

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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***still make the difference!***



## Promote pleasure reading for better school performance

It's true: Reading for pleasure boosts academic achievement. Studies show that children who read for pleasure have higher scores in English, math, science and history than those who rarely read outside the classroom.

To encourage your child to read for enjoyment:

- **Set aside time** in his schedule for reading every day.
- **Get everyone** in the family reading. Show that it's fun!
- **Take trips to the library** or bookstore. See what books appeal to your child and encourage his interests.
- **Talk with librarians** and booksellers. Ask what books they recommend for kids your child's age.
- **Keep reading materials handy.** Fill your home with books, magazines, newspapers and other reading resources.
- **Don't force him to read** books he doesn't enjoy. Let your child know it's OK to stop reading something if he gets bored.
- **Read aloud.** Middle schoolers aren't too old for this. Take turns reading chapters to each other. Or have your child read to a younger sibling.
- **Discuss books.** Tell your child about a book you liked. Or ask your child to tell you about his favorite book.

**Source:** C. Whitten and others, "The Impact of Pleasure Reading on Academic Success," *The Journal of Multidisciplinary Graduate Research*, [niswc.com/mid\\_readforfun](http://niswc.com/mid_readforfun).

## Parent-teacher conferences are beneficial for all



Parent-teacher conferences in middle school are often brief. But they can be extremely valuable.

To get the most from a meeting with your child's teacher:

- **Make a list** of things you'd like to discuss ahead of time. Include questions and information about your child that you'd like the teacher to know.
- **Be prompt.** Teachers typically schedule conferences back-to-back. Arriving late may delay the meetings after yours.
- **Keep an open mind.** Your goal is to work as a team with your child's teacher. Even if the teacher says something you disagree with, listen carefully.
- **Clarify and summarize** as you go. Teachers sometimes use educational buzz words. If you don't understand something the teacher says, just ask.
- **Ask the teacher** how you can support your child. If your child is doing well, ask what you can do to keep things on a positive track. If there are problems, ask what you can do to help.
- **Take notes.** This will help you remember what you discussed.

# Create a family media plan to manage recreational screen time



According to a recent study, kids who spend seven hours or more per day in front of a screen are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety than those who spend just one hour per day in front of a screen.

Research also shows that excessive recreational screen time negatively affects schoolwork, activity levels and face-to-face communication skills.

To manage your child's technology use, experts recommend creating a personalized family media plan that answers the following questions:

- **What devices** do I want my child to have access to?
- **Where will devices** be allowed and where will they be off-limits?
- **How much time** will my child be allowed to use them?

- **Will the same rules apply** during weekends and school breaks?
- **What content is appropriate** for my child to access?
- **How will I maintain consistency?**
- **What consequences** will there be for misusing devices?
- **What example** am I setting through my own use of technology?

**Source:** J.M. Twenge and W.K. Campbell, "Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study," *Preventive Medicine Reports*, Elsevier B.V., [niswc.com/mid\\_mediaplan](http://niswc.com/mid_mediaplan).

**"Teens spend an average of nine hours a day online. Kids eight to 12 spend an average of six hours a day online."**

—Common Sense Media

# Four strategies can reduce your middle schooler's test anxiety



Does your child's stomach do flip-flops the night before a huge test? Does yours? Relax! Although you can't take the test for

your child, there are lots of ways you can help her get ready.

When your middle schooler has an upcoming test:

- 1. Chat with her.** Ask your middle schooler why she's so nervous about the test. Is the material too hard? Does she not understand it? Sometimes just getting her concerns off her chest can make the test less scary.
- 2. Help her make a study schedule.** If the test is next week, encourage her to set aside study time on each of the days leading up to it. This

may keep her from cramming the night before.

- 3. Create a comfy study spot.** Carve out a quiet, well-lit place at home where your middle schooler can study. Make sure she has all the supplies she needs—including a healthy snack—when she sits down to hit the books.
- 4. Remind her of her strengths.** "I know you're worried about the big science test, but remember how well you did on the last one?" Focus on the positives.

Later, when your child receives her test grade, talk about it. If she did well, celebrate her success. If she didn't, calmly go over what went wrong and talk about how she can improve next time.

# Are you helping your child resist peer pressure?



Peer influence is strong in the middle school years. Are you doing all you can to help your child combat negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- 1. Have you talked** with your child about doing the *right* thing rather than the *easy* thing?
- 2. Do you suggest** ways your child can say *no* to things he knows are wrong? He could say, "I'm not interested" and walk away.
- 3. Do you talk** to your child about how most kids his age feel pressured to fit in, too?
- 4. Do you make** your family rules clear to your child? Do you emphasize that he can talk to you when he feels pressured to break them?
- 5. Do you encourage** your child to think about consequences? "If you skip school with your friends, what might happen as a result?"

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are helping your child resist negative peer pressure. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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## Encourage your child to use a journal to plan for the future



Your child is in middle school, and it is not realistic to expect him to know what he wants to do for the rest of his

life. But it is realistic for him to have some sense of what he likes and what he doesn't, what he is good at and what he struggles with.

Experts agree that it is helpful for students to begin thinking this way once they get to sixth grade. Children who know themselves have a good head start on the future.

