

Middle School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Inspire your middle schooler's interest in science and math

Science and math sometimes get a bad reputation among middle schoolers. Many students believe they're "just not good" in these subjects.

But when kids try some hands-on activities in science, technology, engineering and math (the STEM subjects), they often enjoy them.

If your middle schooler thinks she doesn't like science or math:

- **Watch science and technology** shows together. Search on YouTube or Common Sense Media to find science shows and games for children of all ages.
- **Head to the kitchen.** Cooking involves both math and chemistry. And you get to eat the results! As you cook with your child, ask her questions, such as: "Why do you

think water boils when it gets hot?" "What happened when we forgot to add baking powder to the cookies?" "How much flour will we need if we double this recipe?"

- **Visit a natural history museum** or science center in person or online. Your child can look for STEM exhibits, learn about the history of technology and discover how things were made.
- **Praise the process.** When your middle schooler is learning something new in one of her classes, it's often hard at first. So don't focus on the grade she's earning. Instead, help her focus on *what* she's learning and the new skills she's developing.

Source: M. Pinola, "How to Get Your Kids Interested in STEM (Without Forcing It on Them)," LifeHacker.

Help your child bounce back from low grades



It's natural to be upset if your child brings home a bad grade. But showing your frustration and anger won't help him earn better grades.

Instead:

- **Put grades into perspective.** Poor grades can drain your child's confidence. Make sure he knows that grades are important, but that they are *not* a measure of his worth.
- **Focus on the positive.** Talk about what your child has done well—in an academic subject or another activity. Ask him what he is most proud of.
- **Look for possible causes.** Low grades indicate a problem. Ask your child what he thinks the problem is. Sometimes it's not academic ability, but poor study habits or test anxiety.
- **Set realistic goals** for improvement. Don't expect all A's if your child is currently getting all C's.
- **Contact teachers.** Sometimes students try their best and still fail. Or they blame teachers for their troubles. Gather more information by asking your child's teachers for their opinion about what's happening.

Middle school counselors can support students in many ways



School counselors are striving to help all students be productive learners during this challenging year. They are trained to help kids and families with a wide variety of issues.

Reach out to a counselor if your child needs help to:

- **Set academic goals.**
- **Select courses** that will prepare him for future classes.
- **Develop study skills.**
- **Get back on track** after facing academic problems.
- **Solve problems with friends.** This can include mediation or counseling sessions for your child or a small group.

- **Strengthen coping skills** for dealing with bullies or with grief.
- **Make plans for high school** and beyond.
- **Connect with community agencies** in times of crisis.
- **Locate additional professionals** for academic and personal support.

Source: "The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association.

"You can do anything as long as you have the passion, the drive, the focus, and the support."

—Sabrina Bryan

Community service promotes learning and builds skills



Studies show that students who participate in community service have better grades and more interest in school than those who don't. Volunteers tend to have strong positive feelings about themselves and their place in society.

Students who volunteer:

- **Are less likely to take dangerous risks**, such as doing drugs.
- **Have higher self-esteem**, are more responsible and feel more connected to their community.
- **Have stronger social skills.**
- **Are more likely to stay in school**, have regular attendance and perform well.
- **Learn valuable skills**, such as how to interact with different kinds of people, how to solve problems and how to follow through on commitments.

- **Meet interesting people**, such as the heads of agencies or businesses. These contacts can be references for students in the future. Encourage your child to get involved and reap the benefits of volunteering. He could:

- **Raise awareness for a cause** on social media.
- **Organize a drive** to clean up an outdoor site, such as a local park or playground.
- **Research organizations** who could help him start a community garden.
- **Organize a book drive** and distribute gently used books to local food banks.
- **Collect items for organizations** to distribute to low-income families.
- **Help a new mom** or an elderly neighbor with housework.

Source: "Civic Engagement: Benefits for Youth," Youth.gov.

Are you still emphasizing attendance?



Student absences have risen this year—increasing the chances that the kids will fall behind. For your child to stay on track, she needs to attend all of her classes.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are doing all you can to promote regular, on-time class 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** letting your child miss a class unless she is sick or it is an emergency?
- ___ **3. Do you emphasize** to your child that your family does not condone skipping classes?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to take steps that will help her be on time, like using an alarm clock?
- ___ **5. Do you work with** the school to make sure you are alerted if your child is not in a class?

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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'Brain movies' improve your child's reading comprehension



Your child read the passage, but now she can't remember the details. Yet she can recall every detail from the Netflix show she watched last night.

Sound familiar? Many middle schoolers have a tough time focusing on the words they read. Creating a "brain movie" can help students remember more of the material.

