

Parent Pointers

Calendar

McCracken Middle School



THE PARENT INSTITUTE

Parent Pointers

Calendar

Middle School Parents
still make the difference!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
December 2016				1 Today, tell your child why you appreciate him.	2 Sign up for bookstore emails so you're aware of book signings. Take your child to signings that would interest her.	3 Talk about how your family can do something for others this holiday season.
4 Teach your child how to do laundry. Feeling competent makes a middle schooler feel good.	5 Look in the newspaper for a list of holiday events. Plan to attend one this month as a family.	6 Keep nutritious foods handy at home, such as sliced vegetables and fresh fruit.	7 Peer pressure can be positive. Encourage group activities like sports and volunteering.	8 Think of synonyms for common words with your child. For example, a synonym for <i>talk</i> is <i>converse</i> .	9 Ask your child to plan and schedule a fun family night.	10 Before your child buys something, encourage him to compare prices and return policies.
11 Don't try to do everything yourself. Ask your child to take the responsibility for one or two holiday traditions.	12 When you watch TV, ask your child questions: "Did that person make a good decision?" "What would you do?"	13 Limit interruptions during your child's homework time.	14 Encourage your child when she faces challenges. Say, "Go for it!" or, "You can do it!"	15 Talk with your child about a choice you have made. Then talk about the consequences.	16 At the store, let your child pick out an unfamiliar vegetable. Find a recipe that uses it and give it a try!	17 Have your child time how long a car trip takes. How many miles were driven? What was your average speed?
18 Bake cookies with your child. If you're doubling a recipe, have him do the math.	19 Respect your child's privacy. It boosts self-esteem and promotes independence and doing better in school.	20 Teach your child to ask <i>who, what, when, where, why</i> and <i>how</i> when doing research.	21 Exercise your child's memory. What did she eat yesterday? Two days ago? Challenge each other.	22 Ask your child to take photos during family events. This may build interest in participating.	23 Have your child ask older relatives about their childhood days.	24 Ask everyone to write down two positive things about each member of the family. Don't forget to include yourself.
25 Give the gift of time to your child. Time with parents is more important to kids than material things.	26 Think of a meaningful quotation you love. Post it where your child will see it.	27 Play Alphabet Mix up. Choose a word; rearrange the letters in alphabetical order. Can your child figure out the word?	28 Listen to your child's music. Have him play a favorite song. Listen to the lyrics and discuss what you hear.	29 Take turns making statements with your child. Have her identify each one as either <i>fact</i> or <i>opinion</i> .	30 Let your child invite friends to stay for a family dinner. It's a great way to learn more about his peer group.	31 Help your child create a time line of the past year.

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Understand the important role of the guidance counselor

A generation ago, counselors often worked only in high schools. Their job was to help students choose courses and plan for after graduation.

Guidance counselors still do those things in high schools. But now they do much, much more. And they have also become a key part of the educational team in middle schools.

Middle school guidance counselors strive to help all students be productive learners. Your child's counselor can offer help with:

- **Selecting courses** that will put him on the right track.
- **Setting goals.**
- **Getting back on track** when he faces academic problems.

- **Solving problems with friends.** This can include mediation or counseling sessions for your child or a small group.
- **Building social skills.**
- **Strengthening coping skills.** This includes skills for dealing with bullies or with grief.
- **Developing study skills.**
- **Making plans for high school and beyond.**
- **Exploring and planning** for different careers.
- **Organizing support** if your child or your family is facing a crisis.
- **Making referrals** to other professionals.

Source: "Why Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association, nswc.com/mid_guidance.

Take a look at your child's attendance



December usually contains a winter break from school. And once your child returns in January,

the school year will be about half over. This is a great time to review the first part of the year and make plans for the next. Looking at your child's school attendance should be part of this important process.

Did your child attend school every day unless she was sick or there was a family emergency?

If so, congratulations! Let her know you're proud of her strong attendance. Help her keep up the good work for the rest of the year and beyond. Strong attendance is one predictor of success in school.

If not:

- **Remind your child** that regular school attendance is a priority.
- **Emphasize the need for rest, nutrition and exercise** to stay healthy and stay in school.
- **Consider the reasons** you take your child out of school. Can you make some appointments outside school hours?
- **Create consequences.** Let your middle schooler know that skipping school erodes your trust in her.

