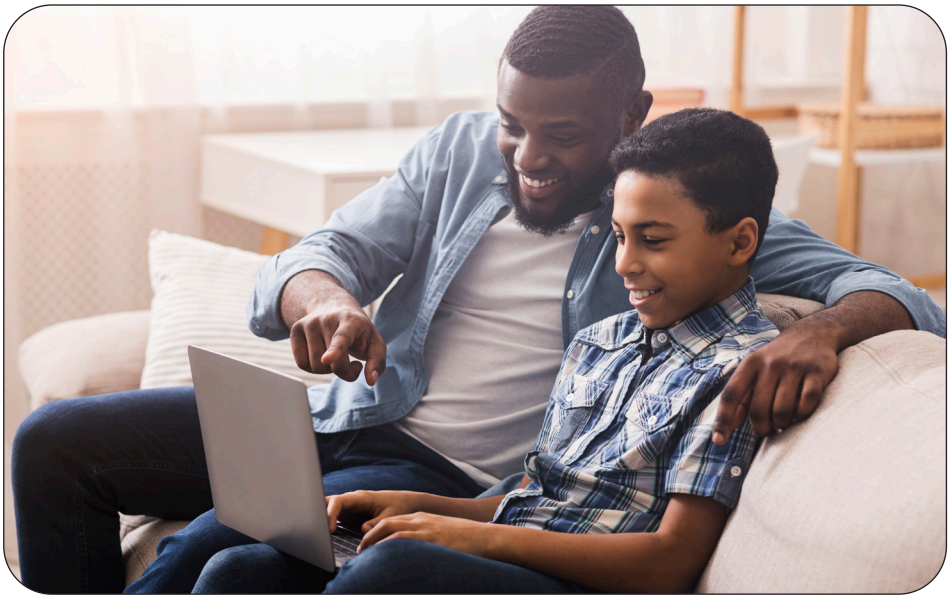
Middle School
Parents®
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Enterprise City Schools
Parent & Family Engagement



Help your middle schooler evaluate online information

Students (and adults) get much of their news from online sources. But today, many of those sources present only one-sided information. It's harder than ever to tell the difference between unbiased information about a product and a website created to advertise that product. And some sites pretend to be news sites, but are actually trying to promote a particular point of view.

A Stanford study shows that most students can't tell the difference between a news story and an ad. They also don't know how to tell a real news site from one that presents a slanted view of an issue.

Talk with your child about the importance of verifying whether an online source is reliable.

Encourage him to:

- **Follow links.** Does the link lead to a trustworthy news source? Or does it go to a site that offers only one point of view?
- **Read more.** Sometimes an article will take one sentence from another source out of context. Read the original source for clarification.
- **Look for hidden ads.** An article containing the phrase "sponsored content" isn't news. It's an ad.
- **Check the date.** A source from 2005 could contain accurate material about ancient Greece. However, information about today's economy would require a more recent source.

Source: *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning,* Stanford University History Education Group, niswc.com/mid_evaluate.

Listen to your child's ideas and opinions



"Could you at least hear me out?" Whether you are in a discussion at work or with a family member, you've probably asked that question yourself. Because even if you don't get your way in the end, you want to know that your point of view was considered.

It should come as no surprise that middle schoolers feel the same way. Giving kids a chance to express their opinions makes them happier, more engaged and more confident—which affects their motivation to do well academically.

When your middle schooler has something to say, take time to listen to her. And when she makes a good point, seriously consider it. For example, she might have a reasonable idea about switching up her chores. Or, she may have a compelling argument for staying up a bit later on Friday night.

You may not always agree with your child, but by hearing her out, you are building her confidence to speak up and contribute in class settings and in other areas of life.

Source: K.N. Marbell-Pierre and others, "Parental Autonomy Support in Two Cultures: The Moderating Effects of Adolescents' Self-Construals," *Child Development*, niswc.com/mid_express.

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Offer your child strategies for taking effective class notes



Every student needs note-taking skills to succeed in school. Without them, it would be nearly impossible to remember everything a teacher says during class.