To show your child how to make a brain movie:

1. **Choose a poem or story** that is filled with sensory-rich language. The poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" by Longfellow is a great choice.
2. **Find images online** that set the scene and show them to your child. (The Old North Church still stands in Boston.)

3. **Read the passage aloud.** While you're reading, ask your middle schooler to imagine what it would look like as a movie. She might even want to close her eyes so she can visualize it.

4. **Have her tell you** what she saw. She could also draw a picture or two of a favorite scene.

Then, encourage your child to try this same approach for her assigned reading. Help her imagine the scene before she reads about George Washington. How cold was it at Valley Forge? Can she see the Battle of Yorktown in her mind?

These mental images will help her pay attention to details. She'll recall the conflict between characters. And she'll remember what she read.

Source: D. Wilson and M. Conyers, "Brain Movies: When Readers Can Picture It, They Understand It," *Edutopia*.

These strategies can help your middle schooler retain learning



It can be challenging for students to remember what they have learned. That's because the human brain is wired to forget.

To help your middle schooler remember what he studies:

- **Be sure he understands** the material. It's tough to memorize something if you don't know what it means in the first place.
- **Make it personal.** Ask your child to explain the topic he's studying to you. Just putting it into his own words may help the concepts stick in his mind.
- **Set it to music.** Encourage your child to make up a tune or simple rhyme to remember names, dates or math formulas.
- **Encourage him to draw a picture** or make a diagram about the information. He can use words for a caption.
- **Surround him** with the material. Is he studying a certain history topic? Find books, movies and songs about that topic, too. Search YouTube for entertaining videos that explain difficult concepts.
- **Be thorough.** Remind your child to read through all of his notes when he's studying. Afterward, he can go back and try to recall and restate the information.
- **Sleep on it.** The brain processes and stores information while people sleep. Suggest that your child review essential information just before he goes to sleep.

Q: My son is hanging around some not-so-nice kids this year, and I'm afraid he'll give into peer pressure and become not-so-nice himself. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Definitely talk to your son, but not necessarily about any one friend. Instead, have a conversation about him and his friends in general. Ask your child questions such as:

- **What interests** do they share?
- **What does your child** enjoy about hanging out with them?
- **What values** do they share?
- **How do they make him feel?**

It could be that these friends make him feel more mature. Or it could be that, like you, he isn't really comfortable with the way they act, but doesn't really know what to do about it.

Beyond that first conversation, here's how to guide him through this tricky area:

- **Avoid critical comments.** Belittling his friends or insulting their upbringing, parents, etc. may make your child feel the need to defend them.
- **Ask guiding questions.** "It sounds like Jonathan was pretty rude to the teacher today. How did you feel when he acted that way?" This kind of broad question may encourage your child to open up.
- **Support him.** Understand that your child isn't weak because he's affected by peer pressure. Let him know that these issues can be tricky, and you will help him figure them out.
- **Be firm.** If you have real misgivings about some of his friends, then it's time to step in. At the very least, supervise the time your child spends with them.

It Matters: Building Respect

Self-respect helps kids learn to respect others



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 resist 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 can help 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.
- **Model self-respect.** Remember to speak positively about yourself. Be honest and follow-through with commitments. Forgive yourself when you make mistakes. Take good care of your health and relationships.

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

Pay attention to how you speak to your middle schooler

You probably speak to your friends and colleagues with respect. But have you noticed how 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 speak disrespectfully to your child, he won't learn how to speak respectfully—to you or anyone else.

Here are some tips:

- **Set a positive tone.** Saying “Hi, honey” or simply “Good morning” is an easy way to start.
- **Consider feelings.** If you know your child has had a bad day at school, don't scold him about not making his bed. Discuss issues when your child is feeling better.



- **Be attentive.** Take your eyes off your phone when your child speaks to you. Look him 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.

Help your middle schooler develop a sense of respect



You make a point of respecting your child, but do you insist that she show you respect, too? If not, now is the time to start.

To develop your child's sense of respect for you, herself and others:

- **Don't let her run the show.** Does your home life revolve around her activities, achievements and desires? It shouldn't. If her needs always come first, she may not learn to respect the notion that other people have needs, too.
- **Hold your applause.** It's fine to congratulate your child when she does well, but don't gush over every accomplishment. Instead, save your highest praise for when your child puts forth her best effort and works hard.
- **Allow her to experience disappointment.** You can't spare your child from all of life's troubles, nor should you. Give her a hug and help her move past them. She'll likely respect herself for bouncing back—and respect you for showing her she could.