

Middle School Parents[®]

January 2010
Vol. 13, No. 5

A Service of the Newton County Schools

still make the difference!



Responsible middle schoolers exhibit self-reliance, persistence

Of course you want your preteen to become a responsible person. But does he know what that means? To help him understand what “being responsible” looks like, talk about the traits responsible people share. Also, suggest ways he can model those same traits.

For instance, responsible people usually demonstrate:

- **A sense of duty.** They do what they’re supposed to do—even if they don’t feel like it. For your preteen, that might mean getting to school on time, finishing his homework every night and doing his chores.
- **Self-reliance.** They value self-sufficiency, so they do as much as they can for themselves. True,

your middle schooler is too young to be completely self-reliant. But he can take a big step toward becoming more responsible. Empower him to handle many of his own tasks, such as doing his own laundry.

- **Persistence.** They don’t give up, and they don’t abandon goals just because they seem out of reach. Your preteen can demonstrate persistence by hanging in there when the going gets tough. If he doesn’t earn a spot on the basketball team this year, for example, he can sharpen his skills in the off-season and try again next time.

Source: Michael S. Josephson, Val J. Peter and Tom Dowd, *Parenting to Build Character in Your Teen*, ISBN: 1-889322-42-3 (Boys Town Press, www.girlsandboystown.org/btpress).

Show your child how to use time more wisely



You have experienced a semester of the many demands of middle school. The second semester can be even

busier than the first. Using time wisely is essential. Your child should resolve to do so and you can help. Encourage your child to:

- **Expand use of planners.** Your child should already be writing down all her assignments, upcoming tests and due dates. Have her consider adding study schedules in her planner.
- **Practice saying no.** Your child can’t accept every invitation or volunteer for every event *and* stay on top of her schoolwork. Using time wisely means sometimes responding with, “Thanks for thinking of me, but I have too much on my plate right now.”
- **Take a different approach** for tests. Just one time, have your child agree to study 20 minutes a night for one week, instead of waiting until the night before the test. Discuss the difference in how she used her time, and what the result was.

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

Setting clear expectations for your middle schooler is key



Don't make your middle schooler guess what you expect from him. Spell it out! When it comes to setting expectations for your middle schooler:

- **Be precise.** "Clean the basement" might mean totally different things to you and your middle schooler, so make your instructions clear. "Please put your video games away, bring your dirty plate upstairs and vacuum the rug."
- **Give a time frame.** Attach a very specific time frame to chores. "I need you to empty the dishwasher within the next 15 minutes." It may help avoid foot-dragging on your middle schooler's part.
- **Get his input.** Your preteen isn't a little kid anymore, so don't treat him like one. Whenever possible, let him put in his two cents when it comes to the house rules. For instance, has he been insisting

that he's old enough for a later bedtime? He may be right.

- **Trust him.** Respect your middle schooler by assuming he'll do what he's told. (In other words, don't hover as he works.) If he falls short again and again, you may need to supervise more closely. But if he does well? Honor him with some breathing room.
- **Offer praise.** Is your middle schooler doing a great job following the rules and pitching in? Let him know!

Source: "Tell Your Preteens What You Expect," Cooperative Extension Service, University of Maryland at College Park, <http://extension.umd.edu/publications/pdfs/L249.pdf>.

"If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders."

—Abigail Van Buren

Expect your middle schooler to remain a part of the family



Middle school is often the age of the closed door. Your once-affectionate child wants to be alone much of the time.

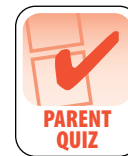
This behavior reflects that your child is growing up and becoming a separate person. You should respect it, but at the same time never let your child lose sight of the fact that he is part of a family. Privacy is fine, but total separation from the family is not. Consider these guidelines:

- **Insist your child spend** most of his time at home. Two evenings a week is plenty of time with friends.

- **Keep TVs and computers** in family areas. Having one in his bedroom gives your child more reason to separate himself.
- **Grant your child leeway** when it comes to family activities. Allow him to sometimes opt out, but make it clear there are other times when he will have to come along.
- **Consider letting your child** bring a friend to spend time with your family. Discuss this in advance so he knows that this is an occasional treat.

