

Middle School Parents[®]

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Enterprise City Schools
Parent & Family Engagement

still make the difference!



Build a relationship that supports academic success

Studies show that positive adult influence is critical to children's success. Children who have healthy adult role models:

- **Feel more secure** and optimistic than children without role models.
- **Are more likely** to feel happy.
- **Are nine times more likely** than other kids to earn straight A's.
- **Are less likely** to cheat on tests.
- **Are more likely** to believe in their own future success.

What's the secret to being a solid role model for your middle schooler? There isn't one. Instead, there are some common sense things you can do to keep your child motivated and feeling loved. Here are a few:

- **Get to know your child.** Don't make snap judgments about

her character. Instead, take time to find out what makes her tick and find ways to support her interests.

- **Offer specific praise.** Middle schoolers sometimes get a bum rap; they're often seen as moody troublemakers. Look for the positive. When your child does something great, say so!
- **Listen to her.** Don't dismiss your child's problems or opinions because she's "just a kid." Pay attention when she tells you something. Your willingness to listen may be the biggest motivator of all.

Source: "Healthy Parent-Child Relationships," U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, [niswec.com/mid_relationships](https://www.niswec.com/mid_relationships).

Connect with teachers to boost learning



While parent-teacher conferences are often brief in middle school, they are still worthwhile.

To make the most of in-person or virtual meetings with your child's teachers:

- **Talk with your child** beforehand. Does he have any concerns about a teacher, a class or a large project?
- **Make a list.** Don't assume you'll remember everything you want to talk about with his teachers. Write down your questions and a few notes about the topics you'd like to cover.
- **Start on a high note.** Begin the meeting by saying something positive. "My child enjoyed the last project he did for your class." An upbeat start may make the meeting go more smoothly.
- **Keep an open mind.** If a teacher has concerns about your child, don't get defensive. Instead, ask for specific examples of the problem.
- **Develop a plan.** If one of your child's teachers mentions a problem, ask for strategies to help address it. Problems are easier to solve when teachers and parents work together.

Clear expectations are key for middle school students



When your child was a toddler, you used clear and concrete language to convey your expectations.

Now that your child is older, clear expectations are *still* the way to go.

When talking with your middle schooler:

- **Speak in terms of what *you* want** and the expectations you have. Telling him what *he* must do may not work because you cannot control his behavior. You can only control yours. “I expect you to complete your homework before you leave the house,” is more effective than, “Do your homework now.”
- **Encourage your child** to be clear about his own expectations. If he

says he expects an A on his next test, have him tell you the steps he will take to achieve it.

- **Discuss teachers’ expectations.** “When Mrs. Jones tells you on Monday that you have a test on Friday, she expects you to start reviewing the material right away so that you will be prepared on Friday.”

“Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.”

—Stephen R. Covey

Teach your child to follow four steps after making mistakes



While it may be comforting for students to hear, “Don’t worry. You’ll learn from this mistake,” that’s not always the

case. Sometimes, students just keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

In order to really learn from mistakes, students need to think about them. Here are four steps your child can take to do just that:

1. **Look at what was right.** You could say, “Your test wasn’t perfect. But let’s see where you succeeded.” Pointing out that all is not lost will motivate your child to take the next step.
2. **Figure out what went wrong.** It’s hard to fix a problem if you don’t know what caused it. Sometimes, the solution is easy: She didn’t

follow the directions. But other times, it requires more analysis.

3. **Take steps to correct the problem.** Perhaps your child didn’t learn the content she needed to know. In that case, she may need to ask the teacher for help. Support her as she makes a plan for what to do differently the next time.
4. **Apply this knowledge** to a new situation. Have your child try a problem that is similar to the one she missed on the test. Encourage her to stop at the place where she made the error and try to make a different choice. When she does, she’ll know that she really has learned from her mistake.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, “Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset,” *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, Elsevier B.V.

Are you helping your child focus on the future?



As a middle school student, your child is not quite ready to begin filling out college or job applications. But she

is ready to begin thinking about her future.

To find out if you are helping your child plan for the future, answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions:

- ___ 1. **Do you encourage** your child to take challenging courses?
- ___ 2. **Do you talk** with your child about what types of careers she might like to pursue when she is an adult?
- ___ 3. **Do you discuss** different higher education options (college, technical school) with your child?
- ___ 4. **Do you tell** your child that you want her to gain the maximum education possible?
- ___ 5. **Do you work** with your child to establish effective study habits now, knowing she will need them even more in the future?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you and your child are preparing a foundation for her future. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Talented students share their secrets for mastering math



What should your child do when he's trying to solve a tough math problem? He should stick with it.

That's the advice of students who took part in a well-known math competition. These kids have figured out some secrets to doing well in a subject that can sometimes trip up their peers.

So what do these students do that can help your child with math? They:

- **Think about the concept.** Instead of simply memorizing something long enough to pass a test, these students try to understand the concept behind the problem. That way, they can solve similar problems in the future.

- **Practice.** Once they figure out how to solve a type of math problem, these students practice. Just as an athlete or a musician practices a new skill, so should a math student.
- **Focus.** Most of these strong math students say they study alone. Some do admit that their study time includes a few distractions. But they make math their focus.
- **Never give up.** What if they can't figure a problem out? If one thing doesn't work, they try another approach. Many also ask a teacher for extra help. If they're still stuck, they may search online to figure out how to get the right answer.

