Middle School
# Parents
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still make the difference!



## Goals can help your middle schooler start the year fresh

It's a new academic year and an opportunity for students to start the year with a clean slate. Encourage your child to establish goals for the year in these areas:

- **Schoolwork.** Middle schoolers need to keep track of multiple assignments in multiple classes. Suggest that your child set a goal to be more organized. Provide tools to help, such as folders, binder dividers, sticky notes and a calendar.
- **Projects.** Suggest that your child plan to break large assignments into small parts and write down deadlines for each step. That way your middle schooler can tackle one step at a time without getting overwhelmed.
- **Writing.** Challenge your middle schooler to strengthen writing skills by writing in a journal for a few minutes every day. Keeping writing skills sharp will make school-related writing easier.
- **Reading.** Reading for pleasure strengthens literacy skills. So help your child create reading goals, such as reading for 15 minutes every night before going to bed.
- **Extracurricular activities.** After-school activities can help students blow off steam and build important skills. Encourage your child to participate in at least one activity this school year. However, remind your child that schoolwork should always be the priority.

## Missing school affects more than grades



Missing too much school hurts middle schoolers' academic performance in several ways. Studies show that kids who are frequently absent are likelier than their peers to:

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

So don't let your child convince you that missing class is "no big deal." Attendance in every class is important—and it's your child's number one responsibility. To support regular, on-time attendance:

- **Be firm.** Every vague complaint shouldn't be a ticket to a day off. Follow the school's health protocols for suspected illnesses.
- **Be mindful.** Make medical appointments and schedule family trips during non-school hours when possible.
- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge that school is not always fun. Your middle schooler may appreciate your honesty.
- **Be proactive.** If your child is avoiding school, find out why. Then, talk to the school counselor about ways to help.

**Source:** P.W. Jordan and R. Miller, *Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd.

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# School counselors offer support to middle school students



School counselors are here to offer your child academic and mental health support. They have specialized training that allows them to help students as they face the unique challenges of middle school.

You or your child can ask a school counselor for help to:

- **Set and meet goals.** The counselor can help your child define goals to achieve in school this year and beyond. The counselor can then suggest classes and activities to help your child meet those goals.
- **Resolve conflicts.** If your child is struggling with something in school—whether academic or social—the counselor can offer support and guidance.
- **Find additional support.** From therapy to tutoring, the counselor can assist with finding outside resources that can help your child thrive.

**"Middle school counselors enhance the learning process and promote academic, career and social/emotional development."**

*—American School Counselor Association*

# Discuss the facts about drugs and alcohol with your child



In middle school, students are far more likely to be exposed to drugs and alcohol than they were in elementary school. But they are less likely to experiment with them if they have received strong anti-drug messages from their families. That's why it's vital that you speak honestly and openly to your child about the dangers of substance abuse.

Address common misconceptions your child may have, such as:

- **"If it's so bad for you, why do you and other adults drink?"** Alcohol use is legal for adults 21 and older. Adults, with mature brains, can safely consume limited amounts of alcohol, if they choose. There is no safe amount of alcohol for a growing brain.
- **"As long as no one is driving, it's not a big deal."** Alcohol and recreational drugs are both dangerous and illegal for middle schoolers. An arrest for either one will establish a record. Use at school can lead to suspension or expulsion.
- **"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.
- **"Everyone says it makes you feel good."** The "good" feeling is temporary and deceiving. In the long term, both physical and mental health can be damaged.

If you or anyone in your family is struggling with substance abuse, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357). The call is confidential.

# Are you setting your child up for future success?



The choices students make in middle school can affect their future academic success. Are you doing all you can to set your middle schooler up for future success? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you encourage** taking classes that are as rigorous as your child can handle well?

___**2. Do you talk about** the importance of reading, and urge your middle schooler to read often?

___**3. Do you follow** the news together and encourage your child to learn about current affairs to boost awareness of civics and history?

___**4. Do you encourage** your child to take a foreign language? Starting in middle school can give your child a foundation for high school.

___**5. Do you discuss** your middle schooler's interests and ways they might translate to a career?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your middle schooler prepare for the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Middle School Parents still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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The Parent Institute, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.
Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

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# Movement, stretching breaks and nutritious food aid learning



Some middle schoolers can't seem to sit still during study time, while others can't seem to stop snacking. Is this normal?

The short answer is *yes*. Your child is entering adolescence, which marks the biggest period of physical change since infancy.

Middle schoolers often:

- **Get up out of their chairs.** As adolescents grow, their bones (including their tailbones) begin to harden. Sitting too long can cause nerve pain. Getting up is a natural defense against that discomfort. Your child may want to try doing some assignments at home standing up. Some students like to study as they walk around their homes or neighborhood.
- **Fidget.** Even if they manage to stay seated, middle schoolers spend lots of time fidgeting. In adolescence, bone growth outpaces muscle growth, meaning kids' muscles are constantly being tugged and pulled. This causes so-called "growing pains." Stretching can help relieve them, so encourage regular stretch breaks during study time.
- **Raid the refrigerator.** It's not just middle schoolers' bones and muscles that are growing. Their stomachs are, too—and it takes more food to fill them. Not only that, but all that physical growth requires serious amounts of nutritious fuel. Stock up on healthy foods like sliced raw veggies that your child can munch while studying.

