

Middle School Parents[®]

still make the difference!

Good discipline includes love & respect for your child



Your child is driving you crazy with her preteen attitude! How should you handle her? As hard as it may seem,

try to handle her with respect. When she acts up, keep in mind that:

- **You should set a good example.** The old “because I said so” technique probably doesn’t work as well as it did when you were her age. Model the behavior you want to see in your child. When she sees you reason your way to a good decision, she’ll be likely to do the same herself.
- **You shouldn’t shame her.** When your child messes up, it’s natural to be disappointed. But it’s not okay to insult her. Saying, “What’s wrong with you?” won’t improve her behavior—it’ll only hurt her.
- **She can learn from her mistakes.** If your child does something wrong, try to see it as a learning



opportunity. “You didn’t study for your test and you failed. What can you do differently next time?” Talk with your child about her options, and really listen to what she says. Instead of just punishing her, you’ll give her a chance to think of a solution.

- **She may want your input.** If your child is struggling with something, she might welcome advice. Ask if you can share one of your experiences. “You know, I had a hard time getting along with my eighth-grade English teacher, too. Would you like to know how I handled it?” Just talk about your experience—don’t lecture. On the other hand, if she doesn’t want your advice, don’t force it on her.
- **You should let her know when she gets it right.** Did your child resolve a situation without misbehaving? Let her know how proud you are of her. “You were angry with your teacher, but you talked to him without losing your temper. Way to go!”

Source: Joanne Baum, LCSW, Ph.D., “Basics of respectful parenting,” SheKnows.com, <http://sheknows.com/about/look/2999.htm>.

Attending school will help your child avoid trouble



Your child’s education can open a world of possibilities, but walking through the school door is the first step. Regular attendance is essential for school success.

As important as school success is, it’s just one reason why regular attendance is critical. Students who skip school are more likely to:

- **Fall behind** their classmates.
- **Drop out.**
- **Join a gang.**
- **Use alcohol** or illegal drugs.
- **Get arrested.**

You can influence your child to reduce risks and increase his chances for success (unless he is ill or there is an emergency). To keep attendance up:

- **Make clear to him** that you expect him to be in school. Let him know you place a high priority on this.
- **Have consequences** if he is truant. Discuss these with him in advance.
- **Schedule doctor appointments** during non-school hours if possible. If this is truly not possible, write a note to his teachers and the office staff explaining his absence.
- **Remember that school** is his job and don’t keep him out of school to work outside the home.

Source: Eileen M. Garry, “Truancy: First Step to a Lifetime of Problems,” Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice, www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/truncy.pdf.

Reinforcing learning at home fosters student achievement



Your child's education doesn't stop when the school bell rings. It continues all day and night—and so does your role in it. As a parent, it's your job to reinforce his learning at home. Here's how:

- **Create a quiet space** where he can work. Don't let TV, pets or noisy siblings get in the way of your child's studying. Instead, consider enforcing a "family quiet time" while he does homework. If that's impossible, be prepared to entertain his little sister outside or in another room while he's working.
- **Show him** that education is important. Take an interest in the things he's learning at school. Pay attention as he tells you about a

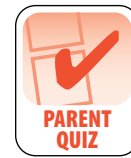
tricky science problem or the cool thing he made during art class.

Look over papers he brings home (not just the ones that need signing). By showing an interest in the things he's learning, you're showing him that learning is interesting!

- **Work alongside him.** Let him see you going over that report for work. While he's doing homework at the kitchen table, pull up a chair and balance the checkbook. Ask him to give you a hand while you measure the window for new curtains. It'll show him that the skills he's honing in school—such as reading and math—truly do have a real-life purpose.

Source: "Parent Involvement—Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence," U.S. Dept. of Education, www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/adolescence/partx2.html.

Does your child know that school is important?



Take this quiz to see if you are communicating your family values on the importance of school and education to your child.

Write *yes* if you do something all or most of the time. Write *no* if you do it rarely or never.

