

Middle School Parents[®]

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still make the difference!



Celebrate Earth Day with online educational activities

Earth Day is Tuesday, April 22. Help your middle schooler find eco-friendly ways to celebrate the planet by logging onto:

- **Recycle City**, www3.epa.gov/recyclecity. Students can explore Recycle City and learn how doing simple things at home can help them reduce waste, use less energy and save money. Students will also find games, activities and resources all about the benefits of recycling.
- **Biomes of the World**, www.teachersfirst.com/lessons/biomes. This site offers an online research project that will interest seriously studious kids. Using its outline and resources, students can discover how ecosystems depend on one another. Students will also find suggestions for cool ways to present the data they gather.
- **Yellowstone National Park**, www.nps.gov/yell/learn/kidsyouth/index.htm#onthisPage-7. Students can learn more about the park and investigate its ecology, history and ongoing preservation efforts.
- **WaterSense for Kids**, epa.gov/watersense/watersense-kids. Students will find out how much water a typical family in the U.S. uses every day and learn effective ways to reduce water usage.
- **Energy Kids**, www.eia.gov/kids/games-and-activities. This site is filled with energy-related riddles, games, puzzles, experiments and more. Students will learn about energy sources and ways to conserve energy.

Three strategies can strengthen writing skills



Strong writing skills are essential for academic success. Students who write well tend to do better

in school than students who don't.

To improve writing skills, have your middle schooler:

1. **Read work aloud.** After completing a writing assignment, have your child read it to you. While reading, your child should mark anything that sounds repetitive, clunky or ungrammatical.
2. **Revise it.** Even a strong first draft can almost always be improved with careful editing. So have your child review the work to see where it can be tightened up, expanded or clarified.
3. **Ask for help.** If a piece of writing still seems weak, have your child ask the teacher to recommend a reputable writing website. Together, explore the strategies for strengthening writing. Beyond that, remind your child that one of the best ways to become a stronger writer is to read a lot. The more students are surrounded with words, the more examples they see of solid writing. And that familiarity helps when it's time to put thoughts into words.

Self-discovery helps middle schoolers plan for the future



Middle school gives students lots of opportunities to learn more about themselves. To encourage the discovery of strengths and interests, have your child:

- **Read.** Reading a variety of material exposes your child to new ideas and pursuits. Suggest your child read anything and everything.
- **Talk to people about their jobs.** Your child should ask what they like best about them. Do any of the jobs sound interesting? Your child might also ask friends about their hobbies and interests.
- **Try new things.** The easiest way for kids to find out if they're good at something is simply to try it. Challenge your child to join

a new organization or activity. Suggest volunteering or signing up for a class online.

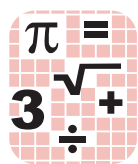
- **Research.** Suggest that your child go online and search for hobbies and careers that seem interesting.

By actively exploring different options and reflecting on experiences, your middle schooler can uncover strengths and passions and identify possible career paths.

“The biggest adventure you can take is to live the life of your dreams.”

—Oprah Winfrey

Inspire your middle schooler's interest in science and math



Science and math sometimes get a bad reputation among students. Many believe they're “just not good”

in these subjects.

However, when middle school students engage in activities related to science, technology, engineering and math (the STEM subjects), they often change their minds.

If your middle schooler thinks science or math is too challenging:

- **Enjoy science and technology media together.** Search on YouTube or Common Sense Media to find science shows and games for kids of all ages.
- **Head to the kitchen.** Cooking involves both math and chemistry. And you get to eat the results! As you cook together, ask your child

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 work.
- **Celebrate the process.** When your child is learning something new in a class, it's often hard at first. So rather than focusing on grades earned, talk about *what* your child is learning and the new skills your child is developing.

Source: L. Halim and others, “Effect of environmental factors on students' interest in STEM careers: The mediating role of self-efficacy,” *Research in Science & Technological Education*.

Do you teach your child to use social media responsibly?



More and more middle schoolers are becoming active on social media platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok,

Snapchat and Instagram. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are reinforcing safe practices for their use:

- ___ **1. Do you talk** with your child about the dangers of sharing personal information online?
- ___ **2. Do you emphasize** the importance of being cautious when accepting “follow” requests or engaging with strangers online?
- ___ **3. Do you discuss** why your child should not post or share inappropriate photos or hurtful comments?
- ___ **4. Do you limit** when, where and for how long your child can use social media?
- ___ **5. Do you make it clear** you will monitor online activities to ensure your child's safety?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child use social media safely. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

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Give your child opportunities to make valuable contributions



The myth that middle schoolers are lazy is just that: a myth. The truth is that adolescents want to be useful and feel like their contributions matter.

Help your middle schooler find ways to contribute in the community year-round. It will boost your child's self-confidence and nurture a sense of responsibility.

Your child could:

- **Join a service organization.** Whether national or local, service organizations can be perfect places for middle schoolers to make a difference and connect with other students who share similar interests.
- **Be a caring neighbor.** Do you have an elderly neighbor? Suggest your child help carry in groceries or take

care of their lawn. Point out ways your child can take the initiative and pitch in. Responsible actions contribute to the overall well-being of the community.