Share these note-taking pointers with your middle schooler:

- **Write down lists.** If the teacher says, "Here are five causes of the Revolutionary War," your child should write them down.
- **Write down what's on the board** or screen. Information a teacher takes time to display is usually something your child should learn.
- **Listen for "extreme" words.** Anytime a teacher describes a concept as the *best*, the *weakest* or the *last*, your child should take note of it.
- **Take advantage of pauses.** When the teacher pauses after saying something, she is likely giving students time to write.
- **Write down information** that the teacher repeats.
- **Stay with it.** Teachers sometimes squeeze in important information near the end of class if they realize they are running out of time.

"Before anything else, preparation is the key to success."

—Alexander Graham Bell

Middle school years are key for preventing substance abuse



Drugs change brains. So once people become addicted to drugs, it will always be harder to stop using them.

Brain researchers know the best way to prevent drug abuse is to keep people from ever using illicit drugs. The middle school years are a time when prevention messages are most important.

People are more likely to turn to drugs in times of transition. Adults facing job loss or divorce may use drugs to feel better. For adolescents, the challenge of changing schools and adapting to new learning environments can make drugs seem appealing.

Middle schoolers also want to try new things. Drugs and alcohol may seem to offer new experiences. Since middle schoolers' judgment and decision-making skills are still developing, they may not see the risks associated with their use.

What can you do as a parent?

- **Ask your child** what she has learned in school about substance abuse. Reinforce those messages at home.
- **Send clear messages.** Let your child know she should avoid all drugs, including alcohol and nicotine products. Also talk about the problem of misusing prescription drugs.
- **Set clear rules and enforce them.** Praise appropriate behavior. Parents who are consistent find they don't have to be punitive.
- **Build a strong relationship** with your child. Do things together as a family. Enjoy spending time on shared activities.
- **Be a good role model.** Your example is the most powerful teacher.

Source: "Preventing Drug Abuse: The Best Strategy," National Institute on Drug Abuse, niswc.com/mid_braindrug.

Do you teach your child responsible social media use?



Social networking sites, such as Snapchat and Instagram, have become increasingly popular among middle schoolers. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are reinforcing safe rules for their use:

___**1. Have you talked** with your child about the dangers of sharing personal information online?

___**2. Does your child know** that if he chooses to be on a social networking site, he must allow you to be part of his network?

___**3. Have you talked** about why your child should not post or share inappropriate photos or hurtful comments online?

___**4. Do you limit** when, where and for how long your child can use social media?

___**5. Does your child know** you will monitor the computer and his cell phone to see what he's doing?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child use social media safely. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Find creative ways to give your child's writing skills a boost



Strong writing skills are vital to academic success. However, insisting that your middle schooler practice them may backfire.

Instead, find creative ways for your child to practice writing. If he's having a good time, he may not realize he's sharpening his skills at the same time.

Ask your child to:

- **Maintain a family diary.** Have you been thinking of starting a blog? Let your child tackle the setup and write a few entries. He could write about how his life has changed since the pandemic. Or ask him to send a quarterly family update email. Remind him that he's doing something valuable by keeping family and friends posted on what's happening in your lives.
- **Put his requests in writing.** The next time your child wants permission to do something, don't just say *yes* or *no*. Instead, have him write down what he wants and why. Tell him to be persuasive and address any objections he thinks you might have.
- **Craft a holiday letter.** If your family typically sends out an end-of-year holiday letter, ask your child to take the lead. Suggest he start by recapping the seasons: "In the spring, our family … ." Beyond that, let him decide what to write.

Making art can help middle schoolers deal with emotions



There's no question that middle schoolers are sometimes moody. Changes in their bodies can make their behavior unpredictable. Social distancing, disruptions to routines and concerns about health can make them feel overwhelmed.

Art can help. Creating art gives kids a productive way to express themselves, and can even reduce anxiety. It can also help them understand and name their emotions—which is often the first step toward learning how to regulate those emotions.

To support your child's emotional well-being, encourage her to:

- **Keep a journal.** She can write or draw about her feelings. She can add quotations that motivate her.
- **Create a display box.** Your child can collect items that make her happy, such as a small rock from a favorite outdoor place, a dried flower and a photo. Then, she can arrange them in the box in a visually pleasing way.
- **Create a "mood mandala."** Mandalas are geometric designs that can start as a series of circles. Your child can use one circle for each day of the month. Then, she can use color and design to reflect her feelings for each day, and link the circles into a pattern.

