

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Essex Regional Educational Services  
Commission Title I Program

*still make the difference!*



## Review test-taking skills with your child as finals approach

**M**ay is around the corner—and so is testing. School districts typically schedule standardized tests for late April or May. Your child may also have to take final exams, which may be something new for her.

For test success, have your child:

- **Begin early.** At the end of the year, tests can come one after another. Your child may face a week with four tests. Studying must begin weeks in advance—not days.
- **Make a detailed schedule.** For example: Monday—math homework, study science 30 minutes, study English 30 minutes. Tuesday—history homework, review math problems, study science 30 minutes. Wednesday—math homework, study history 30 minutes, study English 30 minutes.
- **Get enough sleep.** The night before a test, your child should review the material for a final “boost.” Then she should get into bed at a time that will allow her to get *at least* nine hours of sleep.
- **Get the “easy ones”** out of the way first. When your child receives the test, she should look it over and determine which questions she can confidently answer without too much difficulty. After answering those, she can go back to the ones she is not as sure about and give them additional thought.
- **Think about the wrong answers** on multiple-choice tests. Your child should cross off any answers she knows are not right. Then she will likely be looking at a choice between two final answers, rather than four.

## Set reasonable expectations for your child



It's important to set expectations for your middle schooler's academic success, but it's equally important to make sure those expectations are reasonable.

To determine whether you're “setting the bar” at the right level for your child, ask yourself if your expectations:

- **Are flexible.** Have you read parenting books telling you what your child “should be” doing, thinking or feeling at this age? Then you may have lost sight of the fact that most of that information is based on *averages*. It doesn't relate specifically to what any one individual should be doing (or achieving). Keep that in mind if you find yourself setting a goal for him just because “all the other sixth graders” seem to be meeting it.
- **Reflect who he really is.** Do you see your child clearly when you're imagining what he should achieve? If he has been a reluctant reader since preschool, pushing him to take honors English may not make sense.

## Help your adolescent understand the reasons behind discipline



Middle school is a time of tremendous growth and change. It is also a time when many students question authority.

Gone are the days, if they ever existed, when your child was likely to immediately do what you asked.

You are still the most important person in your child's life and he wants to please you. But he also wants, and needs, a lot more say in what happens to him—or at least to know *why* it is happening.

Here are some pointers for helping your child accept and understand consequences:

- **Explain.** Your child may not always realize that you imposed a rule because you are concerned about his safety, for example. Share your thinking with your child. He still may not like the rule, but he will likely feel less frustration if he understands it.
- **Work on the relationship.** Talk with your child often—and not just about the ways he needs to

improve. Express interest in what is going on in his life and also in his opinions. He's much more likely to listen and follow your directions when he knows you care about him as a person.

- **Strive for fairness.** Punishing your child just because you're angry is never a good idea. At this age, it backfires completely. Your child's focus will only be on what he thinks *you did to him*, not on what he should learn. So make sure consequences fit the infraction. If he fails to do his chores this afternoon, he has to stay in tomorrow afternoon to do them.

Source: C. Pratt, "Middle School Discipline That Works," EduGuide, niswc.com/discipline\_reasons.

**"If we don't shape our kids, they will be shaped by outside forces that don't care what shape our kids are in."**

—Dr. Louise Hart

## Categorize to build your child's higher-level thinking skills



In middle school, your child's reading will require him to make associations and sift out key ideas. One step

toward this skill is the ability to define and categorize. Your child can figure out a lot once he knows what something is and where it fits in.

Here is an example of how you can help your child build this skill:

1. **Show your child an item**, such as a ring. Ask him, "What is this?" He will probably say, "It's a ring."

2. **Ask your child**, "Can you put this item in a category?" He is likely to reply, "It's jewelry."
3. **Now ask him**, "What else can you tell me, now that you've established that this is a ring and a piece of jewelry?" Brainstorm with your child. Some ideas to get him started include: "It's valuable." "It should be kept in a safe place." "It can be worn as a symbol of marriage or other commitment."

Source: D. Johnson and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, Kaplan Publishing.

## Are you still emphasizing attendance?



April often heralds the return of warmer days. But it's not summer vacation yet—and your child needs to be in

school, on time, until it is. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are doing all you can to promote regular, on-time school attendance:

\_\_\_ 1. **Have you made it clear** that attending school is your child's first priority through the end of the year?

\_\_\_ 2. **Do you avoid** taking your child out of school unless it is an emergency?

\_\_\_ 3. **Do you emphasize** to your child that your family does not condone truancy, no matter how nice the weather might be?

\_\_\_ 4. **Do you encourage** your child to take steps that will get her to school on time, like using an alarm clock?

\_\_\_ 5. **Do you encourage** the school to notify you if your child is not in school?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are conveying the importance of attendance to your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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## Tutoring might be the answer to ongoing academic struggles



If your child struggles to make decent grades, she may need some one-on-one learning support outside of school. But with work, the house and the rest of the family to care for, you're spread too thin to give it to her. What's the solution?

It may be time to look for a tutor.

To decide whether getting a tutor is the answer to your child's academic problems, ask yourself:

- **Is homework time** a nightly battle?
- **Are my child's grades** slipping more by the day?
- **Is the entire family** feeling the stress of her school troubles?

If the answer to these questions is *yes*, then a tutor may be worth a try—at least in the short-term.

