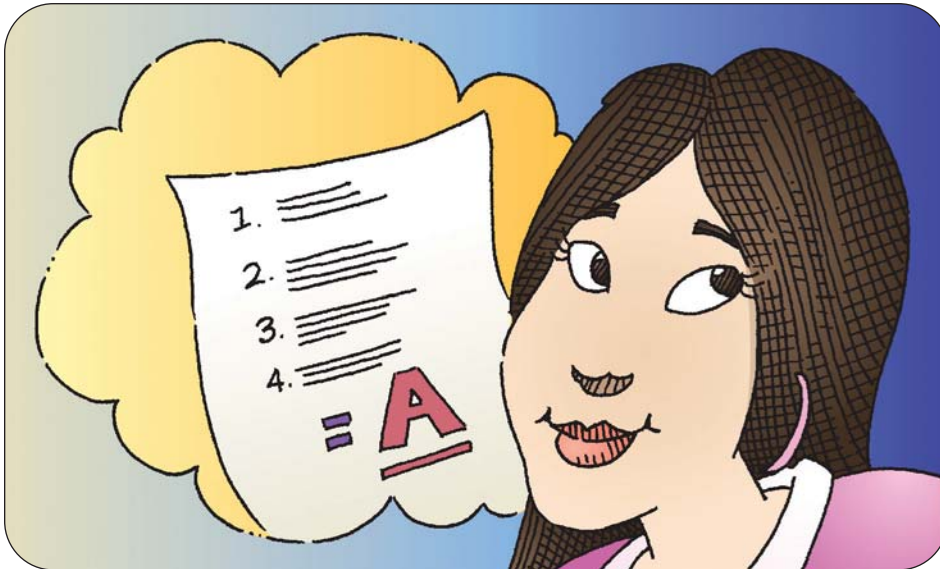


# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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A Service of the Newton County Schools

*still make the difference!*



## Aim for total clarity when setting expectations for your preteen

**W**hen your child was small, you used clear, concrete language to convey your expectations. Why? You wanted to make sure she could understand and comprehend.

Now your child is older, but clear expectations are still the way to go. With a preteen or young teen, anything less gives her too much “wiggle room.” At this age, do not give your child an out. She just might take it. Instead:

- **Speak in terms of what you want** and the expectations you have. Telling your child what she *must* do may not work. In the end you cannot control her behavior. You can only control yours. “I expect you to complete your homework before you leave the house,” is

more effective than, “You’d better do your homework now.”

- **Encourage your child** to be clear about her own expectations. If she says she expects an A on the next test, have her tell you exactly how she plans to get there. Writing down the plan is even better.
- **Discuss teachers’ expectations.** “When Mrs. Jones tells you on Friday that you have a test on Monday, what does she expect?” If you get a blank look in return, supply the answer for your child. “She expects you to start reviewing the material right away so that you will be prepared on Monday.”

Source: Jody Johnston Pawel, *The Parent’s Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, ISBN: 1-929643-34-9 (Ambris Publishing, [www.parentstoolshop.com](http://www.parentstoolshop.com)).

## Motivate your preteen with enthusiasm



Keep your preteen motivated and you’ll keep him on the path to school success! To help motivate him to do well in school and beyond:

- **Focus on his efforts.** Yes, grades matter. But so does hard work. So the next time your preteen studies hard but brings home a less-than-perfect grade, applaud him anyway. Let him know his effort matters as much as the outcome.
- **Take an interest** in what he’s learning. Enthusiasm is contagious, so spread some to your preteen. Ask him about what’s happening in class and show interest in what you hear. Is he reading about the Civil War? Mention how cool it would be to tour a battlefield. Is he studying French? Go online and search for images of the Eiffel Tower.
- **Be on his side.** Whether it’s with a kiss on the cheek or a quick squeeze before he heads out the door, let your preteen know you love him every single day. The more supported and cared about he feels, the more motivated he may be to do well in school.

# Let the power of positive peer pressure work for your preteen



You've heard the horror stories: Peer pressure is dangerous. It causes otherwise good kids to do bad things.

While it's true that negative peer pressure can lead to trouble, there's such a thing as *positive* peer pressure, too. Unlike its negative counterpart, positive peer pressure may encourage kids to:

- **Work hard** (or harder) in school.
- **Try a new sport** or other healthful activity.
- **Develop a good attitude** about school or themselves.
- **Behave more respectfully** toward teachers and other adults.