Source: Tom McMahon, *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents with Kids 11 to 19*, ISBN: 0-671-89106-5 (Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, www.simonsays.com).

Do you know how to apply effective consequences?



Disciplining your child involves establishing consequences for broken rules. Are your consequences effective and

appropriate? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you use natural consequences** when possible? Example: Your child leaves her shoes outside, again. It rains and they are ruined. She must earn the money to buy new ones herself.
- ___ **2. Do you use logical consequences** when natural consequences don't apply? Example: Your child breaks curfew on Friday night. She must stay in the next night.
- ___ **3. Do you make consequences meaningful?** Consequence should involve something your child cares about.
- ___ **4. Do you stay in the present** when setting consequences? Don't drag up past mistakes or predict mistakes your child will make in the future.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are setting suitable consequences. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

Middle School Parents
still make the difference!

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

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May
by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS,
Inc., an independent, private agency.
Equal opportunity employer.
Copyright © 2010 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

Writers: Maria Koklanaris & Holly Smith.

Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Guard against negative peer pressure from other adults



Children are not the only ones who face peer pressure at this age. As a parent, you may find yourself battling it, too.

Usually, this parent peer pressure is no better for your child than the kind she gets from her own peers. It involves someone else trying to get her to do what isn't right for her. But this time they are going through you.

Guard against:

- **The parent version** of “everyone else is doing it.” Just because a parent organizes a co-ed sleep-over doesn't mean your child should go. Say, “I appreciate the

invitation, but our rule is that Kelsey doesn't attend these parties. That's our final decision.”

- **Being made to feel guilty.** Stick to your values no matter what others say to you.
- **Parents who supply children** with alcohol. Yes, there are those who say “They're going to do it anyway. They might as well do it safely at home.” This is nonsense! And it sends a terrible message. Do not ever let your child attend events chaperoned by such adults.

Source: Susan Borowitz, *When We're in Public, Pretend You Don't Know Me*, ISBN: 0-446-67951-8 (Warner Books, www.twbookmark.com).

Communication, common sense lead to your child's online safety



Your preteen may be a whiz when it comes to surfing the Internet, but that doesn't mean he's an expert at keeping himself safe online. In fact, his “super surfing skills” might lead him to think he's safer than he really is. And that's where you come in.

Take time to talk with your middle schooler about staying safe online, and don't feel intimidated because he knows more about how the computer works. You're the adult, and you know more about how the world works.

To help your middle schooler stay safe when he's online:

- **Enforce some rules.** Are chat rooms off-limits? If so, make sure your preteen knows. Is he forbidden from visiting fee-based sites? Make that clear. Establish serious consequences if your child breaks the rules.

- **Talk about the dangers.** Don't assume your preteen knows the pitfalls of sharing too much information online. Speak with him about keeping all of his personal information private. Also, remind him that “stranger danger” applies online, too.
- **Trust, but verify.** Tell your preteen that inappropriate sites are forbidden, but also block them with parental-control software.
- **Be aware of his online life.** Does your preteen have a MySpace or Facebook account? That may be fine—as long as he's not keeping it secret.
- **Don't allow the computer** in your preteen's bedroom. He's less likely to get into trouble if he's surfing the Internet in the living room or kitchen.

Source: “Safety Tips,” NetSmartz Workshop, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, www.netsmartz.org/safety/safetytips.htm.

Q: My eighth grader gets stressed about everything, from homework to snowstorms! How can I help her better manage her anxiety and learn how to just “go with the flow”?

Questions & Answers

A: Middle school is full of big changes, so it makes sense that your child gets worked up sometimes. Still, if the stress itself—rather than whatever set it off—is becoming too much, it's time to talk her back from the ledge.