Keeping a journal is an effective way for your middle schooler to get to know himself better. Encourage him to write about what he thinks as well as what he does.

In the journal, your child should answer questions such as:

- *What are my strengths in school?*
- *What are my weaknesses in school?*
- *What do I love doing outside school?*
- *What am I good at doing outside school?*
- *What do I like to learn about or would I like to learn more about?*
- *What is important to me right now?*
- *Do I prefer to work with others or alone?*
- *Am I happier when I am indoors or outdoors?*
- *What have I done in my life that I am most proud of?*

Encourage your child to update the journal regularly. His answers are likely to change—and that's OK.

He should pay more attention to the things that stay the same. These trends could provide clues to his future success.

## Goals can help your child stay motivated throughout the year



The first couple of months of school is a natural time to set goals. But who should be doing the goal-setting?

In middle school, it should be your child's responsibility to set goals and take charge of her own learning.

Encourage your child to:

- **Be realistic.** If she has struggled in the past, bringing every grade up to an A in one quarter may not be a realistic goal. Instead, help her identify her most important need and set specific goals to address that. For example, "I want to raise my math grade from a C to a B."
- **Write down goals.** Putting a goal in writing increases the chances of achieving it.

- **Plan.** Accomplishing goals takes vision, effort and time. If bringing up a math grade will take an extra 30 minutes of study each night, your child may need to cut down on time spent on other activities. She should block out her study times on the calendar.
- **Check.** Review goals every few weeks. How is your child doing? What changes, if any, should she make? At the end of the quarter or semester, your child should take stock of her goals. She should figure out a maintenance plan for goals she has met, an action plan for goals she has not met and an exploration plan for possible new goals.

Source: S. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Touchstone.

**Q:** I caught my daughter copying all the answers from her friend's homework. She said it was no big deal and that other students do it all of the time. What should I do?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, middle school is a time when many students turn to cheating. At this age, students are highly aware of how they compare with their peers and they may view cheating as a way to keep up.

In a study conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, 90% of middle schoolers admitted to copying a friend's homework and 75% admitted to cheating on tests.

Cheating is very serious. But you can keep your daughter from turning one mistake into a more severe problem. Here's how:

- **Send a clear message** to your child that cheating is wrong. It's dishonest and it robs her of learning the skills and information she'll need for success in life.
- **Ask your daughter** why she cheated. Is she afraid of disappointing you or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades?
- **Don't put too much emphasis** on grades. Instead, stress the importance of doing her best. Let your child know that mistakes are learning opportunities and you will love her no matter what.
- **Help your daughter** develop better study habits—so she can make better grades on her own.
- **Find help** if your child has fallen behind. The teacher may know a student who would be willing to tutor her a few hours a week.

# It Matters: Building Responsibility

## Help your child develop a sense of responsibility



Boost your middle schooler's sense of responsibility and you'll help him succeed in the classroom and out. To

instill this quality:

- **Talk about it.** Teach your child that he's responsible for his attitude and the decisions he makes. If things are going wrong, help him see how his choices might have contributed to the situation. He may be surprised to find out that even little things, like his choice of words, tone or body language, influence the way things will turn out for him.
- **Enforce it.** Insist that your child take responsibility for his actions. That means allowing him to experience the consequences of those actions. For example, don't take his forgotten homework or lunch to school over and over again.
- **Advocate for it.** Tell your child that you value responsibility-related traits like self-control and persistence. When you see him demonstrating those qualities, praise him.
- **Model it.** Let your child see you taking responsibility for your mistakes. "I left my gardening tools out in the rain, and now they are rusted. I should have been more responsible." He will learn more by your admission than he'd learn in an hour of lecturing.

**Source:** M. Josephson and others, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, Boys Town Press.

## Organization skills support your child's academic success

Some middle schoolers have a difficult time staying organized. And when students become too disorganized, their grades often suffer.

While it's ultimately your child's responsibility to keep track of her schoolwork, you can:

- **Make sure she has** the right materials. Your child should have a separate place to keep schoolwork for each of her classes. She can use a notebook or folder for each class—or a binder divided with tabs.
- **Give her a daily planner.** She can use it to write down dates for assignments, tests and other school responsibilities.
- **Suggest she organize** her backpack on a weekly basis. She should



throw away trash, sort and file her papers and restock the backpack with necessary school supplies.

## Meaningful responsibilities help middle schoolers thrive



Fulfilling responsibilities at home in addition to homework helps your middle schooler see himself as a capable

person. This feeling of self-worth will serve him well in school and in life.

Some children are ready for certain tasks before others are. Take your child's development into account, then consider giving him responsibility for:

- **Scheduling.** Have your child track his appointments, social events and extracurricular activities. He can mark them on the family calendar and coordinate with

you how to get to and from his activities.

- **Budgeting.** Have your child manage some of his expenses. If he wants to purchase something, encourage him to make a plan. How much allowance will he have to save, or what odd jobs can he do to reach his goal?
- **Contributing.** Expect your child to participate in discussions about things that affect family life. As a parent, you'll make the final decisions, but ask your child for his opinion and consider it. Asking him to contribute his ideas helps him feel valued and understood.