

Middle School Parents[®]

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McCracken Middle School

still make the difference!



Allow standing, fidgeting & snacking at homework time

If your child can't seem to sit still during homework time, it's probably because he can't! And if he can't seem to stop snacking, it's probably because he needs that food.

Your middle schooler is entering adolescence. And this marks the biggest period of physical change he has experienced since infancy.

Among other things, 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 of his homework standing up. Or he could study vocabulary words as he walks around the house.
- **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 homework time.
- **Raid the refrigerator.** It's not just kids' 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 fuel. Stock up on healthy snacks and let your child munch while he's studying.

Source: P. Lorain, "Squirming Comes Naturally to Middle School Students," National Education Association, nswc.com/mid_squirm.

Winter break activities keep learning alive



Winter break should be just that—a break from the normal routine. But your middle schooler should keep learning, just not as formally as she did at school.

Here are ways your child can continue to learn over the break:

- **Write.** Encourage your child to start a journal and write in it for about 10 minutes each day. She can write a letter to friends or family she won't see during the break. She should also write thank-you notes to anyone who gives her a gift or extends her a kindness over the holidays.
- **Read.** Your child should read something every day. If she has a book she is enjoying, great. Otherwise, a magazine or newspaper article of interest works, too. Take a trip to the library together to help her find appealing reading material.
- **Do math.** Ask your child to help you add up the day's expenditures or stick to your budget while shopping. She can also calculate the ingredients you will need to bake a double batch of cookies.

Five reasons your middle schooler should keep reading



Now that your child is in middle school, she probably spends more time on homework than she did when she was in elementary school. With the increased workload, reading for pleasure may be pretty far down on her list of priorities.

Your child may think that she reads a lot for school and that should be enough. She's wrong! Here are five reasons why your child should make time for pleasure reading:

1. Reading can make her an expert.

Reading is the best way for your child to learn as much as possible about her areas of interest.

2. Reading can take her places.

Few people can afford to travel every place they'd like to go.

But your child can always travel through a book. And she can gain knowledge to help her set goals to get there in person someday.

3. Reading can make her laugh.

Appreciating the humor in books helps your child develop thinking skills. It also improves her own sense of humor.

4. Reading can make her a detective.

A winter day on break is a perfect time for your child to grab a cup of hot chocolate and dive into a great mystery.

5. Reading can introduce her to people like herself. In books that feature characters her age, your child is likely to encounter people that think the way she does and have the same issues she is facing.

Source: "Motivating Kids to Read: Teenagers and Reading," Reading is Fundamental, niswc.com/mid_read.

"Books are a uniquely portable magic."

—Stephen King

A written discipline plan can curb arguments & misunderstandings



Children who follow rules at home are more likely to follow rules at school, too. While some kids are "rule followers," others resist rules and enjoy arguing over every point.

A written discipline plan can serve as a reminder for your child. Seeing the rules posted can help him keep them in mind. It also removes your child's ability to argue. You can point to the plan to show him exactly what you both agreed to.

To create an effective plan:

- **Keep it simple.** Too many rules will overwhelm both of you. Think

of the top five issues that are most important to you. Post the rules and consequences for those.

- **Involve your child.** A child who needs a written discipline plan is also a child who does not like to give up control. Give him input about rules and consequences—but remind him that you have the final say.
- **Monitor progress.** When you notice that your child is able to stay consistently within boundaries, it's time to review and possibly revise the plan.

Source: "Curb Your Teen's Bad Behavior with Discipline that Works," WebMD, niswc.com/mid_discipline.

Is your child prepared to stay home alone?



December means winter break, which can pose a problem for working parents. Is your child prepared to keep herself safe on occasions when you might be at work? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **Have you established rules** about answering the door and the telephone when you aren't home?

___2. **Have you told your child** not to let callers know you are not there? Your child can say: "My mom needs to call you back later."

___3. **Have you given your child** several ways to reach you?

___4. **Have you given your child** the names and numbers of several responsible adults to call if she can't reach you?

___5. **Have you established rules** for using appliances and other potentially dangerous items when you are not there?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are preparing your child to stay home alone. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Teach your child to recognize bullying and react appropriately



You may think it is easy for kids to recognize bullying. But in the social structure of middle school, it is not so simple. That's because middle school students tend to be much more forgiving if the bully is one of the "popular kids."

As you talk with your child about bullying, encourage him to:

- **Focus less on *who* is bullying** and more on *what* is actually happening. Are the actions hurtful? Are the words meant to cause a person sadness, fear or shame? Then it's bullying—even if the person who is doing it is someone everybody likes, and the victim

is someone who doesn't have many friends.

- **Think about how he would feel** if he were in the victim's place. Would it make a difference to him if the person bullying him were a "popular kid"? Or would he be hurt no matter who the bully was? Encouraging your child to "walk in another's shoes" is an important step toward building empathy.
- **React appropriately.** Your child should never be a bystander. Standing by and watching, or worse, laughing along with the bully, is almost as harmful as the bullying itself. Your child should ask the bully to stop or slip away and tell an adult.

