

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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## Help your middle schooler prepare for standardized tests

**S**pring is around the corner, and it may bring more than nice weather and blooming flowers. Spring is often also standardized-test time. If your preteen has such an exam on the horizon, start helping her prepare.

To help your preteen do her best on standardized tests:

- **Do your homework.** Find out as much as you can about the test ahead of time. What subjects will it cover? Will it take place in one day or span an entire week? What will the results mean for your preteen?
- **Gather practice materials.** Have your preteen ask her teacher if there is a sample test she can take at home. Books offering general tips on test-taking success can help, too. The best ones will

include sample exercises that mimic the upcoming test.

- **Ask about modifications.** Does your preteen have a learning disability? Find out if it entitles her to any special testing accommodations. Taking the test in a quiet room or being given an un-timed exam may be the key to her test success.
- **Practice test-taking strategies** with homework. Get your preteen in “test mode” by having her practice the skills she’ll need. For instance, students are often told to skip questions they don’t know and come back to them later. Have her do the same thing with her daily assignments.

Source: “Standardized Test Success,” FamilyEducation.com, <http://school.familyeducation.com/educational-testing/teaching-methods/37502.html>.

## Make sure your child’s schedule isn’t overbooked



Extracurricular activities can be great fun for your preteen. But don’t forget that they’re just that: *extras*. Your preteen’s primary focus should be on school. So it’s vital that his after-school activities not interfere with his performance in class.

To make sure your preteen’s schedule isn’t overbooked:

- **Keep an eye on his grades.** Does your preteen start bringing home lower marks once basketball season starts?
- **Pay attention to homework habits.** Is your preteen’s before-dinner study routine suddenly stretching to bedtime? It could be a sign that he’s over-scheduled. If that’s the case, it may be time to drop an activity.
- **Watch his mood.** Is your easy-going preteen now stressed or irritable? Does he wake up exhausted or collapse into bed at night? He likely has too much on his plate.

Remember: After-school activities should enhance your preteen’s education—not interfere with it. If he’s doing too much, insist that he scale back on his activities, at least for a while.

## Teach your preteen to research options before making decisions



Before your child can make a good decision about an important question, he should do some research. *Then* he can act. Guide your child to:

- **Get the facts.** If he is asked to look after a neighbor's dog for the weekend, he should find out *exactly* what he needs to do. How often should he feed the dog? What times? Should he walk the dog? How often?
- **Consider conflicts.** Your child has to study this weekend. He is also invited to a friend's party. Can he do both and still care for the dog?
- **Think about the feelings** of those involved. Say that the dog needs to be let out at 8:30 p.m. and the party starts at 7:30. If he misses the party will his friend be upset? If he turns down the job, will the neighbor ask another person to care for the dog in the future?

- **Come up with alternatives.** Perhaps your child can explain to his friend that he really would like to have steady work caring for the dog. Maybe your child and his friend can do something together next weekend instead.
- **Realize that decisions** are not always perfect. If your child decides to miss the party and care for the dog, he is giving up fun with friends. But he is gaining a chance to look after the dog when his neighbor travels. Sometimes good decisions require a small sacrifice to achieve a long-term benefit.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *What Do Your Stand For? For Teens, A Guide to Building Character*, ISBN: 1-57542-029-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

**“Growing up is a process, not an event.”**

—Paul B. Jamison

## Avoid shouting matches with tone of voice, choice of words



Your child is now at a stage where you need to discipline more carefully. Discipline is essential. But your child is more

likely to push back at discipline methods she finds too harsh and controlling. The point of discipline can quickly become lost as she uses the opportunity to pick a fight.

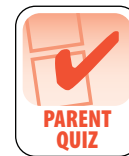
You may not be able to avoid this all the time. But you can keep the upper hand while still treating your child with respect if you:

- **Lower your voice.** Be calm and in control when speaking to your child.

- **Use fewer words.** Kids usually tune out at the first sign of a parental lecture. So instead of launching into another rant about your child's messy room, point to the clothes on the floor, and firmly say, “Katie, pick up your clothes. Now, please.”
- **State the obvious.** “The dog keeps standing by her empty bowl. She looks pretty hungry.” Not: “You forgot to feed her again. Can't you remember anything?”

Source: Peter L. Benson and others, *What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future*, ISBN: 1-57542-027-9 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

## Are you fostering responsibility in your child?



Take this quiz to see if you are encouraging your child to be responsible. This is one of the most important qualities for

success in school and in life. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you emphasize** the importance of being reliable and dependable by expecting your child to do what he says he'll do?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you hold** your child accountable for his actions? If he loses something he borrowed, do you expect him to earn money to replace it?
- \_\_\_ **3. Have you talked** with your child about the importance of good judgment?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you work** with your child on developing greater self-control? Model this by holding your temper and avoiding impulsive actions.
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to do some kind of volunteer work?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are striving to raise a responsible child. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Parents are middle schooler's best defense against substance abuse



You probably realize that at this age, your child may be tempted to try alcohol or drugs (including tobacco). You likely will not be there when this happens. But your child carries your love and support with her. It can make a big difference in what she decides to do at that moment.

Remember that:

- **Providing a strong family life** is the best thing you can do for your child. Does your child know how much you love her? If so, she is less likely to disappoint you by drinking or using drugs. A child

who eats meals with her family and enjoys spending time at home has less opportunity and desire to drink or use drugs.

