

Middle School Parents[®]

Franklin County Middle School

still make the difference!



Create a learning environment at home for your middle schooler

Who plays the biggest role in whether or not your preteen fulfills his potential? According to many experts, it's you! Parents are enormously important when it comes to helping children excel in school and beyond.

By creating a learning-friendly environment at home, you'll go a long way toward keeping your preteen primed for learning all through his school years.

To create such an environment:

- **Spend time together.** It sounds simple, but just hanging out with your preteen supports his learning. Whether you chat at the dinner table or toss a ball back and forth outdoors, the time you spend connecting with your preteen is time well spent.

- **Share books.** Your preteen may think he's too old for story time, but how about reading alongside each other for a few minutes each night? If he's tackling a particular book for school, why not read it yourself? Later on, discuss it together.
- **Work on a project.** Think about your preteen's interests and find a project that utilizes them. Does he like working with his hands? Build a birdhouse or bookshelf together. Is he bookish or computer-oriented? Go online and start researching your family tree. Any project you do together is likely to boost his learning skills.

Source: "Making the Most of Time with Your Child," ParentsCentre, www.parentscentre.gov.uk/_files/D52932991C68EC74A73647A9BC114C3C.pdf.

Motivate your child by staying in the present



An unmotivated child often has a tough time living in the present. If she is unhappy with the way she's perform-

ing now, she may focus on the past. "I used to make good grades, but then school got to be so hard!"

Help your child stay in the present by being there yourself. Don't bring up past mistakes. Don't say, "We know you can do better next time." Your intentions may be good, but your child hears that you are disappointed.

Instead, try to:

- **Notice small positive steps.** Say, "I see you brought your history book home." Don't add, "Why can't you *always* remember it?"
- **Comment on effort** that is happening now. "You are working hard on your homework."
- **Help your child solve problems.** Avoid saying, "Get your soccer cleats on now!" This tells your child she can't figure out a simple task. On the other hand, "We need to leave for soccer in ten minutes," shows your child you trust her to know what to do.

Source: Natalie Rathvon, *The Unmotivated Child: Helping Your Underachiever Become a Successful Student*, ISBN: 0-684-80306-2 (Fireside, a Simon & Schuster company, 1-800-323-7445, www.simonsays.com).

Encourage your middle schooler to explore all types of careers



By middle school, most children have developed individual skills and hobbies. You can help your child see how these

lead to careers.

Here's how:

- **Talk about your job.** Include specifics, such as, "I write letters on the computer and help customers on the phone." This helps your child see how things he does now (such as write reports and solve problems) can help him later.
- **Bring your child to work.** Explain your responsibilities and

introduce him to coworkers. If he's fascinated with the jobs of friends or relatives, perhaps they'd take him to work, too.

- **Be positive.** Talk more about the things you like at work than the things you don't like. Send the message that work can be fun.
- **Don't stereotype.** Encourage your child to consider all kinds of careers, whether they're traditionally male or female. A girl can become a police officer and a boy can become a nurse.

Source: Lori B. Murray, "Kindling Great Career Expectations," *Parenting* (The Parenting Group, www.parenting.com).

Know what types of involvement benefit your child, the school



Working with the school at this age is a dilemma for many parents. When your child was in elementary school, the path to parent involvement was more clear. Your child's

teacher probably needed volunteers and sent a letter home requesting specific help.

In middle school, receiving such a letter is unusual. Having students come and go all day is challenging for teachers. Adding parent volunteers into this mix could be chaotic.

Never think, though, that your child's school doesn't value you. The school, and your child, still need you very much.

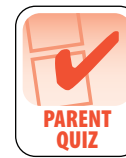
Of course it is important that you show up at school to attend conferences and other school events. And there are things you can do at home, too:

- **Encourage your child's progress and effort in school.**

- **Be aware of your child's homework.** Monitor and suggest ways your child can find help. But *never* do homework for your child.
- **Talk to your child** about what he would like to do when he graduates. The day will arrive sooner than you might imagine!

Source: Kathleen Cotton and Karen Reed Wikeland, "Parent Involvement in Education," Northwest Regional Education Library, www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu6.html.

Are you teaching your child how to handle anger?



It started as a simple disagreement. She wanted to stay up later. You said "no." Then she got mad and yelled. You

yelled back. Pretty soon, you were both out of control.

Sound familiar? Anger is a normal emotion. But left uncontrolled, it can destroy the relationship between parents and kids. Are you letting anger spiral out of control? Answer *yes* or *no* to each statement below.

___ 1. I've talked with my child about how to handle anger. I encourage her to use methods like exercise and talking it out.

___ 2. I know my child takes cues from me. So I try to model positive ways of handling anger.

___ 3. My child knows that in our family, physical violence is never acceptable.

___ 4. I take a time-out if I am very angry. If my child is very angry, I may give her a time-out.

___ 5. I try to listen more than I talk, especially when I am upset.

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are doing a good job of keeping anger under control. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Be specific & clear when setting limits for your middle schooler



It isn't always easy to discipline your preteen or get him to follow the rules. After all, it's normal for him to test your limits and angle for more freedom.

Still, your preteen cares very much what you think of him and he wants to please you (even if he doesn't always act like it). But in order to behave properly, he needs to know what you expect. To be sure he does:

- **Spell it out.** Never assume your preteen knows what's allowed. Tell him *exactly* what you expect. "You must be inside by eight o'clock on school nights. No exceptions."
- **Explain *why*** you have the rules you do. You don't need to justify your rules, but help him

understand them. "You can't watch TV all night because it cuts into homework and family time."

