

Middle School Parents[®]

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Educational Service Unit #8
Linda Miller, Service Representative

still make the difference!



Try blogs, reviews & letters to get your middle schooler writing

Sure, your middle schooler may be tech-savvy and “wired.” But that doesn’t mean she shouldn’t spend time working on some good old-fashioned writing! To encourage her to write:

- **Invite her to blog.** If your family keeps a blog, ask your child to post entries occasionally. Don’t expect her to write huge essays. But do have her update friends and relatives on what’s been happening at school and home lately. If she enjoys doing it, consider giving her a section of her own on your blog page. If your family doesn’t have a blog page, see if your child would like to create one. She can start by going to www.blogger.com.

- **Let her post online reviews.** Is your child a big-time reader? Suggest that she log on to book-selling sites and write reviews of the best new titles. Is she a movie nut? Help her find a child-friendly site where she can add her two cents about the latest release. (As with anything online, make sure the sites are age-appropriate. Try www.commonsemmedia.org.)
- **Give her stationery**—and have her use it. Every so often, ask your child to write a letter to Grandma or Uncle Jim. Let her experience the rapidly fading art of letter writing. Although email and instant messages are quick and fun, they’re no substitute for putting pen to paper!

Use categorizing to build higher-level thinking



In middle school, your child’s reading will require him to make associations and sift out key ideas. One step toward this skill is the ability to define and categorize. You can figure out a lot once you know what something is and where it fits in.

Here is an example to help you work on this with your child:

1. **Show your child a ring** (or any other item), and ask, “What is this?” He will probably say, “It’s a ring.”
2. **Then ask**, “Can you put it in a category?” The likely answer is, “It’s jewelry.”
3. **Now ask**, “What else can you tell me, now that we know it’s a ring and a piece of jewelry?” Brainstorm with your child. Some ideas to get your child started include: “It’s valuable.” “We should keep it in a safe place.” “You wear it when you get dressed up.”

Explain to your child how defining and categorizing allowed you both to share a lot more knowledge.

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan Publishing, www.kaplanpublishing.com).

Tutoring might be the answer to ongoing academic struggles



If your child struggles to make decent grades, he may need some one-on-one learning support outside of school. But with work,

the house and the rest of the family to care for, you're spread too thin to give it to him. What's the solution? It may be time to look for a tutor.

To decide whether getting a tutor is the answer to your child's academic problems, ask yourself:

- **Is homework time** a nightly battle?
- **Are my child's grades slipping** more by the day?
- **Is the entire family feeling** the stress of his school troubles?

If the answer to these questions is *yes*, then hiring a pro may be worth a try—at least in the short-term.

To help your middle schooler get the most from tutoring sessions:

- **Stand back.** If the sessions take place in your home, don't try to

"pitch in." Give the tutor space to do his job.

- **Provide a distraction-free setting** if the sessions take place in your home. Be sure there is a quiet, well-lit place to work.
- **Set reachable goals.** Don't expect your child to bring home straight A's right after he begins tutoring sessions. Instead, set smaller goals such as raising his math grade a few percentage points per month. Meeting these goals may be your best indicator as to whether the tutoring is working.

Source: Jeanne Shay Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, ISBN: 1-57542-168-2 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

"The pressures of being a parent are equal to any pressure on earth."

—John Lennon

Foster a sense of responsibility through consequences & choices



Your child won't morph into a responsible young adult overnight. It's a process, and it takes time. To nurture your child's

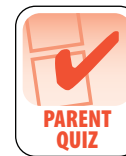
sense of responsibility:

- **Enforce consequences.** Dole out penalties when your child breaks the rules. This will remind her that she is responsible for her actions. And when she messes up, she only has herself to blame.
- **Give her chores.** Chores are ideal for building responsibility in your child. Even better, completing them may make her feel capable.

- **Have her manage money.** Nothing hammers home the "be more responsible" message like empty pockets! Give your child chances to earn money and teach her how to manage those earnings.
- **Let her make choices.** If possible, allow your child to decide issues for herself. Obviously, you should offer guidance. But whenever it's reasonable—and safe—for her to make her own decisions, stand back and let her.

Source: Maud Purcell, LCSW, CEAP, "Building Responsible Kids," Psych Central, <http://psychcentral.com/lib/2006/building-responsible-kids>.

Are you still emphasizing attendance?



April often heralds the return of warmer days. But it's not summer yet—and your child needs to be in school, on time,

until it is. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are continuing to promote regular, on-time school 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 taking** your child out of school unless it is an emergency?
- ___ **3. Do you emphasize** to your child that your family does not condone truancy, no matter how nice the weather might be?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to take steps that will get her to school on time, like using an alarm clock?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** the school to notify you if your child is not in school?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are conveying the importance of attendance to your child. Mostly *no*? Try those ideas in the quiz.

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Teach your middle schooler how to set realistic academic goals



Students who are successful in school know how to set academic goals for themselves. Here are tips for setting sound academic goals:

- **Make them specific.** Goals should state exactly what your child wants to do. Example: "In the next quarter, I will have at least an 80 percent average in all my classes."
- **Make them measurable.** Your child should be able to record progress toward his goals. Example: The goal of 80 percent in all classes is measurable. With this goal, your child can look at his average at different points in the

quarter. Then he can compare his actual performance with his goal performance.

