

Middle School Parents[®]

MORAN SCHOOL
MICHAEL WAGGONER

still make the difference!



Stay involved to boost your middle schooler's success

Many parents wonder if their involvement in school really makes a difference once their kids reach adolescence. The answer is *yes!* Study after study shows that parents have an enormous effect on their kids' ultimate success in school—even during the middle school years.

Years of research have proven that students whose parents are continuously involved in their education have:

- **Better grades and test scores.**
- **Higher graduation rates.**
- **Lower levels of drug and alcohol abuse.**
- **Stronger self-esteem.**

What does all this mean? It means that staying involved in your middle schooler's education won't just help

her today—it'll help her tomorrow and for the rest of her life.

To play an active role in your child's education:

- **Show an interest** in what she's learning. Ask your child what she did in class today and make sure you *really* listen to her answer.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Your child is more likely to believe in herself if she knows you believe in her. So set the bar high and cheer her on as she strives to reach it.
- **Be a role model.** Inspire your child to work hard by displaying perseverance yourself.

Source: "What Research Says About Parent Involvement in Children's Education in Relation to Academic Achievement," Michigan Department of Education, niscw.com/involve_middle.

Exercise is linked to school performance



Exercise helps your child build the strong body he needs for good health. Research suggests that exercise can also improve your child's academic performance.

A review of 14 studies, involving 12,000 students, found that active students performed better in school than students who weren't active. Exercise may help your child with academics by:

- **Increasing the flow of blood and oxygen** to his brain. This improves cognition (thinking skills) and his ability to focus.
- **Putting him in a better mood.** Exercise is known to increase positive feelings and reduce stress. Stress and anxiety work against school progress.
- **Reinforcing certain lessons** that help him do better in school. This is especially true if your child is on a sports team. Sports require players to follow rules and to take turns. These are traits associated with school success.

Source: A. Singh, Ph.D., "Physical Activity and Performance at School: A Systematic Review of the Literature Including a Methodological Quality Assessment," *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, American Medical Association.

Approach discipline issues with consistency and compassion



Of all the challenges of parenting, discipline may be one of the trickiest. There is no one-size-fits-all method of disciplining your child—especially since she is constantly growing and changing.

One way to keep your bearings is to adopt a consistent approach when it comes to discipline, even as your specific rules and consequences evolve. Do this by:

- **Controlling yourself.** It's tough to think clearly when you're agitated. Avoid disciplining your child when you're angry. (You may do or say something you regret.) Instead, take a moment to calm down before addressing the issue.
- **Notice your child's emotions.** You're not the only one who gets angry and upset. Your child does, too. So if she's clearly upset, help her calm down (or at least acknowledge her feelings) before

disciplining her. Never insult her by calling her a "crybaby."

- **Listening.** This isn't about letting your child talk her way out of a consequence. It's about demonstrating respect even as you enforce it.
- **Drawing the line.** Flexibility is important, but some issues should be non-negotiable. Make sure you are clear about your zero-tolerance policy for things like smoking and illegal drug use.

Source: S. Brown, *How to Negotiate with Kids ... Even When You Think You Shouldn't*, Penguin.

"Limits and structure form the foundation of the stable platform that adolescents use to launch themselves into adulthood."

—Michael Riera

Three steps can help your child read academic material



Not all reading is the same. Of course there are many different kinds of reading material.

But people also read in different ways depending on what they want to accomplish.

When middle school students read academic material, they are *reading to learn*. Here are three steps your child should take while reading an assignment:

1. **Do a "quick read."** This is also called skimming or scanning the text. Your child should pay

attention to pictures, headlines and text in boldface. These can give him an early idea of what the material is about.

2. **Read deeply.** To make this step most effective, your child should take notes while he reads. He should also write down any words or concepts he doesn't understand.
3. **Read it more than once.** For new or difficult material, your child should go back over it even after reading deeply. Reading it through once again will improve his comprehension.

Are you helping your child get off to a great start?



Middle school brings a lot of changes and transitions. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are helping your child through the first few weeks of school:

___ 1. **Have you reviewed** your child's classes, the names of his teachers and the name of his counselor?

___ 2. **Have you talked** with your child about whether he can open his locker and find his classes?

___ 3. **Do you work with your child** to increase his use of calendars and other tools, such as to-do lists?

___ 4. **Are you patient** with your child? Some days he will seem very independent, and other days he will seem to need you more than ever.

___ 5. **Have you made your home** a familiar and comfortable place by continuing rituals, such as family meals?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your child navigate the challenges of middle school. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Survive middle school with tips from a school counselor



When it comes to the tools he'll need to succeed academically, your child will need more than just pencils and paper. Be sure to send him to class with proper "middle-school survival skills," too!

These skills are crucial because excelling in middle school involves much more than academics. Your child will have the best chance of thriving if he:

- **Is emotionally healthy.**

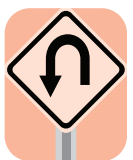
Adolescents are notoriously filled with self-doubt. And that can make them more likely to give in to peer pressure or attempt to "fit in" at all costs. So help keep your child emotionally strong. Spend time with him. Encourage healthy

friendships and then get to know those friends. Take an interest in the things that interest your child. And if you see him losing his way, seek professional help.