Give your middle schooler's motivation a boost this winter



For many middle schoolers, the school year is getting old. Their September enthusiasm has faded like the sun on a winter afternoon.

To keep your child motivated throughout the winter and geared up for a successful spring:

- **Give encouragement** and praise. Look at your child as he is bent over his textbook and say, "I see how hard you're working and I know it will pay off." Follow the rule of saying five positive things for every one negative thing.
- **Stay involved.** Back-to-school night and first-quarter teacher conferences are behind you, but you still have a vital role to play.

Attend a game or other school event together. Check in with your child's teachers and ask how you can help.

- **Offer specific suggestions.** Does your child need to brush up on study skills? Have him take notes as he reads. This can help him learn key concepts. Is he struggling with foreign language vocabulary words? Encourage him to make flash cards and offer to quiz him on them.

"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."

—Mark Twain

Improve communication with your child by simply listening



Many parents of middle schoolers think their kids don't talk to them enough. But that lack of conversation may

actually be because of the parents. Some parents suffer from the same problem they complain about in their children—they just don't listen.

To improve communication with your child, avoid these common pitfalls:

- **Taking over the conversation.** For example, your child says, "You know that new kid at school, Sarah ... ?" You interrupt and say, "Sarah! I met her parents at the PTA meeting. They seem lovely. You should call her." Maybe your child was going to share something with you. But she probably won't now.

- **Always putting your child off.** You can't drop everything each time your child calls your name. But if your answer is almost always: "Hold on" or "Just a minute," your child may just save what she was going to say forever.

To increase your chances for a conversation with your child:

- **Let her finish!** Don't assume you know what she is going to say.
- **Think ahead about times** when she can have a chance to say what she wants. Time spent in the car or otherwise doing errands is an ideal time. Be quiet during these times and give your middle schooler an opportunity to break the silence.

Source: K.R. Ginsburg and M.M. Jablow, "But I'm Almost 13!" *An Action Plan for Raising a Responsible Adolescent*, McGraw-Hill Education.

Are you stressing the importance of your child's effort?



Every student is capable of his own "personal best." Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are

encouraging your child's best effort:

- ___ **1. Do you point out** his effort? "I'm impressed that you are working on your project this weekend!"
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to take pride in his own effort? "It must make you feel great to know that you hung in there."
- ___ **3. Do you model** consistent and diligent effort? "I am working on this report each day this week so I can get it completed by Friday."
- ___ **4. Do you point** to effort as the reason for your child's successes? "That extra half hour a night of studying has paid off."
- ___ **5. Do you avoid** focusing too much on results, as long as your child puts forth his best effort?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are encouraging your child to strive for his best. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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A study group can enhance your middle schooler's learning



Does your middle schooler enjoy sharing knowledge with peers and gaining knowledge from them in turn?

If she does, studying with a group may be a valuable addition to the work she does on her own.

Share these tips for setting up an effective study group:

- **Choose participants carefully.** They should be in your child's classes and devoted to doing well in school. Avoid potential conflicts—romantic interests or rivals may not be the best choices for a study group. Between four and six students is a good size for a study group.

- **Be clear about the purpose.** Study groups are for improving schoolwork. That can't happen if students are only socializing. Have group members schedule separate social time every few weeks to reward themselves for their hard work.
- **Set regular meeting times** and be strict about them. The study group should be a commitment. Once students get in the "groove" of studying together, they rely on one another. If students need to miss a session, it should be for a good reason. Pick a neutral meeting place, such as the library. Or, rotate between houses.

Source: Ron Fry, *How to Study*, Career Press.

Fun estimation challenges help build your child's math skills



Math is a subject that typically depends on precise answers. But the first step to arriving at those answers is

often to look the problem over and make an "educated guess," or an estimation.

Give your child frequent opportunities to estimate. You can do this by using examples from daily life or by asking questions that allow him to estimate the answer.

Encourage him to check his answer by working the problem through, or by comparing a "real-life" answer to his guess.

