



Talk about academic integrity with your middle schooler

Middle school students sometimes turn to cheating when they face academic stress, have a fear of failure or feel pressured by classmates. That's why it's crucial for you and your child to have open conversations about academic integrity.

Studies show that:

- **Above-average students** are just as likely to cheat as their lower-achieving peers.
- **Cheating doesn't carry** much of a stigma anymore. Students don't feel the shame in it that they once did.
- **The more pressure** students feel to earn higher grades, the more likely they are to cheat.
- **Cheaters often think** they'll be at a disadvantage if they don't cheat because "everyone else" does.

- **Cheating is easy**, due to technology. Students can download papers or projects and pass AI-generated work off as their own. They can text pictures of test questions to friends. Emphasize to your child that cheating is never OK. Say you expect honesty at all times. Be clear that cheating includes:

- **Copying homework** from another student.
- **Receiving or giving help** during a test.
- **Copying work** without giving the source.
- **Handing in a project** or paper that was completed by artificial intelligence or someone else.

Source: *Plagiarism: Facts & Stats: Academic Integrity in High School*, Plagiarism.org.

Show your child how to enjoy time alone



While peer relationships are important during middle school, it's equally essential for students to develop

a sense of self-reliance and independence. Encourage your child to engage in activities that foster self-discovery and enjoyment, such as:

- **Reading.** Your child is always less likely to feel lonely when immersed in a good book, or any other enjoyable reading material.
- **Arts and crafts.** Adolescents are often wonderfully creative and can produce beautiful work when given the time.
- **Writing.** Your child could keep a journal or write a short story.
- **Exercise.** Suggest your child go for a walk each day. Your middle schooler can listen to music or an audiobook, or just think about the week ahead.
- **Cooking.** Growing kids are usually drawn to the kitchen. Cooking is a rewarding experience that involves all five senses. And as a bonus, your child can eat the creations!
- **Daydreaming.** Let your child know it's OK to spend some time imagining what life could be like.

Middle schoolers like to have a sense of control over homework



You might have a difficult time finding a middle school student who loves doing homework. But you can help your child develop a positive attitude about it. The key is to give your child a feeling of control.

Research shows that middle school students have definite preferences about completing assignments at home. They would rather:

- **Do the assignment** somewhere other than at home.
- **Do the assignment** when their peers are around.
- **Have their family members** be less involved with schoolwork.

So what can you do to support success with homework? You can:

- **Check on school achievement.** If your child is doing fairly well, consider allowing your middle

schooler to choose where to complete homework, within reason.

- **Let your child try studying** with a friend, in person or online. Keep an eye on the study session.
- **Provide encouragement.** Say things like, “I see you working hard on your assignment. That’s why you make progress!”

Source: H.Z. Kackar and others, “Age and gender differences in adolescents’ homework experiences,” *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, Elsevier.

“As children grow older, parents must give them greater freedom, including greater freedom to make mistakes.”

—John Rosemond

Playing board games builds skills and promotes learning



Did you know that playing board games reinforces skills that aid learning and thinking? Board games give children an opportunity to:

- **Follow directions.** Students in middle school still need to practice this skill—just ask any middle school teacher!
- **Use logic, reasoning and strategy.** For success with many games, your child will need to decide which move to make or card to play. This kind of decision-making will be helpful in math and science classes.
- **Read, write, spell** and boost their vocabulary. Some board games are all about creating words and

word puzzles. For others, your child must read and understand questions and clues.

- **Create and spot patterns.** Learning how to recognize, remember and apply patterns is directly related to success in math.
- **Focus and pay attention.** Taking turns, planning strategies and monitoring opponents all require focus and attention. Your child will sharpen these skills while playing.
- **Negotiate and communicate.** Some board games, such as Monopoly, require players to make deals and alliances in order to move forward. Playing these games teaches kids how to collaborate with others.

Are you instilling kindness in your middle schooler?



Students are expected to be responsible and caring members of the school community. Are you encouraging your child

to be kind? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___ **1. Do you model** kindness by treating your child and others with kindness and respect?

___ **2. Do you teach** your child to be kind on social media? Make it clear that it’s never OK to post mean or hurtful comments online.

___ **3. Do you promote** empathy by saying things like “Remember how you felt when you didn’t get invited to Parker’s party?”

___ **4. Do you notice** when your child is being kind to others and say you are proud?

___ **5. Do you encourage** your middle schooler to befriend a wide variety of students—even if others don’t welcome them as easily?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are teaching your middle schooler to be kind. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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A five-step process can help your child make better decisions



Want your middle schooler to make more responsible decisions? Encourage your child to rely on this five-step

process when faced with a dilemma:

1. **Define the problem.** Your child should have a clear understanding of the issue at hand before making a decision.
2. **Explore options.** What are some ways your child could handle the problem? Have your child make a mental list, then narrow it down to the three most sensible choices. This list-making step is crucial because it illustrates that there are usually more than two options for solving a problem.

3. **Consider the disadvantages.** Have your child think about the cons of each of the top three ideas. If a certain option has a particularly serious consequence, this is a good time to rule out that option.

