

# Middle School Parents®

McCracken Middle School

*still make the difference!*



## Help your middle schooler evaluate online information

**S**tudents (and adults) get much of their news from online sources. But today, many of those sources present only one-sided information. It's harder than ever to tell the difference between unbiased information about a product and a website created to advertise that product. And some sites pretend to be news sites, but are actually trying to promote a particular point of view.

A Stanford study shows that most students can't tell the difference between a news story and an ad. They also don't know how to tell a real news site from one that presents a slanted view of an issue.

Learning how to find reliable sources on the internet is a skill your middle schooler will need in school and life.

Share these strategies with your child:

- **Follow links.** Does the link lead to a news source your child knows is trustworthy? Or does it go to a site that offers only one point of view?
- **Read more.** Sometimes an article will take one sentence out of context. It's a good idea for your child to read more of the original source.
- **Look for hidden ads.** An article containing the phrase "sponsored content" isn't news. It's an ad.
- **Check the date.** A source from 1998 may be acceptable for a story about ancient Greece. But your child should find an up-to-date source for a story about today's economy.

**Source:** *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning*, Stanford University History Education Group, [niswc.com/mid\\_evaluate](http://niswc.com/mid_evaluate).

## Expect your child to keep commitments



"His word was as good as his bond." This old adage, which refers to a person who always does what he says he will, is one of the cornerstones of responsibility.

Tell your child you expect him to keep his promises and commitments. Encourage him to:

- **Think before agreeing** to do something. It's great to take on new responsibilities, but your child should only do this if he feels he is ready and if he has the time. Whether it's agreeing to tutor a friend in math or helping a neighbor clean up his lawn, your child should make sure he will be able to follow through.
- **Avoid making excuses.** If your child misses a commitment, he needs to be accountable. He should acknowledge his mistake, apologize and ask if there is anything he can do to make it up to the person.
- **Honor the commitments** he makes to himself. When your child sets a goal and creates a plan to achieve it, he is making a promise. Living up to that promise will boost his self-confidence, productivity and happiness.

## Three strategies can help you motivate your middle schooler



What happened to your once-enthusiastic student? He turned into a middle schooler! Suddenly, motivating him to do just about anything can feel like pulling teeth.

Don't despair. To motivate your child to do what needs to be done:

### 1. Catch him before he plugs in.

It's tough dragging a child away from his favorite TV show or computer game. So, if there's something you need him to do, ask *before* he turns on the TV or his game. He may be more compliant.

### 2. Stick to routines.

Routines are critical when it comes to keeping order at home. Don't abandon them just because your child is in middle school. If he knows exactly what times he's supposed to study, feed

the dog and get ready for bed, he may be less likely to drag his feet when it's time to do those things.

- ### 3. Support his interests.
- Find out what your middle schooler likes to do and encourage him to do it. If he's interested in soccer, for example, kick the ball around together. The more you support him as he works at something he loves, the more inspired he may be to work hard at other things—like school!

**“Ability is what you're capable of doing. Motivation determines what you do. Attitude determines how well you do it.**

—Lou Holtz

## Link today's academic success to your child's future goals



Studies show that the best way to help your child succeed in school may be to remind him that working hard today

has a payoff tomorrow. In other words, make him see that doing well in school is about more than getting good grades. It's about reaching his goals someday.

Middle school students are far too young to have their life paths set in stone. But they are at a great age to begin thinking about their futures. And even though they're breaking away from their parents, they still take their guidance seriously.

In fact, “lack of guidance” is cited as the main reason capable kids don't go on to college.

After reviewing data from 50,000 students over a 26-year period, researchers also found that, by middle school:

- **Kids begin losing interest in grades.** For many kids, hanging out with friends and having fun mean more than making the honor roll.
- **It's challenging for parents to build relationships with teachers.** Since kids have several teachers every day, it can be hard to get to know them all. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't try!
- **Parent involvement matters.** But stressing the long-term benefits of doing well matters even more.

**Source:** N.E. Hill and D.F. Tyson “Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement,” *Developmental Psychology*, American Psychological Association.

## Have you made academic honesty a high priority?



In a survey from the Center for Academic Integrity, a whopping 95 percent of high school students admitted to participating in some form of cheating. Are you addressing this with your child before high school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. Do you set a positive example for your child by being honest yourself?
- \_\_\_ 2. Have you spoken with your child about her school's honor code and the importance of following it?
- \_\_\_ 3. Have you discussed different types of cheating? Copying from a student, getting exam questions early and sharing homework with other students are all forms of cheating.
- \_\_\_ 4. Have you told your child that copying passages from the internet and passing them off as her own work is also cheating?
- \_\_\_ 5. Have you talked about the consequences of cheating?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are showing your child how important it is not to cheat. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1283

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Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.