1. **I let my child know** I am excited and happy for her as she begins a new school year.
2. **I tell my child I believe** school is her job and it should have a very high priority.
3. **I make clear to my child** that I expect her to follow school rules.
4. **I attend events** the school holds for parents, even if my child tells me "no one else's parents are going."
5. **I ask my child** specific questions about what she is learning, what parts of school she feels are going well, and what, if anything, I can do to help her.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean your child realizes you value school and expect her to do the same. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions on communicating the importance of school.

Watching violent shows may lead to fewer friends



Watching violent TV is not the way to win friends, studies say. Children who watch violent TV shows may have fewer friends than those who don't.

A study from Children's Hospital in Boston found that children who watch violent shows spend less time with friends than children who watch nonviolent shows.

The study's researchers suggest that parents:

- **Know** what their children watch on TV.
- **Limit TV time** and limit watching TV alone.
- **Allow** only "family" shows. Shows that begin at 9 p.m. or later are usually not for children.

- **Make** violent shows of any kind off limits.

Source: Sandra G. Boodman, "Solo Viewing, Bad Endings, Watching Violent TV May Cost Kids Friends," *The Washington Post*, April 11, 2006 (The Washington Post Company, 1-800-627-1150, www.washpost.com).

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Help your middle schooler build a true sense of responsibility



Boost your middle schooler's sense of responsibility and you'll help him in the classroom and out. Responsible students take learning seriously. To nurture his sense of responsibility:

- **Expose him to money.** If he does not have an allowance, consider giving him one. By letting him manage money (and not spotting him a few bucks each time he runs low), he may develop more respect for it.

Include him when you're paying bills or working on your budget. Don't share every financial detail, but let him see what budgeting looks like. "I'd love to order pizza tonight, too, but it'll have to wait. Payday isn't until Friday."

- **Revamp his chore list.** Are you still packing your child's lunch? How about doing his laundry? If so, pass the torch. Now that he's a preteen, your child is capable of handling such day-to-day chores as cooking and doing laundry. Don't overload him with hours of new tasks, but work toward giving him meaningful responsibilities.
- **Let him take his lumps.** When your child makes a mistake, don't swoop in to save him (unless he's in true danger). By allowing him to experience the consequences of his actions, he's more likely to learn not to make the same mistake again. If you're always running to his rescue, he'll only learn that he doesn't have to take responsibility for anything.

Helping others gives you & your child a common purpose



Doing community service with your middle school child is a perfect fit. Your child can now, as never before, feel empathy—she can put herself "in the shoes" of someone who needs help. She also gains ideals—the sense that she *should* be helping.

Another big plus: Research shows community service is part of being a healthier person and a better student. Studies show that children who do community service are less likely to take health risks, such as smoking. One study even showed that students who perform community service do better on some tests.

Some ideas for you and your child:

- **Try your own neighborhood.** Community service doesn't have

to be formal. Do you know a senior citizen who needs yard work done or would like a hot meal? How about entertaining the children of a busy mom so she can garden or read a book?

- **Choose a charity.** What does your child feel strongly about? The environment? Finding a cure for disease? Protecting animals? Have a yard sale, a car wash or other fundraiser. She can donate the money to her favorite cause.
- **Make a date.** For example, spend one Saturday a month volunteering with your child. Make sandwiches at a soup kitchen or read to children at a local hospital.

Source: Julia Lawlor, "Helping Hands," *Parents*, May 2006, (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-727-3682, www.parents.com).

