher would benefit** your child. Is there a teacher who's known for handling your child's particular learning issue? Then it makes sense to ask if he can be in that teacher's class.

Good luck!

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Summer Learning

## Encourage your preteen to enter a summer contest



Summer offers wonderful opportunities for your child to learn outside of the everyday structure of school. It especially allows your child to focus on his talents and interests. One way for your child to do this—and to add an element of excitement as well—is to enter a contest.

Contests can have several benefits for your child. Entering a contest can:

- **Inspire your child to do his best.** Whether your child enjoys art, writing, photography or math, the idea that he is competing against peers and being judged may motivate him to produce a “personal best.”
- **Boost your child’s self-concept.** Even if your child doesn’t win, he made a great effort. You should emphasize this. “You worked so hard. You got your entry in on time. You took a risk in trying something different. I bet you feel proud of yourself. I know I’m proud of you.”

To find contests:

- **Check with your child’s school.** Often contests for children will send materials and entry forms directly to schools.
- **Ask at your public library.** Librarians may have received contest materials. Or they may know how to search for contests.
- **Check the Internet.** Be careful, though. Research any group offering the contest before you allow your child to enter.

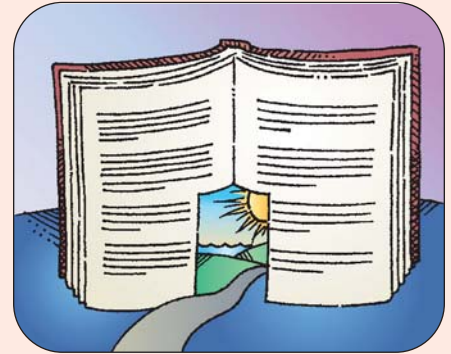
Source: “Events and Contests,” Reading is Fundamental, [www.rif.org/about/eventscontests](http://www.rif.org/about/eventscontests).

## Fill your preteen’s summer with books to maintain ‘word smarts’

**N**o more pencils, no more books? No way! According to research, kids may lose some of their “word smarts” if they don’t keep reading over the summer.

So make a point of surrounding your preteen with words this summer. You can:

- **Make suggestions.** Too hot to go outside? Suggest a few good titles to help your preteen wile away the afternoon. What could be nicer than a cold drink and a cool book?
- **Browse bookstores.** There’s no need to rush your preteen through the aisles. Allow time to discover something new.



- **Visit the library.** Don’t make trips to the public library a once-in-a-while occasion. Go often!

Source: Beth M. Miller, Ph.D., “The Learning Season: The Untapped Power of Summer to Advance Student Achievement,” The Nellie Mae Education Foundation, [www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Learning\\_Season\\_FR.pdf](http://www.nmefdn.org/uploads/Learning_Season_FR.pdf).

## Plan a learning-rich summer for your middle schooler



Expose your middle schooler to new and interesting things this summer. It won’t just teach her something during vacation. It may make her eager to learn more once the school bell rings again.

To keep your middle schooler primed for learning this summer:

- **Appeal to her stomach.** Don’t overlook one of the best ways to experience a new culture: food! Find a great ethnic restaurant and feast on a cuisine you’ve never tried before. If your area has few options, whip up an ethnic dish together at home. Search for intriguing recipes online or at the library.
- **Become tourists in your own town.** Check out the latest exhibit at your city’s science center or art museum. Or explore a different trail at a local park. (Or even hike a familiar trail at an odd time.) Whatever you do, try to see your “same old town” through fresh eyes.
- **Hit the theater.** Has your middle schooler ever attended a play? Make this the summer she starts! Look for low-cost options and take in a show together. If live theater isn’t available, head for the movies instead. But don’t see the latest blockbuster. Instead, find something independent or artsy. Afterward, discuss it together.