## Behavior is easier to understand if you know how preteens think



Parenting a middle schooler today can be challenging. Your child acts like she knows everything, and at times she seems so grown up.

The important word is *seems*. It doesn't matter how cool your child acts—it will be years before she can think like an adult.

Keep in mind that:

- **Emotional thinking** usually wins out over rational thinking with middle schoolers. That's why kids this age may lash out if they think they've been treated unfairly. Your child is not ready to stop and think: "I'd better cool it because I might get in trouble." She is more likely to respond with pure emotion.

Together, brainstorm respectful ways your child can respond when she's upset, such as excusing herself and walking away. Counting to 10 before blowing her top can work, too.

- **Your child lives in the moment.** She may not grasp that her semester grade may drop if she doesn't study tonight for her test. To her, the end of the semester is light-years away. What she does tonight can't possibly affect anything that far away.

Don't force your middle schooler to make a connection she is not ready to make. Instead, set firm rules about studying and stick to them.

**Source:** K.R. Ginsburg with M.M. Jablow, "But I'm Almost 13!" *An Action Plan for Raising a Responsible Adolescent*, Contemporary Books.

## Find creative ways to give your child's writing skills a boost



Strong writing skills are vital to your middle schooler's success in school and beyond.

However, insisting that he practice them may backfire.

Instead, find creative ways for your child to practice writing. If he's having a good time, he may not realize he's sharpening his skills at the same time.

Ask your child to:

- **Craft a holiday letter.** The fall and winter holidays are fast approaching. If your family typically sends out an end-of-year holiday letter, ask your child to take the lead. Suggest he start by recapping the seasons: "In the spring, our family ... ." Beyond that, let him decide what to write.
  - **Maintain a family diary.** Have you been thinking of starting a blog?
- Let your child tackle the setup. (He's probably much more tech-savvy than you are!) Or ask him to send out a quarterly family update email. Remind him that he's doing something valuable by keeping family and friends posted on what's happening in your lives.
- **Put his requests in writing.** The next time your child wants permission to do something, don't just say *yes* or *no*. Instead, have him write down what he wants and why. Tell him to be persuasive and address any objections he thinks you might have.
  - **Keep a personal journal.** He can record his thoughts, experiences and emotions. Encourage him to write in it every day—even if it's just a sentence or two. He will enjoy looking back at it when he's older!

**Q:** We're heading into the holidays, but my eighth grader isn't exactly gung-ho about all the looming family time. I really want him to spend time with us. Should I make him join us for all of our holiday activities?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** It's tempting to insist that your middle schooler join you for everything, but resist the urge. It's important to respect the fact that he is growing up.

Try to be flexible. Rather than demand that your child spend every moment with the family this holiday season:

- **Prioritize.** If there's a big event everyone must attend, so be it. Let your child know you understand he wants to spend time with his friends. But skipping Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's isn't an option. On the other hand, perhaps you could let him skip your annual holiday-shopping marathon.
- **Embrace new traditions.** Accept that some "little kid" activities may need to be retired now that your child is older. But rather than abandon them completely, tweak them. For instance, did he used to love decorating the table with leaves and pinecones? Now that he's older and more capable, give him a hot glue gun and ask him to craft an autumn display.
- **Don't get upset.** Try not to take it personally when your child doesn't want to participate in family activities. It's all part of growing up. And remember: He may roll his eyes at these things now. But, chances are, he'll enjoy them with his own kids someday!

# It Matters: Homework

## 'Brain movies' improve 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 kids have a tough time focusing on the words they read. Creating a "brain movie" can help your child remember more of what she reads.

To show her how to make one:

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 child to imagine what it would look like as a movie. She might even want to close her eyes so she can "see" it.
4. **Have her tell you** what she saw. She might even 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?

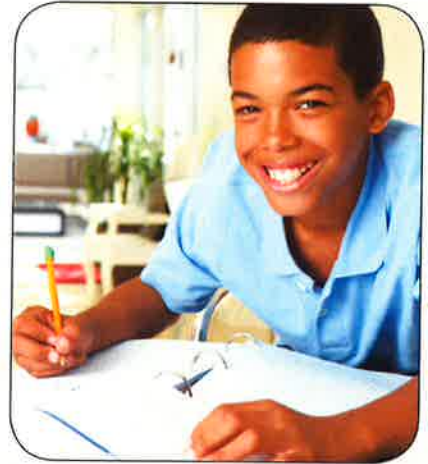
These mental images will help her pay attention to details. She'll recall the conflict between characters. And she'll remember what she read.