My child started middle school last year, and he had a tough time fitting in. Now he's dreading the new school year. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

Given what your child's been through, it makes sense that he'd be nervous about the upcoming year. Luckily, a difficult time last year does not mean this one will be the same. To help your child flourish this time around:

- **Listen to him.** Let your child talk about last year's troubles, and really pay attention to him. Don't dismiss his concerns by simply telling him that this year will be better. If he's still upset about last year, he needs to get those feelings out.
- **Define the problem.** Help him pinpoint the trouble spot (or spots). "You struggled last year because you didn't seem to have anything in common with the other kids. Is that right?" The more clearly you can define the issue, the better.
- **Brainstorm solutions.** Together with your child, think of ways to address the issue. "Where are some good places to meet kids who like what you like?" Possibilities include clubs (school-based or not), sports teams, volunteer groups and religious organizations.
- **Take action.** Decide how to help your child put your ideas into action, and then do it. "Since you said you'd like to find other kids who play chess, maybe you can talk to your school counselor about possibly starting a chess club." This may not solve all of your child's school problems, but it's a start.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

Slowing down will help your child avoid problems



Patience and forethought are not exactly the hallmarks of a child in middle school, as you probably know all too well. Kids this age tend to be impulsive. You may notice that your child acts first, and thinks later. It also tends to be the age when people expect more responsible behavior.

Your child can learn to think before she acts. Just know that it will take a lot of practice and may be a test of your patience as well as hers! Help her to:

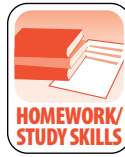
- **Wait.** Just a few seconds of delay before acting can help your child avoid negative consequences. Pick a phrase your child can practice repeating to herself, such as “Let me think about it,” or “I need to push the pause button.” Remind your child often of this phrase. Praise her when you see her remembering to wait.
- **Envision.** Once your child learns to “push the pause button,” she should then move on to considering her options. The key phrase here is “What will happen if?” What will happen if she joins her friends in cutting class? What will happen if she’s an hour late on her curfew?

Envisioning instead of rushing ahead gives your child a preview of consequences. Now she has a better chance of making the right choice.

- **Write it out.** Have her write down some possible consequences. Seeing them written on paper may have a bigger impact.

Source: Neil I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can't*, ISBN: 0-7611-1570-6 (Workman Publishing Company, Inc., 212/254-5900, www.workman.com).

Help your child start the school year with good study habits



Establishing and using good study habits now, before your child gets to high school, may be the best thing

he can do to be successful. Encourage him to:

- **Find out** what works best for him. This includes when to study, where to study and how to study.

Does he need quiet or does he concentrate better with background noise? Can he work well at the kitchen table, or only in his room?

Is it more efficient for him to complete one thing before starting another, or can he work on several things at a time?



- **Get his timing down.** Can he work straight through for several hours, or does he need to work in 15 to 20 minute bursts? Some students find breaks refreshing, while others get distracted too easily.

- **Always read directions.**

Have your child ask himself if he really understands the directions. Then have him read them again. He can't do the assignment if he doesn't know what he is supposed to do.

- **Remember presentation.**

Teachers can't give credit for homework they can't read. His sloppy work shows disrespect for the teacher and himself—it bars him from demonstrating how much he really knows.

Source: Ron Fry, *How to Study*, ISBN: 1564142299 (Career Press, 1-800-227-3371, www.careerpress.com).

Find out teacher expectations for your child this school year



Middle school teachers will expect your child to be more independent than her elementary school teachers did.

Encourage this

independence, but continue to support your child. One way is by getting to know her teachers and what they expect. You can:

- **Introduce yourself** to teachers at open house or back-to-school night. Give your full name and your child's full name. Let teachers know how to contact you and find out how to contact them.
- **Find out how** your child should track assignments. Often, this is

with a notebook that goes back and forth to school. Ask to see your child's notebook. Encourage your child to write down due dates.

- **Find out how much time** teachers expect students to spend on homework for class. Then you can spot trouble if your child never has any homework or if it takes her far longer to do it than it should. The earlier you alert the teacher to any problems, the easier it will be to solve them.

Source: Rosemarie Clark, Donna Hawkins and Beth Vachon, *The School-Savvy Parent: 365 Insider Tips to Help You Help Your Child*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, www.freespirit.com).