- **Support a cause.** Your middle schooler could collect supplies for a local shelter or host a bake sale to raise funds for a charity. Help your child do some research and make a plan.
- **Write letters of thanks.** Encourage your child to write a thank-you note to a public servant, such as a fire fighter or mail carrier. Your middle schooler will learn how nice it feels when one responsible member of society applauds another!

Source: E. Medhus, M.D., *Raising Everyday Heroes: Parenting Children to Be Self-Reliant*, Beyond Words Publishing.

Q: My middle schooler is hanging around some not-so-nice kids at school this year. I'm afraid my child will give into peer pressure and decide to be not-so-nice, too. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Definitely talk to your child, but not necessarily about any one friend. Instead, have a conversation about 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 does your child feel** when around them?

It could be that these friends make your child feel more mature. Or, it could be that, like you, your child 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 your middle schooler through this tricky area:

- **Avoid critical comments.** Belittling friends or insulting their upbringing, families, etc. may make your child feel the need to defend them.
- **Ask guiding questions.** "It sounds like Erin was pretty rude to the teacher today. How did that make you feel?" This kind of broad question may encourage your child to open up.
- **Support your child.** Understand that your child isn't weak when affected by peer pressure. These issues can be tricky, so say you will help your student figure them out.
- **Be firm.** If you have real misgivings about certain friends, then it's time to step in. Supervise the time your middle schooler spends with them.

An after-school plan keeps your child safe when home alone



You may feel your middle schooler is mature and capable. However, if your student comes home to an empty house every

day after school, it's necessary to take precautions.

To make sure your child is safe and productive during after-school alone time:

- **Prepare for emergencies.** Before leaving your child alone, outline exactly what to do in the event of a fire, severe weather or other urgent situation.
- **Post a list** of important phone numbers. Include the numbers for your work, nearby neighbors and emergency services.
- **Write down the rules.** Whether it's "no friends at the house" or "no cooking" while home alone, make your expectations crystal clear.
- **Require regular check-ins.** Expect a call or text as soon as your child arrives home.
- **Agree on a routine.** If the bus drops your child off at 4:00 p.m. and you get home at 6:00 p.m., suggest ways to constructively fill those hours. "Take 30 minutes to relax, and then tackle your homework."
- **Create a Plan B.** Keys get lost. Doors can jam. Make sure your child has a back-up plan for getting into the house.

It Matters: Building Character

Show your child the many ways to exhibit respect



Student behavior—both positive and negative—significantly influences a classroom environment. It's difficult for teachers to create a positive learning atmosphere in the absence of respectful behavior.

Talk to your middle schooler about the benefits of respectful behavior and discuss the many ways students can show it.

Middle schoolers should:

- **Respect themselves.** Self-respect helps your child make wise choices and work through personal and academic challenges.
- **Be on time for classes** and other commitments. Promptness demonstrates respect for people's time.
- **Follow instructions.** Your child should obey classroom rules and complete assigned tasks.
- **Take care of school property** and maintain a tidy workspace.
- **Collaborate** by sharing resources and working with other students effectively in groups. Share strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully.
- **Listen to others and be polite.** This includes parents, teachers and classmates. Your child should address adults by name: "Good morning, Mrs. Foster."
- **Be aware of body language.** Smiling, nodding and making eye contact when talking with others demonstrates respect.
- **Realize that they can learn** something from almost every person they meet—even if they disagree with them.

Talk to your child about the value of being dependable

Dependability is vital in school and the workplace. 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 works hard who will do well and be considered for advancement.

Dependable students:

- **Do what they say they will do.** At school, your child should turn work in on time. If your middle schooler is part of a group, whether in a class or in an extracurricular activity, your child should follow through on commitments. Others' success is dependent upon your child's actions.
- **Be cheerful.** Showing up and doing the job is important. But doing it while scowling and muttering will make it less likely your child will be asked to help out again. And that's



how valuable opportunities are missed.

- **Make amends.** Everyone makes mistakes. It's part of life. But your child should also try to correct errors. If your child lets someone down, suggest saying, "I'm sorry. I won't let it happen again. How can I make it up to you?"

Your middle schooler's success begins with a positive attitude



A positive attitude can motivate your middle schooler to put forth the effort that leads to success—even when faced with challenges. To foster a positive attitude, recommend that your middle schooler:

- **Focus on the things** that can be changed. A negative attitude often results from feeling helpless. For example, your child probably can't change the material in classes. If that were the goal, your child would feel helpless and negative.

But your middle schooler *can* decide how much effort and time to put into classes. Increasing the amount can lead to success and a positive feeling of empowerment.

- **Think of others.** It's amazing how doing something good for another person can lift a person out of a bad mood. Challenge your child to bring a smile to someone else's face as often as possible.
- **Keep a gratitude journal.** In it, suggest writing about things that make your child feel grateful and happy.