- **Understands his changing body.** Never underestimate the impact physical changes can have on your child! A poor self-image can quickly translate into poor grades. Body image is that important to preteens. So talk to your child about the physical changes he'll likely experience during the middle school years. If he knows they're normal, he may feel less abnormal when they happen.

Source: C. Francis, "Surviving Middle School: Tips for Parents from a Middle School Counselor," American School Counselor Association, nswc.com/counselor_middle.

Have a conversation with your child about drugs and alcohol



In middle school, your child is far more likely to be exposed to drugs and alcohol than she was in elementary school. It's important that you speak honestly and openly with her about the dangers of substance abuse.

Here are some issues that may come up:

- **"My friends say trying it a few times won't hurt anyone."** In fact, studies have shown that young brains are especially susceptible to drug and alcohol addictions.
- **"As long as no one is driving, it's not a big deal."** Recreational drug use is illegal *all the time*. Alcohol use is illegal before age 21. An arrest for either one will establish a record. Use at school can lead to suspension or expulsion.

- **"Everyone says it makes you feel good."** The "good" feeling is temporary and deceiving. Poisoning your body can lead to a short-term "crash" and illness. In the long term, both physical and mental health can be damaged.
- **"But I see you and other adults drinking."** Alcohol use is legal for adults 21 and older. Adults, with grown brains, can safely consume limited amounts of alcohol, if they choose. There is no safe amount of alcohol for a growing brain.
- **"Who says this besides you?"** Check out www.thecoolspot.gov for all the facts.

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, "Too Much, Too Soon, Too Risky," The Cool Spot, nswc.com/drugs_middle.

Q: I urged my child to get involved with school activities last year, but she overdid it, and her grades suffered. How can I help her strike a balance between her activities and her studies this time around?

Questions & Answers

A: You said the magic word: *balance*. The trick is for your daughter to get the benefits of extracurricular activities—enjoyment, friendship, increased self-esteem, etc.—without becoming so over-extended that she can't complete her schoolwork.

To help your middle schooler find the right balance:

- **Encourage her to prioritize.** Which activities did your child enjoy best last year? Which benefited her the most? Ask her to think honestly about these questions. Don't settle for a terse "I loved doing everything!" response. If your child is going to make smart choices about extracurricular activities, she'll need to evaluate them candidly.
- **List the pros and cons.** Once your child has narrowed down her favorites, have her list the pluses and minuses of each one. For instance, was lacrosse fun? But did it consume too many weekends? Help her see each activity with a clear and critical eye.
- **Devise a plan.** Keeping each activity's pros and cons in mind, help your child select one or two to join this semester. In a few weeks, reassess the situation. If she's already struggling in class, make some changes. But if she's thriving? She may have struck the right balance!

It Matters: Responsibility

Learning is your middle schooler's responsibility



Middle school marks an important new phase in your child's education. From this point on, she will

be expected to take increased responsibility for her own learning. Instead of being teacher-led, learning in the secondary years becomes student-led.

Your child will need to:

- **Stand up for herself** and her education. Your child should think about what she needs to be successful and ask for it. Encourage her to get to know her teachers so she feels comfortable approaching them.
- **Participate in class.** Your child should ask questions and give opinions in class.
- **Get help at the first sign** of a problem. She should find out when her teachers are available for students needing extra help.
- **Work to get along** with her teachers and classmates. Everyone learns better in a pleasant environment.
- **Take challenging classes.** Your child shouldn't just coast along. If her classes are easy for her, she may not be in the right classes.
- **Think about her learning!** Instead of just memorizing information, your child should ask herself, "How does this relate to something I have learned or experienced before?"

Source: H. Wolpert-Gawron, "Equation of Success: Top Ten Responsibilities that Students Must Own," Edutopia, nismw.com/take_charge.

Share four tools to help your student stay organized

Responsibility for staying on top of several classes (each with a different teacher) as well as extracurricular activities is a big challenge in middle school.

To make organization easier for your child, give him these tools:

1. **Sticky notes.** Have your child place small sticky notes on the spines of books and binders in his locker that he should bring home for homework.
2. **To-do lists.** Have your child write down everything he needs to complete for the following day, week, month, etc.
3. **Calendars.** Your child should write all assignment due dates and test dates on a calendar. Remind him to check it often.
4. **Schedules.** Show your child how to make and follow a schedule



every day. Here's a sample schedule:

3:00 *Home from school*

3:15 *Snack and relaxation*

3:30 *Homework*

4:30 *Read*

5:00 *Change for soccer practice*

5:30 *Leave for soccer practice*

Source: A. K. Dolin, *Homework Made Simple: Tips, Tools and Solutions for Stress-Free Homework*, Advantage Books.

Attendance is vital to your middle schooler's success



Missing too much school won't just hurt your child's performance in class—it may damage her

future. Studies show that kids who are frequently truant are likelier than their peers to:

- **Repeat a grade.**
- **Get expelled.**
- **Drop out of school.**

So don't let your child convince you that casually missing school is "no big deal." Attendance is vital—and it's her responsibility. After all, it's her future that's on the line!

To make sure your middle schooler's attendance doesn't suffer:

- **Be firm.** Every vague complaint shouldn't be a ticket to a day off.
- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge that school's not always fun. Your middle schooler may appreciate your honesty.
- **Be proactive.** If she's clearly avoiding school, find out why. Start by talking to her guidance counselor.

Source: "Prevention Brief: Reducing Truancy," National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, nismw.com/truancy.