4. **Consider the advantages.** Now ask your child to figure out the pros of the top choices. Does one option have major advantages over others? That may be the winner.

5. **Decide on a solution.** After weighing the pros and cons of each possible option, your middle schooler can now make a decision with confidence.

Source: R. Burke, Ph.D. and others, *Common Sense Parenting: Using Your Head as Well as Your Heart to Raise School-Aged Children*, Boys Town Press.

Q: I didn't do well in math when I was in school. Now my middle schooler is taking a math class that I don't really understand. When my child struggles, I don't know how to help. How can I offer support?

Questions & Answers

A: You can help your child with math assignments—even if you don't know how to do the math. Here's how:

- **Have a positive attitude.** Several studies show that families' attitudes about math have a direct effect on their children's achievement in math. Instead of saying things like, "I was never very good in math," say, "Wow, that looks challenging. But I know you will be able to figure it out!"
- **Ask your child to explain** the math problem to you. Say, "Tell me step by step how you think you should solve it." This is one of the best ways for students to figure out new math concepts.
- **Suggest writing down** the steps your child takes to solve each problem. While there may be only one right answer to a problem, there may be many ways to get to it. Showing work lets the teacher see what your child did—and if the answer is wrong, the teacher will know where things went off track.
- **Point out times** during the day when *you* use math. Whether you use math on the job or to double a recipe, your child will see that the subject is important in everyday life.
- **Encourage your child** to persist. The feeling of finally "getting it," will motivate your child to keep going when facing new challenges.

Volunteering boosts middle schoolers' self-confidence



The middle school years can be tough. Schoolwork is harder. Friendships often change. And it seems as though

physical changes may never end. That can lead even the most confident kids to struggle with self-confidence.

Studies show that volunteering is an effective way to increase self-esteem in adolescents. Helping others lets middle schoolers develop skills and understand that *they* can make a difference.

Any volunteer work is valuable. But research reveals that reaching out to strangers may have the biggest impact on kids. Performing acts of kindness for people your child doesn't know can produce positive feelings that last as long as one year.

To help your child reap the benefits of volunteering:

- **Keep it simple.** Volunteer work doesn't have to be on a grand scale. Your child could sign up to work one shift preparing sandwiches for a group that feeds the hungry. Or, your middle schooler could get a group of friends together to join a walk to raise money for a cause.
- **Consider volunteering as a family.** Whether it's collecting food for a food bank or delivering meals to those in need through an organization like Meals on Wheels, your family can grow closer as you help others together.

No matter what volunteer activity your middle schooler decides to engage in, be sure to stress how your child will be making a difference. It's that sense of accomplishment that helps kids feel capable.

Source: J. Fraga, "Helping Strangers May Help Teens' Self-Esteem," National Public Radio.

It Matters: Reading Skills

Audiobooks and e-books enhance reading time



In today's digital age, there are more ways than ever for middle schoolers to engage with reading. Beyond traditional books, audiobooks and e-books offer exciting alternatives that can spark a love of reading. These digital formats provide flexibility, convenience and a variety of features that can enhance your child's reading experience.

Introduce your child to:

- **Audiobooks.** These recordings are great resources—especially if your child struggles with fluency. Listening to books read aloud supports literacy skill development. Audiobooks offer many of the same benefits as print versions—exposure to story structure, compelling plots and new vocabulary words. For the maximum benefit, encourage your child to read along in the print version while listening to the audiobook.

As with traditional books, you can check out audiobooks from the library. You can also download free titles from websites like www.loyalbooks.com.

- **E-books.** Your child can read digital versions of books on a computer or a handheld device. While some e-books contain only text, others include graphics, videos and links. But be careful: Too many bells and whistles can distract readers. E-books are available at the public library and online at websites such as www.goodreads.com.

Join your middle schooler to encourage pleasure reading

Many things compete for middle school students' time—friends, activities, social media, etc. As a result, it can be challenging to prioritize reading for pleasure.

However, reading is a powerful tool that can enhance your middle schooler's academic success. By cultivating a love of reading, you're laying the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

To instill a passion for reading:

- **Read the same book.** Together, select a book and check out two copies. Set up a "mini book club" just for you and your child.
- **Read at the same time.** Your child is less likely to get distracted if you are both doing the same thing. Pick a time each day when you both can sit down for at least 20 minutes and read.



- **Look for movies** that are based on books. Interest in a movie can make your child more willing to read the book that prompted it. Plan to read the book and see the movie together.

Help your child gain a deeper understanding while reading



As students progress through middle school, reading assignments become more complex.

To build comprehension, encourage your middle schooler to engage in active reading. This means focusing on the text, asking questions, making connections and summarizing key points. Suggest your middle schooler focus on:

- **The author's purpose.** Why did the author write this? Was it to inform the reader? To entertain? To influence thinking?
- **The main idea and details.** What is the author's basic

message? What elements does the author include that support and strengthen this message?

- **Figurative language.** "The ocean sang to me," doesn't mean the ocean really *sang*. It means that the ocean was appealing.
- **The sequence of events.** What happened first in the story? What happened next? What was the result?
- **Relationships** between things that happened in the story and the outcome.
- **The characters' feelings.** What decisions did they make as a result of those feelings?