One way to help your preteen enjoy the benefits of positive peer pressure is to nudge him toward honest, decent friends. You can't choose his friends, but you can influence the sorts of kids he selects if you:

- **Talk about what makes** a good friend. "Would a friend put you in

a dangerous situation? Would he enjoy seeing you get in trouble?"

- **Reinforce your values.** "A real friend stands up for you when someone else tries to force you to do something. He wants you to do the right—not the wrong—thing." As great as positive peer pressure is, don't rely on it constantly. Whether it's joining the drama club or trying out for wrestling, your preteen's reasons for pursuing something should go beyond "because all my friends are doing it."

Source: Stacey Schifferdecker, "Harnessing the Power of Positive Peer Pressure," More4Kids.info, www.more4kids.info/611/positive-peer-pressure.

**"Character isn't inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action."**

—Helen Gahagan Douglas

# Involvement in middle school is different, but no less important



The school year is well underway. You've emailed your child's teachers and attended back-to-school night. That was a great start toward involvement.

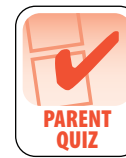
But, it's just a start. To keep it going:

- **Join your school's** parent-teacher organization. If you can find time to attend even one meeting, you are almost guaranteed to learn something you didn't know about your child's school.
- **Meet an administrator.** There may be thousands of parents of students at your child's school.

Administrators do not know all of them (or even most of them) by name. But if you introduce yourself, you will have a reference point to give the administrator should you ever need to work together directly.

- **Get to know** the guidance counselor. Guidance counselors in middle school are crucial members of the team. They work hard to get to know the students they are responsible for. They are wonderful resources for the times when you need help with issues that are not purely academic.

# Are you helping your child connect to middle school?



Research shows that students who participate with their schools beyond the academic day feel more connected to school.

This helps them do better in school.

Are you encouraging your child to participate and connect to middle school? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Have you reviewed the list** of school activities with your child so you know what's available?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to participate in a club or activity that matches her interests?
3. **Are you enthusiastic** if your child expresses interest in trying a new club or activity?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to attend activities such as school sporting events or dances?
5. **Do you urge your child** to take advantage of time with teachers after school or homework clubs?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child feel like a part of her middle school. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Reduce your middle schooler's test anxiety with preparation



Does the thought of an upcoming math test give your middle schooler sweaty palms and a stomach-ache? Help her

prepare for the big event and she may be less nervous about it. Here's how:

- **Remind her not to cram.** One frantic night of studying won't pay off on test day. Instead, your preteen should begin preparing at least one week in advance. That way, if she doesn't understand something, she'll have time to get help before the test.
- **Use the textbook** and class notes. Are there practice tests in your middle schooler's math book? Encourage her to take them as she

prepares for the big exam. If there aren't any, see if you can help her create a practice quiz by using her notes from class.

- **Have her ask for clarification.** If your preteen is unsure of what's going to be on the test, have her ask her teacher. Few things are scarier than the unknown, so the more information she has, the more confident she may feel.
- **Help her take care of herself.** Make sure your preteen is rested and fed on exam day. Be sure she gets enough sleep the night before and offer her a healthful breakfast that morning.

Source: "Preparing for a Math Test," Mission College, [http://salsa.missioncollege.org/mss/stories/storyReader\\$29](http://salsa.missioncollege.org/mss/stories/storyReader$29).

# Give your middle schooler some extra incentive to keep reading



All the way through college and beyond, the best readers are often the best learners. The more your child reads, the better off he'll be. The trick, of course, is getting him to *want* to read. Try a few of these ideas:

- **Issue a challenge.** Research has shown that reading at least four books over a summer is particularly helpful. So apply that to another three-month period—October, November and December—and challenge your child to read four books by 2010. Offer some incentive, such as the chance to stay up later, or have an additional privilege for doing so.
- **Ask your child questions** about what he is reading. If you are really at a loss, help him choose at least one book that has discussion

questions at the end. Once he's finished reading the book, get his opinion on the questions.

- **Enlist help.** Seek out the librarians at your child's school and ask them to recommend books based on your child's reading level and interests. Make a point of telling them you are actively trying to get him to read more. Do the same at your community library. Every so often, visit it with your preteen. Each of you should check out a book or two.
- **Take advantage** of the upcoming holiday movie season. Some of the movies your child hopes to see may be based on books. Make reading the book a condition for seeing the movie.

