

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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*still make the difference!*



## Link today's academic success to your child's future goals

It's a new academic year; however, returning to school during such uncertain times can be unsettling for students and families. To set your child up for a successful year, turn your focus to the importance of education.

Studies show that the best way to help middle schoolers succeed in school may be to remind them that doing well is about more than getting good grades. It's about reaching their future goals.

Middle school students are at a great age to begin thinking about their futures. And even though they're breaking away from their parents, they still take their guidance seriously.

In fact, "lack of guidance" is cited as the main reason capable students don't go on to college.

After reviewing data from 50,000 students over a 26-year period, researchers also found that, by middle school:

- **Kids begin losing interest** in grades. Help your child set learning goals for himself and celebrate his progress.
- **It's challenging for parents** to build relationships with teachers. Even if you can't meet a teacher at the school building, staying in touch via emails and phone calls will help you work together to benefit your child.
- **Parent involvement still matters.** And stressing the long-term benefits of doing well in school matters even more.

**Source:** N.E. Hill and D.F. Tyson "Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement," *Developmental Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

## Sleep improves students' school performance



Experts agree: Most middle schoolers aren't getting the sleep they need in order to perform at their best.

One study found that 85% of adolescents get fewer than eight and a half hours of sleep each night. Students this age should be getting nine to 10 hours.

When kids don't get enough sleep, their academic performance suffers. They have difficulty remembering material and concentrating on their schoolwork.

And it's not just the amount of sleep that matters. Researchers say that consistency and quality of sleep matter, too.

To make sure your child gets the sleep she needs:

- **Set a reasonable bedtime** that results in at least nine hours of sleep each night.
- **Establish a bedtime routine** that helps her relax and fall asleep.
- **Set a screen time curfew.** Studies show that watching TV or using electronics 90 minutes before bedtime delays sleep.

**Source:** J.F. Dewald and others, "The influence of sleep quality, sleep duration and sleepiness on school performance in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review," *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, Elsevier.

## Three strategies can help you motivate your middle schooler



What happened to your once-enthusiastic student? He turned into a middle schooler!

Suddenly, motivating him to do just about anything can feel like pulling teeth.

Don't despair. To motivate your child to do what needs to be done:

### 1. Catch him before he plugs in.

It's tough dragging a child away from his favorite show or game.

So, if there's something you need him to do, ask *before* he turns on the TV or his computer. He may be more compliant.

2. **Stick to routines.** Routines are critical when it comes to keeping order at home. If your child knows exactly what times he's supposed

to feed the dog and get ready for bed, he may be less likely to drag his feet when it's time to do those things.

3. **Support his interests.** Ask your child what he likes to do and encourage him to do it. The more you support him as he works at something he loves, the more inspired he may be to work hard at other things—like school!

**“Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.”**

—Lou Holtz

## Arm your middle schooler with these effective study habits



Students need strong study skills to be successful in middle school—and parents play a significant role

in helping their children develop them. The study skills students learn now will help them succeed today, in high school and beyond.

To lay the groundwork for your child's academic success:

- **Encourage her to break down** large projects. Don't let your middle schooler get rattled by long-term assignments. Show her how to divide big projects into smaller, more manageable parts.
- **Have your child estimate** how long an assignment will take and plan her time accordingly. Then, have her use a timer to see if her estimates are accurate. This will help her make adjustments for future assignments, if necessary.
- **Increase her self-awareness.** Ask your child to figure out when she's at her best. Then encourage her to do most of her work during those times. If she needs to let off some steam, encourage her to go for a run or a brisk walk before sitting down to work.
- **Create flexible learning spaces.** Allow your child to work where she feels most comfortable—whether that's at the kitchen table or on the couch. Just make sure that the space has adequate lighting and is free from distractions.
- **Promote organization.** Help her create a system to keep track of important assignments. It might be file folders, a color-coded binder or a desk calendar.

## Have you made academic honesty a high priority?



In a survey from the Center for Academic Integrity, a whopping 95 percent of high school students admitted to participating

in some form of cheating. Are you addressing this with your child before high school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you set a positive example** for your child by being honest yourself?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Have you spoken** with your child about the school's honor code and the importance of following it?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Have you discussed** different types of cheating with your child, such as finding the answers to exam questions online and sharing homework with other students?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Have you told your child** that copying passages from the internet and passing them off as his own work is also cheating?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Have you talked** about the consequences of cheating?

### How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are showing your child how important it is not to cheat. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Don't let digital devices derail your middle schooler's studies



Sometimes it seems that middle schoolers are permanently attached to their phones, tablets and other devices. They text from the minute they wake up until they go to bed. They share funny videos and memes with their friends. They scroll through social media.

So it's no surprise that students often try to use their phones while they're doing schoolwork. But several research studies show that the more time students say that they text, use social media or read online while they work, the lower their grades are.

Students often think their devices can help with their work. After all, they can watch a video about Jamestown while studying American history. They can check their answer to a math problem.

There's just one problem: Students seldom stay focused on the work they are doing. Pretty soon, they click from the history video to the latest internet joke. From then on, history is not their focus.

What can you do to help your child stay focused on his work and not on digital devices? Here are some tips:

- **Talk about multitasking**—and how research shows it doesn't work. Students need to focus while studying or they won't learn.
- **Limit the use of devices during work times.** Studies show that the more time students spend multitasking, the longer their studies take. Have your child "park" his phone or tablet in a different room.