**Source:** P. Lorain, "Squirming Comes Naturally to Middle School Students," National Education Association.

# Taking notes helps students remember what they learn



Taking notes can benefit students in many ways. Creating a written record helps students remember what the teacher said in class. Reviewing class notes is also an effective way to study for tests.

To get the most from note-taking, your middle schooler should:

- **Take notes by hand** rather than with a computer if possible. A recent study shows that writing by hand aids in learning and memory.
- **Think about what is important.** Your child should listen for names, dates, times of events and other key information. And if the teacher writes something on the board, your child should include it.
- **Review and rewrite notes** after class. Rewriting them ensures your child will be able to read them. It also helps the information stick in your child's mind.
- **Enlist a friend.** Your child can compare notes with a classmate. Maybe the friend picked up something your child missed.
- **Stay organized.** Encourage your child to use a binder that has different sections, labeled with the name of each class. Suggest putting the date on notes and filing them in the appropriate section.

**Source:** F.R. Van der Weel and A.L. Van der Meer, "Handwriting but not typewriting leads to widespread brain connectivity: a high-density EEG study with implications for the classroom," *Frontiers in Psychology*.

**Q: My middle schooler wakes up exhausted every morning and I'm worried it will have a negative effect on learning and schoolwork this year. What can I do?**

## Questions & Answers

**A:** A few minutes of lost shut-eye today, a few minutes tomorrow—those minutes add up. Pretty soon, your middle schooler is cranky, overtired and struggling in school.

To make sure your child gets enough sleep each night:

- **Review your child's bedtime.** Middle schoolers need between eight and 10 hours of sleep each night to function their best in class.
- **Have your child "unplug"** one hour before bed. That means no TV, computer or digital devices in the hour leading up to lights-out. Instead, read or play a board game together. This will help your child ease into "sleep mode." Experts also recommend middle schoolers charge their phones away from their bedrooms at night!
- **Avoid caffeine.** Consuming caffeine up to six hours before bedtime can disrupt sleep. So make sure your child stays away from coffee, many sodas and tea. Watch out for energy drinks, too—they also contain the stimulant.
- **Beware of long naps.** Too much sleep during the day can make it harder to fall asleep at night. If your middle schooler needs to take a nap, keep it under 60 minutes.
- **Take time to talk.** Your middle schooler may be lying awake worrying at night. Remember, your child is not too old for you to have a reassuring talk together before lights-out.

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# It Matters: The Family-School Team

## School safety begins with communication



Schools today take many steps to keep students safe. But they can't do it alone—they need families' help.

One of the most effective ways you can contribute to a safe school environment is to discuss what's going on at school and in your child's life every day.

Have open discussions with your middle schooler about:

- **The school discipline policy.** Talk about the reasons for certain rules. Review the consequences for breaking the rules.
- **The school's safety** and security procedures. If you don't know what they are, find out.
- **Personal safety issues,** such as ways to keep safe when traveling to and from school.
- **Your own family values,** rules and expectations for your child.
- **The impact of violence** in the media—TV, books, video games, music and movies.
- **Strategies for solving problems** peacefully and diffusing tense situations.
- **Concerns about friends** or classmates who may be dangerous to themselves or others.
- **Social media** and the need to use it responsibly.
- **The importance of telling** a teacher or other adult if your child sees something that doesn't seem right.

If *you* hear something that concerns you, inform the school immediately. Schools are safest when families, students and educators work together.

## Being involved benefits you and your family in three ways

Family engagement at the middle school level is just as important as it was in elementary school. Students' grades, test scores, attendance and behavior all tend to be better when families are aware of what is going on at school and how to help.

But your child is not the only one who benefits when you are engaged. Here are three ways being involved also benefits *you*:

1. **You understand more** about how the school works. Perhaps you come from an area where the school system is different from the one where you are currently living.
2. **You learn whom to contact** if you have concerns. You know your child's teachers, the school counselor and are familiar with the administrators.
3. **The school** will have a better understanding of you and your family. Perhaps English is not your first language. Perhaps you need support. School staff may be able to direct you to resources for help. And if the staff knows your family's situation, they can better respond to your child's needs at school.



## Your middle schooler doesn't like a teacher—now what?



Middle schoolers often dislike teachers who they feel are too tough, give too many assignments or give hard tests.

If your child dislikes a teacher:

- **Find out why.** Ask your child exactly what the teacher says or does that inspires dislike.
- **Remind your child** that it's not the teacher's job to be popular. Your middle schooler doesn't have to *like* the teacher's personality to *learn* from the teacher.
- **Realize** that in most cases, your child will need to accept the situation. Middle school is more challenging and rigorous than elementary school. Your middle schooler may have to study harder and work longer.
- **Talk to the teacher.** If you believe there may be a personal issue between a teacher and your child, ask the teacher for a conference. Listen calmly, offer your insight and work together to develop a plan to go forward.