To help your middle schooler get the most from tutoring sessions:

- **Stand back.** If the sessions take place in your home, don't try to "pitch in." Give the tutor space to do his job.
- **Provide a distraction-free setting** if the sessions take place in your home. Be sure there is a quiet, well-lit place for them to work.
- **Set reachable goals.** Don't expect your middle schooler to bring home straight A's right after she begins tutoring sessions. Instead, set smaller goals such as raising her science grade a few percentage points per month. Meeting these goals may be your best indicator as to whether the tutoring is working.

**Source:** J. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Be patient and creative when communicating with your child



When your child was in elementary school, she probably couldn't wait to tell you what she learned in math class or who she played with at recess.

But now that she's older, you're lucky to get a mumbled "Fine" when you ask how her day went. And as hard as that can be for parents, it's a normal part of moving toward adulthood.

Of course, that doesn't mean the lines of communication between you and your child must slam shut. It just means you need to be creative about keeping them open. Here's how:

- **Keep asking questions.** Prepare for curt replies, but don't give up on learning about your child's

life. Don't interrogate her, but do let her know you care about her. Try simple questions like, "Who did you eat lunch with?" or "What did you work on during study hall?"

- **Stop and listen.** Occasionally, your child may surprise you by wanting to share something. Don't miss it because you're busy checking your email. If she comes up and says, "The coolest thing happened today," stop what you're doing and give her your undivided attention.
- **Go high-tech.** Rather than poke your head into her room every five minutes, send her a text. She'll probably be so shocked that you'll get her attention!

**Q:** I recently went back to work full-time. And although my seventh grader is mature enough to stay by himself after school, I hate the thought of his being home alone every afternoon. Should I hire a sitter even though he insists he doesn't need one?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Not necessarily. Since you feel your child is responsible enough to stay alone for a few hours each day, it sounds like the issue isn't that he's by himself—it's how often he's by himself.

If that's the case, then the solution may be to limit the number of days he's home alone every week. But it doesn't need to be an "all or nothing" solution. To limit your middle schooler's "alone time" to a couple of days each week:

- **Look into after-hours** programs at the school. Middle schools often provide after-school care for students. It could offer him an extra chance to hang out with other kids once or twice each week.
- **Research neighborhood** options. See what your local community center has to offer for middle schoolers. If you find a cool weekday program for your child, he may be eager to go there every few days.
- **Enlist family.** Is a nearby relative willing to hang out once a week with your child? Arrange it. Your child—and his relative—may end up loving that quality time together!

# It Matters: Respect

## Self-respect is critical for your child's success



Self-respect is essential for middle schoolers. A child with self-respect believes in herself as a worthy person. She knows she deserves to be treated fairly and kindly. And she knows it would be out of character for her to treat others differently.

To foster your child's sense of self-respect:

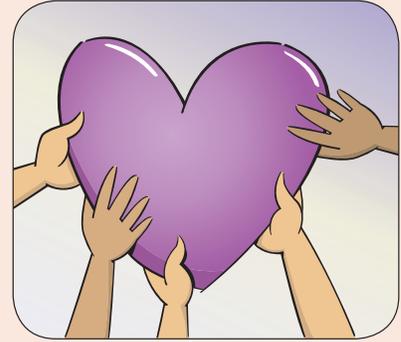
- **Help her fight** negative peer pressure. Talk about ways your child can avoid situations she knows are not right for her.
- **Keep a positive attitude.** Everyone experiences bumps in the road. These are temporary. Encourage your child to make a fresh start after a setback.
- **Point out her strengths** and explain that people have different strengths and weaknesses. This awareness helps your child control feelings of jealousy. The ability to be happy for others, rather than jealous of them, is an important part of self-respect.
- **Take a firm stance** against substance abuse. Tell your child that self-respect includes respect for her personal safety and health.
- **Treat her with respect.** Your child needs a model for self-respect. You are the best choice. When you treat her well, she realizes that because you respect yourself, you are naturally respectful to others.

**Source:** Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Fireside.

## Volunteering builds your child's awareness & respect for others

**V**olunteering in the community is more than a nice thing to do. Community service provides your middle schooler with valuable learning opportunities. It can also broaden his horizons and give him a better understanding of those around him. By performing community service, your child may:

- **Gain new insight.** Does your child think “the poor” all fit a stereotype? To him, are “the homeless” all the same? Working with them could help him see that they're people just like he is. And that may lead him to respect them more.
- **Become more connected** to the community. Your child's world



likely revolves around school, home and friends. But helping out in the community may widen his world a little. And, hopefully, that “widening” will also boost his awareness of—and sympathy for—others!

## Speak to your child with respect and expect the same in return



You probably speak to your friends and colleagues with respect. But how do you speak to your child?

It's natural for family members to let their guards down around one another and speak in a more casual way than they do with others. But if that crosses into disrespect, you are doing your child and yourself a disservice.

If you don't speak to your child with respect, she won't learn how to speak respectfully—to you or anyone else. Here are some tips:

- **Start with the basics.** A “Hi, honey,” or even a simple “Good morning” sets a positive tone.

- **Consider feelings.** If you know your child has had a bad day at school, this may not be the best time to scold her about not making her bed. Bring issues up when your child is feeling better.
- **Be attentive.** Take your eyes off the TV when your child speaks to you. Look her in the eye. If you are driving, you obviously have to watch the road. Encourage your child to speak to you anyway. A lot of great parent-child communication happens in the car.

**Source:** A. Packer, *The How Rude! Handbook of Family Manners for Teens: Avoiding Strife in Family Life*, Free Spirit Publishing.