Your child may want to share her artistic creations. Or, she may want to keep them private. Just let her know you're available to talk.

If your middle schooler's moodiness lasts for days on end, or if she seems sad or anxious all the time, be sure to consult with her doctor.

Source: J. Fraga, "How Making Art Helps Teens Better Understand Their Mental Health," KQED News, niswc.com/mid_mental.

Q: School has been in session for several months, and I feel like I'm not in the loop about things like homework and upcoming tests. How can I stay informed about what my child is doing academically without seeming nosy?

Questions & Answers

A: Remember, it's your job—and your right—to know how your child is doing in school, so you're not being nosy. You're being an engaged parent!

To stay informed:

- **Talk to your child.** Have her give you an update on each of her classes. The more you know about them, the more comfortable you'll feel asking about them. If your child doesn't want to talk about school every day, set aside 15 minutes for a weekly chat. It will give her a chance to fill you in on how she's doing. And if there's a problem brewing, she will have a built-in opportunity to tell you about it.
- **Read everything** the school sends home. Check the school's online communication platform and visit the website. Follow the school and district on social media. These are the most effective ways to stay informed about changes to school policies, etc.
- **Touch base** with your child's teachers. If you haven't had an opportunity to meet them in person, send a note to each and introduce yourself. Include your phone number and email address, and ask them for their contact information.
- **Attend remote and in-person** school events and workshops when you can. It's the perfect way to connect with school staff and other parents—and to find out what's going on at school!

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It Matters: Building Character

Explore service opportunities with your child



The COVID-19 crisis has changed the way of life of many families. During challenging times, it's important to show your child that he can be a helper and make meaningful contributions to his community.

Community service may sound like a big commitment. But if your child can find just one hour a week, he can do something significant to help others and himself.

Here are a few age-appropriate ideas for middle schoolers:

- **Collect canned foods** for a food bank that accepts food donations.
- **Learn how to make simple masks** and distribute them to friends and neighbors.
- **Offer virtual tutoring** for a younger child in math or reading.
- **Collect personal essentials**, such as socks, toothbrushes, shampoo and soap, and donate them to a shelter.
- **Help a neighborhood family** by offering free dog-walking or yard work services.
- **Make cards and posters** for seniors in a retirement or assisted living communities to let them know they are loved.
- **Collect and deliver letters** of thanks for healthcare professionals and other frontline workers.
- **Organize a collection** of pet food, old towels and blankets for donation to an animal shelter.
- **Work on a political campaign.** Kids can put up signs, share information on social media and encourage people to vote.

Teach your child how to bounce back from disappointment

Learning how to move on after setbacks can boost your middle schooler's academic achievement and her overall happiness—and it's a skill that can be taught. Here's how:



- **Empower your child** to solve her own problems. It's natural to want to smooth the path for your child. But when you do, you keep her from learning how to solve problems herself. Let her develop her own plan for dealing with a low grade, for example. You can help her practice what to say to the teacher, but expect *her* to say it.
- **Encourage your child** to set realistic goals for improvement. Then, show her how to develop plans to achieve them.
- **Help your child** accept that life isn't perfect and sometimes things won't go her way. Kids who spend time on social media often think that everyone else has a perfect life. Tell your child, "Don't compare your inside with their outside."
- **Set an example.** When you handle disappointments with grace, your child learns healthy coping skills.

Help your middle schooler develop good judgment



When you trust your middle schooler, you have faith that he will do the right thing most of the time. But knowing what the right thing is takes judgment—and that develops over time.

Here are two ways to guide your child toward good judgment:

1. **Give him increasing amounts** of responsibility for school routines. Start with something basic, such as homework. Your child knows what he needs to accomplish for school. Tell him you will let him judge for himself a reasonable time to work.

   If this goes well, allow him to exercise judgment over another area of his life. If it doesn't go well, ask him what he has learned from the experience. Work out a new plan with him, and try again.
2. **Discuss situations in advance.** What would he do if a friend asked to copy his homework? Your child knows that cheating is wrong, but kids can get flustered when presented with tough situations for the first time. Role-playing scenarios will help him call upon his judgment skills and make a good decision when it counts.