To help your child better manage her everyday stress:

- **Teach her to recognize** the warning signs. Does your child start twirling her hair or biting her nails when she gets anxious? Have her pay attention to those warning signs. Stress is much more manageable when it's caught early.
- **Help her develop** an action plan. If your child is having fits over an upcoming project, show her how to break it into small parts. A big task is daunting, but a series of smaller ones may not be.
- **Encourage** healthy habits. A good diet and adequate sleep can go a long way toward easing anxiety.
- **Find ways** for her to blow off steam. Exercise, reading or chatting with a friend may be all your child needs to calm down.
- **Remind her** that you have her back. Your stressed-out child may feel like the weight of the world is on her shoulders. So let her know you're right there with her and will help her overcome her stress and be successful.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Attendance

After-school activities benefit your preteen



Middle schoolers often have access to after-school programs either at school or in the community. Many such

programs are academic. Others help your child do better in school in other ways. Regular attendance in such programs may be worthwhile.

In fact, research shows that regular attendance in after-school programs promotes:

- **Better social skills.** This includes the ability to communicate and solve problems.
- **Better performance in school.** That includes higher grades and more completion of homework. Also seen: Not dropping out and more attachment to school.
- **Healthier habits.** That includes less cigarette and drug use.

To help your child get these benefits:

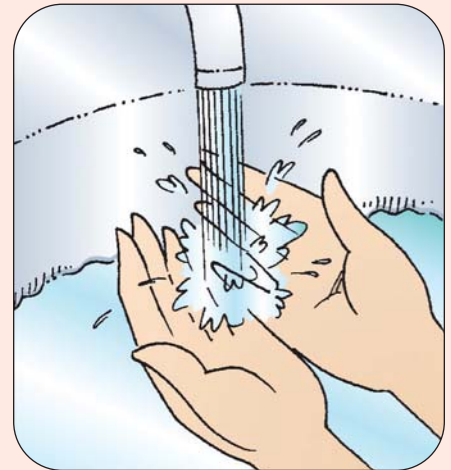
- **Find safe transportation.** Some after-school programs include bus transportation. If not, your child may be able to get home in a car pool or community bus.
- **Consider home schedules.** Of course your child has responsibilities at home. Try adjusting these perhaps twice a week so your child can attend a program.
- **Enlist other adults.** A program run by adults your child knows and trusts is ideal. But if not, find an adult leader he can respect.
- **Look for a program** that interests your child. At the least, ask him to give it a chance.

Source: Elena Kennedy, Brooke Wilson and others, "Improving Attendance and Retention in Out-of-School Time Programs," Child Trends, www.childtrends.org/files/child_trends-2007_06_19_RB_AttendandReten.pdf.

Help your preteen avoid those winter colds with good hygiene

Your preteen can't learn much in school if she's stuck at home with a cold or the flu! So keep her attendance up by helping her stay healthy this winter. Here's how:

- **Remind her to dress appropriately.** Your preteen may think she's "too cool" for a hat and gloves when the days turn frigid, but insist she wear them anyway.
- **Avoid nosebleeds.** Dry winter air can cause nasal irritation. Keep your preteen's nose from drying out by using saline spray or a cool-mist humidifier.
- **Wash, wash, wash.** Germs love to hitch rides on dirty fingers, so remind your preteen to wash her hands often. It's one of the best ways to avoid wintertime bugs.



- **Soothe dry, cracked skin.** Have your preteen use lotion as needed.

Source: "Winter Health and Safety," KeepKidsHealthy.com, www.keepkidshealthy.com/welcome/winter/winter_health_safety.html.

Why is it so important for your middle schooler to be in school?



Every day of school is important. But after winter break, missing days of school can be especially tough on your child. She should be in school every day unless she is ill.

Here's why:

- **Once the year is half over,** many teachers turn a serious eye to the end-of-year exams that are so important to school accreditation. The pace of instruction picks up. It becomes more difficult to catch up after missed days.
- **In just a few weeks,** if not before, teachers will also begin to review for the end-of-year exams. This

review will go on at the same time as regular teaching.

- **Your child may have more homework** as a result of faster instruction and review. The more time she is out of school, the more it piles up. And she will be required to turn it all in.

Please continue to:

- **Emphasize to your child** the importance of daily attendance. Being on time is important, too!
- **Accept no excuses** except true illness for having your child miss school.
- **Refrain from making plans** for your child that would require her to miss school.