Plan for college by setting goals and exploring options



College is years away, but that doesn't mean your child shouldn't start thinking about it and making plans for it now.

Studies show that college graduates are more likely than non-graduates to:

- **Live healthier, longer lives.**
- **Stay employed.**
- **Enjoy their jobs.**
- **Change jobs more easily.**
- **Earn significantly higher salaries.**

To help your child begin focusing on her college future:

- **Talk about her interests.** What does your child like to do? What are her passions? Whether it's graphic design or physical fitness, there's surely a college program geared toward it. She won't be enrolling anytime soon, but it's okay to "plant the seed" and get

her thinking about how she can continue doing what she loves at the university level someday.

- **Encourage her to set goals.** How does your child see herself in 10 years? As a college graduate? A successful employee? Ask her what she envisions and how she plans to get there. Specifically, talk about what she can do now (such as studying harder or taking tougher classes) to help her reach her goals later.
- **Widen her horizons.** There are too many careers to count, and odds are your child hasn't heard of many of them. So go online and research various professions. Get her excited about the different options available to her!

Source: *Getting Ready for College & Careers: A Handbook for Grades 6 through 8*, Washington State GEAR UP Program, nswc.com/mid_college.

Q: I know that attendance is important, but we're traveling over the holidays, and my seventh grader will miss a week of school. How can I keep him from falling behind?

Questions & Answers

A: First, take a look at your itinerary. Is it possible to alter your plans so your trip falls within the school's break? That's the only way to ensure your child won't miss out on important learning.

If your travel dates are written in stone, though, here are three things you can do to help your child stay on top of things:

1. **Talk to his teachers.** Well in advance, explain the situation to each of them. If they're planning to assign readings or worksheets right after break, see if your child can get started now. Find out which teachers maintain updated classroom websites, and see if your child can follow each day's lesson from afar. But keep in mind: Teachers are under no obligation to adjust to your vacation schedule.
2. **Focus on learning** while you are away. Look at your trip as a learning opportunity. Explore museums and cultural or historical attractions and discuss them as a family. Try to immerse your child in educational activities he might not get at home.
3. **Set aside time** for reading. Even if your child has no official work to complete while he's away, insist he read for pleasure. A vacation from school should not be a vacation from learning!

It Matters: Building Character

Encourage your child to give to the community



Performing community service can help your child become 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, and more likely to have academic success.

Giving back to the community is an important concept to teach your child all year long. However, the holidays are a natural time to get into the spirit of doing kind deeds.

Here are some ideas for you and your child:

- **Remember those** who may be alone. Is there someone who would love to join your family for a special event? Have your child issue the invitation.
- **Bake up some cheer.** With your child, make a few dozen cookies. Take them to your local police station or firehouse.
- **Go through closets.** Does your child have any outgrown clothes in decent condition? Help him donate them to a charity.
- **Go through your pantry.** Do you have any unopened canned or boxed foods that your family can spare? If so, deliver them to a local food pantry with your child.
- **Offer to water plants** or take care of pets for a neighbor who is traveling during the holidays. Offering to do this for free for someone he cares about would be a wonderful giving gesture on your child's part.

Source: *Volunteering: Indicators on Children and Youth*, Child Trends Databank, niswc.com/mid_service.

Help your middle schooler cultivate a positive attitude

Thomas Edison said, “Genius is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.” A positive attitude can motivate your child to put in the effort she needs in order to succeed. A positive outlook can also keep your middle schooler going even when she feels like giving up.

To foster a positive attitude in your child:

- **Be a role model.** Are you often negative? Are you a pessimist? If so, it is difficult to turn around and ask your child to be positive.
- **Tell your child** to focus on what she can change. A negative attitude often results from feeling helpless. For example, your child probably can't change the material in her classes. If that were her goal, she would feel helpless and negative. But she *can* change how



much she prepares. That can lead to success and a positive feeling of empowerment.

- **Encourage your child** to think of others. It is amazing how doing something good for another person can lift a person out of a bad mood. In this season of giving, challenge your child to bring a smile to someone else's face.

Discuss the qualities that make a person dependable



Dependability is a key to your child's success in life. It matters little how talented or smart someone is if that person cannot be counted on. It is the person who shows up on time and puts forth effort who will be considered for advancement.

Encourage your child to:

1. **Do what he says he will do.** At school, he should turn his work in on time. If he is part of a group, whether academically or in an extracurricular activity, he should do his part. Others may succeed

or fail based on whether he pulls his weight.

2. **Make amends.** Everyone makes mistakes. It's part of life. But your child should also try to correct them. If he lets someone down, he should say: “I'm sorry. I won't let it happen again. How can I make it up to you?”
3. **Be cheerful.** Showing up and doing the job is important. But if your child does it while scowling and muttering under his breath, he likely won't be asked again. And that's how wonderful opportunities are missed.