- **Get his input.** If you're planning to modify a rule, let your preteen add his two cents. "We're considering moving your curfew back a bit. What time do you think is reasonable?" You may not follow his suggestion, but hear him out.
- **Back off.** Once your preteen has a good understanding of the house rules, don't nag him about them. Instead, trust that he'll obey them. If he doesn't, be sure to enforce reasonable consequences.

Source: Billie H. Frazier, Ph.D. and Bonnie B. Tyler, Ph.D., "Tell Your Preteens What You Expect," University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service, www.agnr.umd.edu/ces/pubs/pdf/L249.pdf.

Show your child that writing is an important part of everyday life



The best way to encourage your middle schooler to write may also be the easiest: Put pen to paper.

In other words, let her see you writing! The more she notices you writing thank-you notes or jotting down grocery lists, the more she'll see that writing is a vital skill—not to mention an important part of daily life.

Beyond setting a good example, here are a few other ways to get the "writing matters" concept across to your middle schooler:

- **Keep her supplied.** The times may be high-tech, but her writing materials don't need to be. Keep her desk stocked with pens, markers and paper. Encourage her to use these "old-fashioned" goodies.
- **Include her** in writing-related tasks. If you're sending out a stack

of holiday cards, have your middle schooler help address the envelopes. Better yet, ask her to write a brief note in each one.

- **Introduce her to your world.** If you write at work, tell your middle schooler about it. "This is a quarterly report I wrote. It took awhile to finish, but it turned out really well." Point out how the writing skills she's learning now—such as how to be clear and concise—may someday help her in her own career.
- **Boost her vocabulary.** Share a new word with your middle schooler each week. It may seem like she doesn't notice, but that new word just may turn up in her writing someday!

Source: Rhonda Barton, "Encouraging the Write Stuff," Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, www.nwrel.org/comm/monthly/encourage.html.

Q: My eighth-grade daughter and I used to be really close, but now everything I do seems to set her off. All I hear these days is, "Leave me alone!" How can I stay involved in her life?

Questions & Answers

A: Welcome to life with a budding teenager! Mother-daughter relationships are always complex, but it's especially true as your daughter reaches the teenage years. This certainly makes it difficult to stay involved with what's going on at school and in her life.

She will likely be embarrassed to see you at the school. And she may avoid talking with you about her problems.

The important thing is to remain involved. There's no magic to navigating this tricky time, but there are ways to stay sane as you move through it. You can:

- **Expect some turmoil.** Your daughter will be irritated by some of what you say or do—no matter how you *say* or *do* it—so just accept it.
- **Remind yourself** that it's about love. Your daughter likely reacts to you so intensely because she loves you so intensely. If she didn't care about you or your opinions, why would she bother reacting at all? This won't make her anger easier to take, but it may shed some light on it.
- **See things** from your child's perspective. Your attempts at a comforting hug may be her "proof that Mom thinks I'm still a baby." So keep this in mind the next time you ask yourself, "Why is she getting angry at me?"

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Building Study Skills

Create a study plan that works for your child



By middle school, your child should have a sense of the study plan that works best for him.

If he is still studying in a haphazard fashion, he is robbing himself of the chance to do his best in school.

His plan should include things like:

- **When to study.** If possible, your child should study when he feels sharpest and most alert. For some kids, it's right after school. For others, it's after dinner.
- **Where to study.** Your child should avoid distractions when studying for a test. If this is not possible at home, he may need to try the library.
- **How to focus.** If your child is in a comfortable and quiet place, but still can't set his mind to work, he may be tired, hungry, thirsty or in need of a burst of exercise. Listening to and acting on these signals from his body may help his mental sharpness.
- **Methods that work.** Some kids read a chapter and take notes from it. Some photocopy the chapter so they can use a highlighter on the pages. Some ask parents to quiz them. Some make flashcards. Help your child figure out the methods that best help him retain information. Remind him to keep necessary supplies on hand and tell you when he is running low.

Source: Ron Fry, *Ace Any Test*, ISBN: 1-56414-230-2 (Career Press, 1-800-227-3371, www.careerpress.com).

Use a calendar to help your child tame long-term projects

Don't let the stress of a long-term project derail your middle schooler! Instead, help her stay on top of managing her time. Here's how:

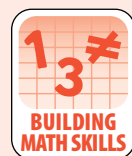
- **Give her a calendar.** Whether it's posted in her room or on the fridge, have your middle schooler list the due dates of her long-term assignments on a calendar.
- **Work backward.** If she has a project due on the 22nd, encourage her to write down "mini deadlines" every few days leading up to that date. For example, she could write "idea due" on the 3rd and "rough draft due" on the 8th. These shorter assignments



may make the bigger project seem less intimidating and more manageable.

- **Check in with her.** Don't badger your middle schooler, but do keep tabs on how her project is coming along.

Make math homework go more smoothly with pictures, phrases



Math is a subject based on logic, reasoning and patterns. But your child also needs memory for math success.

Suggest that your child make a guide of phrases and pictures to help him build a "math memory." Of course he can't use this on tests at school, but it can be a great homework resource. The guide can free his attention to focus on solving the problem and can help him memorize concepts.

Your child may want to include study aids like these:

- **Illustrations of shapes.** Did you know there are many kinds of four-sided figures? Your child's

guide can help him remember the difference between a rhombus and a trapezoid. There are also different kinds of triangles.

- **Phrases** such as *My Dear Aunt Sally*. This helps your child remember to *Multiply* and *Divide* before he *Adds* and *Subtracts*.
- **Pictures** that show real-life uses for math. For example, a drawing of a pizza cut into eight equal sections is a way to show fractions. One of the eight slices equals one-eighth. Two equals two-eighths or one-fourth.

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan, a Simon & Schuster company, 1-800-323-7445, www.simonsays.com).