Source: Hannah Trierweiler, "Sunscreen ... Shade ... Books! How to help kids discover the joy of summer reading," *Instructor*, May/June 2009 (Scholastic, [www.scholastic.com/instructor](http://www.scholastic.com/instructor)).

**Q:** Lots of middle schoolers claim their teachers treat them unfairly, but in the case of my son's language-arts teacher, I think it may be true. What should I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Before you do anything, it's important to get the facts straight. Start by having a talk with your child and asking specifically why he feels he's being mistreated. Learn the details of the situation to make sure you have the *whole* story.

For instance, if your child mentions that the teacher unfairly accused him of disrupting the class, ask if the teacher may have had a particular reason for suspecting him. Had he disrupted the class before? Was he sitting with a group of unruly kids and just got caught up in the mix?

If, after talking with your child, you're convinced that something unfair is happening:

1. **Schedule a time to meet** with your child's teacher to talk about your concerns.
  2. **Explain what your child** has told you in a respectful and clear way. Don't be defensive.
  3. **Listen carefully** to the teacher as she clarifies things from her perspective.
  4. **Discuss possible solutions.** Work with the teacher to find ways to solve the problem.
  5. **Talk with your son** about your meeting. Be sure to avoid making any negative comments about the teacher to him.
- If, despite talking with your child's teacher, the trouble continues, take the matter to the school principal.

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Discipline

## Find out your school's policy for cell phones



Here's one change from elementary to middle school you may not have thought of:

In elementary school, few students have cell

phones. In middle school, many do. Your child is likely to want one. If you agree, be aware that having a phone is a serious responsibility both on and off school property.

Here are some things to think about before you make a decision:

- **School rules.** Many middle schools permit students to have phones on the property. But almost all require that phones be off during the academic day. Learn the policy. Spell out for your child the consequences of not following it.
- **Money.** Cell phone use can be expensive. For middle and high school students, most of the expense comes from sending and receiving text messages. Some students have thousands of texts a month. Who will pay for the use of the phone? Will your child have unlimited text messaging? Decide, and get agreement from your child *before* getting a phone.
- **Danger.** Sending a threatening text on a phone can get your child in huge trouble. Another danger zone is the camera feature on most phones. Forbid your child from sending or receiving photos that are threatening or even slightly sexually suggestive.

Source: Greg Taillon, "Cell Phones for Kids?" Preteenagers Today, [www.preteenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/cellphone.htm](http://www.preteenagerstoday.com/resources/articles/cellphone.htm).

## Use empathy, advice to teach your preteen self-control

**D**oes your preteen "lose it" when he gets upset? It's time to work on his self-control. Teaching your preteen to control himself when he's angry or frustrated will help him grow into a conscientious, mature adult.

The next time your preteen blows a fuse:

- **Define the problem.** "You're upset about having so many projects due at once."
- **Empathize.** "It's a lot of work. I'd feel overwhelmed, too."
- **Give instructions.** "Take a few deep breaths and sit down."
- **Stay calm.** He won't stop yelling if you start yelling.



- **Talk about it.** Once your preteen's anger has blown over, talk about how he could use self-control to better handle his emotions 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](http://www.girlsandboystown.org)).

## Show your child how to act respectfully by *earning* respect



Your child has reached the age where she can see through phoniness. If you say one thing and do another, the

bad consequences will come in threes. First, she'll do what you do, not what you say. Second, she'll lose respect for you. Third, she won't know how to act in a respectful way, affecting home life, school life and the rest of her life.

So live by these values and it's likely your child will too:

- **Be honest.** Tell the truth. Admit mistakes—don't blame others for them. Apologize (yes, to your child, too) when you are wrong.
- **Be consistent.** When you make a rule, stick to it. That applies to

rules you make for your child and those you make for yourself.

- **Be selfless.** You're a parent—therefore, your child's needs come first. (Take note that the word is *needs*, not *wants*.) Your child is not a parent and so cannot completely emulate you here. But your example shows her how to be considerate of others.
- **Show dignity.** Convey to your child that no one can make you feel small unless you allow it. Ugly words hurt. And so does being disrespected. Instead of stooping to someone else's level, tell your preteen to rise above it.

Source: Michael J. Bradley, *Yes, Your Teen is Crazy: Loving Your Kid Without Losing Your Mind*, ISBN: 0-936197-44-7 (Harbor Press, [www.harborpress.com](http://www.harborpress.com)).