**Source:** D. Wilson and M. Conyers, "Brain Movies: When Readers Can Picture It, They Understand It," Edutopia, [niscw.com/mid\\_brainmovie](http://niscw.com/mid_brainmovie).

## Show your child how to take responsibility for learning

Is your middle schooler sweating his next big test or assignment? Help him take responsibility for his learning by showing him how to prepare for it. The best way he can prepare is to sharpen his study skills every day. Here's how:

- **Encourage him to read ahead.** By skimming over the next day's lesson or chapter ahead of time, he'll be better prepared for class. This may also help him ask better questions or participate more.
- **Have him review his notes.** Even if he doesn't have homework in a certain class, he should still look over the day's notes at night. It's a quick, easy way to remind himself of what's being taught.



- **Make sure he's in class.** Your child won't learn the day's lesson if he isn't in class. He should only miss school when it's necessary.

## Mastering skills and strategies makes study time productive



In middle school, your child must increase her skill level to work independently and effectively. During study time, she should:

- **Answer six key questions.** She should always find out: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. This will lead to a basic understanding of many reading assignments. It will also help her write an outline.
- **Learn vocabulary.** Your child will struggle with an assignment if she doesn't understand the language in it. Encourage her to look up the definitions of unfamiliar words in the dictionary.

- **Weigh important information.** Many assignments will require your child to understand the difference between central ideas and details. Practice this with your child: "Elise dropped tears on her blue shirt as she walked up to the house." What is more important, the fact that Elise had a blue shirt or that she was crying?
- **Compare and contrast.** Can your child tell how things are alike and how they are different from one another? This skill will help her with several subjects, particularly English and history. Ask her, "How are a cat and a dog alike? How are they different?"



# Parent Pointers

## Calendar

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Calendar

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>November 2017</b>			<b>1</b> Keep nutritious foods handy at home, such as sliced vegetables and fresh fruit.	<b>2</b> Limit interruptions during your child's homework time. Stretch breaks are OK.	<b>3</b> Middle schoolers need time alone with their thoughts and feelings. Suggest activities your child can do alone.	<b>4</b> If your child doesn't know how to do her laundry, teach her. Feeling competent makes kids feel confident.
<b>5</b> Have your child make an audio recording of key ideas from a chapter he's reading and play them back to study.	<b>6</b> Today, have your child teach you something she needs to learn for homework. It's a great way to reinforce learning.	<b>7</b> Let your child see you reading often. This shows him that you think reading is important and fun.	<b>8</b> With your child, learn how to count to 10 in at least three different languages.	<b>9</b> Does your child study well with others? If so, let her start a study group.	<b>10</b> Ask your child to plan and schedule a fun family night.	<b>11</b> Turn off the TV for the day. Read books, play games, talk or exercise instead.
<b>12</b> When your child tells you something important, repeat it to make sure you understand.	<b>13</b> Encourage your child when he faces challenges. Say, "Go for it!" or "You can do it!"	<b>14</b> When your child studies for a test, have her start at a different place in her notes every time.	<b>15</b> Does your child dawdle during homework time? Use a timer and have him try 15-minute work sessions.	<b>16</b> Avoid focusing so much on grades that your child feels she has to cheat.	<b>17</b> Let your child invite friends to stay for a family dinner. It's a great way to learn more about his peer group.	<b>18</b> Bake cookies with your child. If you're doubling a recipe, have her do the math.
<b>19</b> Today is the anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Read it aloud with your child.	<b>20</b> Write your child's name vertically. Have him use each letter to begin a line of a poem.	<b>21</b> Remember that children learn from your actions more than your words. Focus on setting a good example.	<b>22</b> Ask everyone to write down two positive things about each member of the family. Don't forget to include yourself.	<b>23</b> Tell your child a family story. Try to think of one that teaches a lesson.	<b>24</b> Take a walk on a clear night and look at the sky. Can your child pick out any constellations?	<b>25</b> Give each family member some marshmallows and toothpicks. See who can build the tallest tower.
<b>26</b> Find a meaningful quotation you love. Post it where your child will see it.	<b>27</b> Point out examples of prejudice to your child. Talk about positive ways to deal with intolerance.	<b>28</b> Start a list of places you and your child would like to visit. Have her collect information about these places.	<b>29</b> Teach your child how to sew on a button today.	<b>30</b> When you watch TV, ask your child questions, such as "Did that person make a good decision?"		