Source: L. Loewus, "Survey: Habits of Talented Math Students," *Education Week*, nswc.com/mid_mathsuccess.

Try these strategies to turn your middle schooler into a reader



Is your middle schooler less than enthusiastic about curling up with a good book? Help her learn to enjoy reading.

Not only will it improve her language skills, it may turn her into a lifelong book lover!

To motivate your middle schooler to read:

- **Lead by example.** Research shows that *your* reading habits can have a huge impact on your child's reading habits. So, let her see you reading for pleasure! Instead of turning on the TV when you get home from work, pick up the newspaper. On weekends, unwind with an entertaining book.
- **Designate daily reading time.** Set aside a short period of quiet time each day when the music, TV and computer are turned off. Suggest

your child use the time to read. Don't force her, though, because it could backfire. Instead, kick back with your own book and see if she follows your lead.

- **Allow your to choose** what she reads. Comics and graphic novels may not be your idea of great literature, but if they inspire her to read, they're perfect!
- **Subscribe to a magazine.** Whether your middle schooler is obsessed with horses, fashion, outer space, sports or guitars, there's surely a magazine devoted to that very subject. Look for a quality publication and consider subscribing, or see if the magazine has a free website. Each new issue offers another opportunity to read.

Source: S.L. Arnold, "The secret to influencing kids' reading habits while thinking only about yourself," *Perspectives on Reading*, nswc.com/enjoyread2.

Q: My middle schooler gets stressed about everything—from homework to current events! How can I help him better manage his anxiety and learn how to go with the flow?

Questions & Answers

A: Middle school is full of big changes, so it's normal for your child to get anxious from time to time. However, if the stress itself—rather than whatever set it off—is becoming too much, it's time to step in and take some action.

To help your child better manage his everyday stress:

- **Teach him to recognize** the warning signs. Does he start grinding his teeth or biting his nails when he gets anxious? That's when he should take action. Stress is much more manageable when it's caught early.
- **Help him create** an action plan. If your child is stressed out over an upcoming project, show him how to break it into small parts. A big task is daunting, but a series of smaller ones may not be.
- **Encourage healthy habits.** A healthy diet and adequate sleep can help ease anxiety.
- **Suggest ways** for him to blow off steam. Exercise, reading or shooting hoops in the driveway may be all your child needs to calm down.
- **Remind him** that you have his back. Your stressed-out child may feel like the weight of the world is on his shoulders. So let him know you're right there with him and will help him overcome his stress so he can be successful.
- **Talk to his school counselor** or pediatrician if your child's anxiety becomes difficult to manage.

It Matters: Responsibility

Help your middle schooler develop leadership skills



Many people think of a leader as someone who gives direction. To some extent, that is true. But true

leadership has more to do with listening, learning and being an example.

The qualities that make effective leaders can also help children be better students. To promote leadership traits in your middle schooler, encourage her to be:

- **Caring.** Effective leaders are always ready to offer help to anyone who needs it.
- **Open to new ideas.** Leaders know they don't know it all. They always listen to others.
- **Organized.** Leaders plan ahead. They know that leaving projects to the last minute usually produces poor results.
- **Flexible.** Leaders don't get stuck in the rut of doing everything the same way every time. They are willing to negotiate and try new things.
- **Optimistic.** Leaders trust the people they work with. They are enthusiastic. They expect things to go right, and because of their leadership, things usually do.
- **Resilient.** Leaders know how to handle losses and move forward when things don't go as planned.

In addition to encouraging specific leadership traits in your child, set a positive example by leading your family with compassion and fairness.

Source: B.A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Facing consequences & solving problems builds responsibility

Middle schoolers aren't always responsible. But some haven't ever *had to be*. Whenever those kids face a problem, their parents try to fix it. That may solve some problems today. But it will create even bigger problems in the future.

To help your child develop the accountability he needs:

- **Let him solve problems** on his own. If he gets a grade that he feels is unfair, encourage him to talk to his teacher about it. Don't immediately contact the teacher yourself.
- **Help him consider** consequences. Encourage your child to think about the potential results of an action before taking it.
- **Let him learn** from experience. It's a good teacher. But your child



can't learn the lesson if you always bail him out. So if he doesn't get his paper written on time, let him learn from the consequences.

Expect your child to keep promises and commitments



"His word was as good as his bond." This old adage, which refers to a person who always did what he said he

would, is one of the cornerstones of responsibility.

Tell your child you expect him to keep his promises and commitments. Encourage him to:

- **Think before agreeing** to do something. It's great to take on new responsibilities, but your child should only do this if he feels he is ready and if he has the time. Whether it's agreeing to tutor a friend in math or helping

a neighbor clean up his lawn, your child should make sure he will be able to follow through.

- **Avoid making excuses.** If your child misses a commitment, he needs to be accountable. He should acknowledge his mistake, apologize and ask if there is anything he can do to make it up to the person.
- **Honor the commitments** he makes to himself. When your child sets a goal and creates a plan to achieve it, he is making a promise. Living up to that promise will boost his self-confidence, productivity and happiness.