Here are some examples of estimation challenges you can give your child:

- **If Dad drinks** two cups of coffee a day, and each container of coffee makes 50 cups, how many

containers of coffee would we have to buy in a year? (Answer: 15)

- **How long will it take** us to get to Grandma's house? We're going 27 miles an hour and she lives 5 miles away. (Answer: about 10 minutes)
- **How many people** are sitting in the first three rows of the movie theater?
- **If you get \$20 every time** you shovel a driveway, how many driveways would you have to shovel to earn \$10,000? (Answer: 500)
- **How much time** do you think it will take for you to read that book?
- **How many bowls** of cereal do you think we will get from that box?

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math—The Middle School Years*, University of California at Berkeley.

Q: My eighth grader is so hard on herself! She complains that she can't do anything right, which isn't true at all. How can I help her see that she's a smart, capable person?

Questions & Answers

A: If there's ever a time when self-doubt and insecurity are likely to rear their ugly heads, it's during adolescence. Middle schoolers are discovering the pressure of trying to measure up, and it can be scary when they feel like they're falling short.

Although you can't make your child's insecurity go away altogether, you can help her see just how smart and competent she is. Here's how:

- **Find the right outlets.** Let your child experience success by putting her where she's most likely to succeed. If sports are her thing, sign her up for one she likes. If she enjoys theater, let her join the drama club at school.
- **Give her responsibilities.** She may gripe about having to clean the garage or empty the dishwasher, but make her do it anyway. Chores are a great way to make your child feel needed because doing them helps the whole family. They can make her more responsible, too.
- **Acknowledge her accomplishments.** Did your child just do something wonderful? Congratulate her! Show her that you noticed her achievement, whether it was earning a good grade on a quiz or setting a beautiful table for dinner.

With a little help from you, your child will begin to see herself as the wonderful person she is!

It Matters: Building Character

Is it a mistake or neglect? What's the difference?



Learning responsibility takes time. So don't expect your middle schooler to grasp it overnight. But do expect him to take responsibilities seriously. And teach him the difference between an honest mistake and neglect.

For example:

- **An honest mistake** would be completing the odd-numbered problems on his math worksheet instead of the even-numbered ones; or taking the trash out on the wrong night.
- **Neglect** would be failing to do his math homework or a household responsibility at all.

Should you discipline your child if he makes an honest mistake? Probably not. Everyone slips up sometimes.

However, if your child neglects a responsibility—whether it's homework or a household chore—don't ignore the situation. Instead:

- **Talk to your child** about where he fell short and why.
- **Remind him** that school is his number one responsibility.
- **Let him know** that he's an important member of the family and his contributions matter.
- **Enforce a consequence.** It's best to agree on the consequence ahead of time and to make sure it is related to the responsibility he neglected.

Source: K. Thomsen, M.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose: Navigating the Middle Years*, Search Institute Press.

Show your middle schooler that you value and expect honesty

Being honest is the foundation of good character. It is also vital for your child's academic success. Your middle schooler won't learn algebra if she simply copies her friend's answers. And she won't become a better writer if she has a friend write her English paper.

Practice honesty with your child and stress its importance. When your child asks why she should be honest, offer these reasons:

- **Honest people have self-respect.** They know who they are and they never have to worry about being caught in a lie.
- **Honest people are respected** by others. Family members, teachers and friends will respect her because they know they can count on her.
- **"Honesty is the best policy"** is more than a saying. Being



honest will keep your middle schooler out of trouble.

- **Honesty will earn your child** more freedom. When you know you can trust your child, you are more likely to grant her additional privileges. Teachers also tend to give more freedom to students they trust.

Source: B. Lewis, *Being Your Best: Character Building for Kids 7-10*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Parents play a critical role in developing children's respect



What's one of the most critical values you can instill in your middle schooler? Respect. By teaching him to respect you, himself and others, you'll help him grow into a grounded, decent adult. You'll also help him have a better school experience.

To instill respect in your child:

- **Remember** that you're not his friend. Your child already has friends; he needs you to be his parent. Friends have equal power in a relationship; parents

and children do not. Earn your child's respect by being reliable and steady, not by being his pal.

- **Be tough** when necessary. Many parents find themselves caving in to their child's nagging. Don't be one of them. Instead, be firm and reasonable when dealing with your child. Treat him fairly and you'll demonstrate respect. Be consistent and loving and you'll earn it.

Source: J. Taylor, Ph.D., *Your Children Are Under Attack: How Popular Culture is Destroying Your Kids' Values, and How You Can Protect Them*, Sourcebooks, Inc.