**Source:** K. Kowalski, "When Smartphones Go to School," *Science News for Students*, Society for Science & the Public.

# Preparation can reduce your middle schooler's test anxiety



Does the thought of an upcoming test give your middle schooler sweaty palms and a stomach-ache? Show her how to prepare for the big event and she may be less nervous about it.

Share these simple strategies with your child:

- **Don't cram.** One frantic night of studying won't pay off on test day. Instead, your child should begin preparing several days in advance. That way, if she doesn't understand something, she'll have time to get help before the test.
- **Use the textbook** and class notes. Are there practice tests in the book? Encourage your child to take them as she prepares for the exam. If there aren't any, see if you can help her create a practice quiz by using her notes from class.
- **Ask for clarification.** If your child is unsure of what's going to be covered on the test, have her ask her teacher. Few things are scarier than the unknown, so the more information she has about the test, the more confident she may feel.
- **Try some relaxation techniques.** Calming exercises such as yoga, deep breathing and meditation can calm students' nerves. Encourage your child to do these daily, and not just on test day.
- **Make healthy choices.** Make sure your child is well-rested and fed on exam day. Be sure she gets enough sleep every night (not just the night before). Offer her a nutritious breakfast in the morning.

**Q:** My eighth-grade daughter and I used to be really close, but now everything I do sets her off. All I hear these days is, "Leave me alone!" How can I stay involved in her life?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Last school year was an unusually difficult year for most kids (and parents). All of that stress and anxiety can affect relationships. In addition, mother-daughter relationships are complex—especially as girls reach the adolescent years. This can make it challenging to stay involved with what's going on in their lives.

The important thing is to try. There's no magic trick to navigating this tricky time, but there are ways to stay sane as you move through it. You can:

- **Expect some turmoil.** Your daughter will be irritated by some of what you say or do—no matter how you say or do it—so just accept it. Try not to take it personally. Instead, simply set guidelines for respectful behavior.
- **Remind yourself** that it's about love. Your daughter likely reacts to you so intensely because she loves you so intensely. If she didn't care about you or your opinions, why would she bother reacting at all? This won't make her anger easier to take, but it may shed some light on it.
- **Listen more than you talk.** Don't pepper your child with questions. Sometimes the quieter parents are, the more middle schoolers will talk.
- **Seek help** if your daughter's behavior seems unusual. Talk to her pediatrician to rule out signs of depression or other medical conditions.

# It Matters: Discipline

## Harsh discipline affects academic achievement



Researchers have found that some kinds of parent discipline can backfire. They followed more than a thousand

students over nine years and learned that when parents practiced harsh discipline, such as hitting or using verbal or physical threats, their children turned away from the family.

As a result, these kids relied more on their peers for support. They chose to spend time with their friends instead of doing their homework. They wanted to keep their friends so badly that they would break rules to stay in the group. If their friends tried risky things like drugs or alcohol, they did as well. Girls were more likely to become sexually active. Boys were more likely to break the law.

The results were predictable: These students were not successful in middle and high school. Many dropped out of school completely.

Discipline works best when it is firm, fair and consistent. To discipline in a positive and effective way:

- **Establish a set of rules** and the consequences for breaking them. Discuss these with your child.
- **Remain calm** if your child breaks a rule. Just follow through with the established consequence.
- **Reward good behavior** with trust. Say, “I trust you to make the right decision on this. I am here if you want to talk about it.”

**Source:** Society for Research in Child Development, “Harsh parenting predicts low educational attainment through increasing peer problems,” *ScienceDaily*, [niscw.com/mid\\_harshdiscipline](http://niscw.com/mid_harshdiscipline).

## Model the respectful behavior you’d like to see from your child

**W**hen it comes to teaching your child about respect, the idea isn’t to *teach* her at all. It’s to *show* her. By demonstrating what respect looks like, you’ll go a long way toward helping your child become respectful.

Here are some simple ways to demonstrate respect every day:

- **Be honest.** Tell the truth. Admit mistakes—don’t blame others for them. Apologize (even to your child) when you are wrong.
- **Be dependable.** If you tell your child you’ll do something, do it. Earn her respect by proving that you’re reliable. And when you can’t do something, be honest about it. It’s an easy way to show her some respect.
- **Be kind.** Don’t insult or belittle your child when she messes up.
- **Be fair.** Don’t pass judgment on your child or punish her for



something before learning all the facts. Show respect by taking the time to get her side of the story.

- **Be polite.** Say *please*, *thank you* and *excuse me* when talking to your child. Don’t barge into her room, either. Instead, knock.

## Be specific and involve your child when you set limits



It isn’t always easy to discipline your child or get him to follow the rules. After all, it’s normal for him to test

limits and angle for more freedom.

Experts recommend following these guidelines when setting limits:

- **Spell them out.** Never assume your child knows what’s allowed and what’s not allowed. Tell him exactly what you expect. “You must charge your phone outside of your bedroom at night. No exceptions.”
- **Explain why you set the rules** you do. You don’t need to justify

your rules, but do help him understand them. “You can’t have your phone in your room after bedtime because it cuts into your sleep.”

- **Get his input.** If you’re thinking of modifying a rule, talk to your child. “We are considering changing your technology curfew. What time do you think is reasonable?” You may not follow his suggestion, but listen.
- **Back off.** Once your child has a solid understanding of the rules, don’t nag him about them. Instead, trust that he’ll obey them—and enforce reasonable consequences if he does not.