- **Your child should know** you don't take this issue lightly. Make clear to your child that you absolutely disapprove of underage drinking and any drug use. Let her know you won't let it go "just one time." Emphasize that you will take immediate action, such as monitoring her more closely, at the first hint of drinking or using drugs.

*Source:* Ruth Taswell, editor, *Parenting at the Speed of Teens: Positive Tips on Everyday Issues*, ISBN: 1-57482-845-2 (Search Institute, www.search-institute.org).

# Inspire your middle schooler with a bit of guidance, love



Want to send your preteen to school ready and eager to learn each day? Let him know that you've got his back! In other words, make sure he feels loved and supported at home.

According to research, kids who enjoy strong relationships with adults:

- **Feel safer** and have a sunnier outlook than kids who don't.
- **Are less likely** than other kids to cheat on a test.
- **Feel healthier** and happier than other kids.
- **Believe they'll succeed** in the future.
- **Are nine times likelier** than their peers to earn straight A's in school.

What's the best way to show your preteen your love? There are too many ways to count. Still, when asked in a survey, students said they'd like their parents to:

- **Really listen** when they have something to say.
- **Stop comparing** them to siblings or peers.
- **Be good role models.**
- **Spend more time together** just having fun as a family.
- **Avoid lecturing** about every mistake.
- **Treat them with respect.**
- **Encourage them to do well** in school and elsewhere.
- **Set reasonable rules** and limits.
- **Notice** when they do things right.
- **Offer guidance.**
- **Take an interest** in schoolwork.
- **Meet their teachers** and learn about their classes.

Being there for your preteen and showing him how much he means to you will put him on the road to success in school—and in life.

*Source:* Anthony W. Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others*, ISBN: 0-8077-4476-X (Teachers College Press, www.tcpress.com).

**Q:** My sixth grader really wants to attend her school's Valentine's Day dance, but I'm not so sure. There will be students there who are much older than her. How can I tell if she's ready for this sort of activity?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** There's no simple answer for figuring out the right time for your child to start attending school dances. But there are ways to determine whether a certain activity is appropriate for your daughter.

Before saying *yes* or *no* to any new activity:

- **Think about your child.** Take an honest look at her maturity level. Is she usually responsible and level-headed? Does she follow directions and use common sense? Then it may be fine for her to experience her first "older kid" activity, especially one being offered by her school.
- **Get the details.** Did your child bring home information about the activity? Read it over. If you still have concerns afterward, contact the school and speak to someone about the event. And if you know parents with older children who may have attended the event in the past, ask for their input, too.
- **See if you can chaperone.** Pitching in at the event may be an ideal solution to the problem. After all, your child will get to attend, and you'll be able to monitor things for yourself. And, as a bonus, the school will have a much-appreciated extra set of hands!

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: The Home-School Team

## What middle school teachers want to tell you



Parent-teacher conferences at the middle school level are usually very brief. Your child's teachers may not have the opportunity to communicate everything on their minds.

So on behalf of your child's teachers, here are some things they may not get to say, but certainly want you to know:

- **Your child still needs** your support for success in school. Be aware of homework, tests and projects. Be suspicious if he never seems to have any!
- **Know your child's friends.** Peers often become all-important in middle school. If your child starts hanging out with friends who experiment with harmful behaviors or rarely study, chances are he'll do the same.
- **Ask questions.** You have the right and responsibility to know your child's grades and how he's doing in general. Send an email, or call the school and leave a message for the teacher.
- **Monitor your child's stress.** Middle school students have a lot to manage. Some take on too much. Your child needs family time and time to relax each week.
- **Love your child** with your whole heart. Tell him often (maybe not in front of his friends.) Encourage him all you can. Make clear you are there for him. When he wants to talk, make every effort to drop what you're doing and listen. Remember, you are still the most influential and key person in your child's life.

## Remain involved when your child reaches middle school

**H**ere's a big myth about middle school: Parents aren't wanted. Maybe this myth survives because students keep spreading it!

No matter the source, it's wrong. Middle school parents can help out plenty at school. Some volunteer opportunities may differ from those in elementary school. But they are no less important.

You can:

- **Communicate.** Your middle school may need someone to write a newsletter. Or you could send emails to parents about school news and events. If you are bilingual, you could serve as a translator for other parents.
- **Advise.** If you are available after school or in the evening, you may help with a student group. Just check with your child. Some middle school students want their parents to be involved with



their activities. Others prefer parents choose a different activity.

- **Support.** Middle school teachers don't usually have volunteers in the classroom. But there are exceptions—a class performance or other special event. If you're available and interested, ask!

Source: Sharron Kahn Luttrell, "Middle School: A Role for Parents," PTO Today, [www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/85-middle-school](http://www.ptotoday.com/pto-today-articles/article/85-middle-school).

## Any time is the right time to volunteer at your child's school



Volunteering at your preteen's school sends her a message that education matters.

But if you think you're too busy to volunteer, think again. There are plenty of ways to lend a hand from home.

You can:

- **Organize fundraisers.** Are middle schoolers having a car wash to raise money for the school? Call a few area businesses and ask for sponsorships.

- **Write press releases** or grant proposals. Are you a whiz with words? See if the school could use your expertise.
- **Get creative.** How about whipping up a batch of goodies for the PTA/PTO fundraiser? Or getting that sewing machine out of mothballs? After all, those costumes for the spring musical won't mend themselves!

Source: "Getting Involved at Your Child's School," KidsHealth.org, <http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/learning/school.html>.