- **Make them achievable.** Example: "I'm going to be captain of the football team in my freshman year" may not be an achievable goal. Even if your child has the talent to achieve it, doing so depends on the decisions of many people other than himself. Your child should own his goals and be responsible for making them happen.

Source: Beverly K. Bachel, *What Do You Really Want? How to Set a Goal and Go for It!* ISBN: 1-57542-085-6 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

Help your child understand the reasons behind your discipline



Middle school is a time of tremendous growth and change. It is also a time of questioning authority.

Gone are the days, if they ever existed, when your child is likely to immediately do what you want.

You are still the most important person in your child's life and she wants to please you. But she also wants, and needs, a lot more say in what happens to her—or at least why it is happening.

Here are some pointers for helping your child accept and understand your discipline:

- **Explain.** Your child may not always realize that you impose a rule because you are concerned about her safety, for example. Share your thinking with your child. She still may not like the rule, but she will feel less frustration if she understands it.

- **Work on the relationship.** Talk with your child often—and not just about the ways she needs to improve. Express interest in what is going on in her life and also in her opinions. She's much more likely to listen and follow your directions when she knows you care about her as a person.
- **Strive for fairness.** Punishing your child just because you're angry is never a good idea. At this age, it backfires completely. Your child's focus will only be on what she thinks *you did to her*, not on what *she should learn*. So make sure consequences fit the infraction. If she fails to do her chores this afternoon, she has to stay in the next afternoon to do them.

Source: Chastity Pratt, "Middle School Discipline That Works," EduGuide, www.eduguide.org/Parents-Library/Middle-School-Learning-Discipline-Behaviors-1771.aspx.

Q: I work full-time. And although my seventh grader is mature enough to stay by herself after school, I hate the thought of her being home alone every afternoon. Should I hire a sitter even though she insists she doesn't need one?

Questions & Answers

A: Not necessarily. Since you feel your child is responsible enough to stay alone for a few hours each day, it sounds like the issue isn't that she's by herself—it's *how often* she's by herself.

If that's the case, then the solution may be to limit the number of days she's home alone every week. But it doesn't need to be an "all or nothing" solution. You can limit her "alone time" to a couple days each week if you:

- **Look into** after-hours programs at your child's school. Middle schools often provide after-school care for students. It could offer her an extra chance to hang out with other kids once or twice each week.

It doesn't need to be an "all or nothing" solution.

- **Research** neighborhood options. See what your local community center has to offer for middle schoolers. If you find a cool weekday program for your child, she may be eager to go there every few days.
- **Enlist family.** Is a nearby relative willing to hang out once a week with your child? Arrange it. Your child—and her relative—may end up loving that quality time together!

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Respect

Teach your child the importance of self-respect



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 not to treat others the same way.

To foster your child's sense of self-respect:

- **Help your child fight** negative peer pressure. Talk about ways she 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 set-back.
- **Point out your child's strengths** and explain that people have different strengths and weaknesses. This awareness helps your child beat back 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 your own safety and health.
- **Treat your child with respect.** Your child needs a model for self-respect. You are the best choice. When you treat her well, she realizes that because you respect yourself, you are naturally respectful to others.

Source: Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, ISBN: 0-684-85609-3 (Fireside, a Simon & Schuster company, www.simonsays.com).

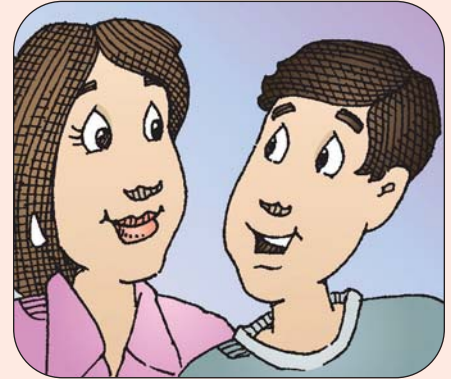
Speak to your child with respect; expect the same in return

As an adult, you probably speak to your friends and colleagues with respect. But what about your child?

It's natural for family members to let their guards down around each other and speak to each other 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 don't speak to your child with respect, he will never learn to speak respectfully—to you or anyone else.

Here are some tips:

- **Start with the basics.** A “Hi, honey,” or even a simple “Good morning” goes a long way.
- **Consider feelings.** If you know your child had a bad day at school, this may not be the best time to scold him about not making his bed. Bring issues up when your child is feeling better.



- **Be attentive.** Take your eyes off the TV when your child speaks to you. Look him in the eye. If you are in the car 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.

Source: Alex J. Packer, *The How Rude! Handbook of Family Manners for Teens: Avoiding Strife in Family Life*, ISBN: 1-57542-163-1 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

Volunteering may lead to awareness, respect for others



Volunteering in the community is more than a nice thing to do. It can also broaden your child's horizons and give him a better understanding of those around him.

By performing community service, your child may:

- **Gain new insight.** Does your child think “the poor” all fit a stereotype? To him, are “the homeless” all the same? Working with them could help him see that they're people just like he is.

And that may lead him to respect them more.

- **Become more connected** to the community. Your child's world likely revolves around school, home and friends. But helping out in the community may widen his world a little. And, hopefully, that “widening” will also boost his awareness of—and empathy for—others!

Source: Laura Paul, “Encouraging Community Service: A Lesson in Perspective and Personal Discovery,” DisneyFamily.com, www.preteenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/encouraging.htm.