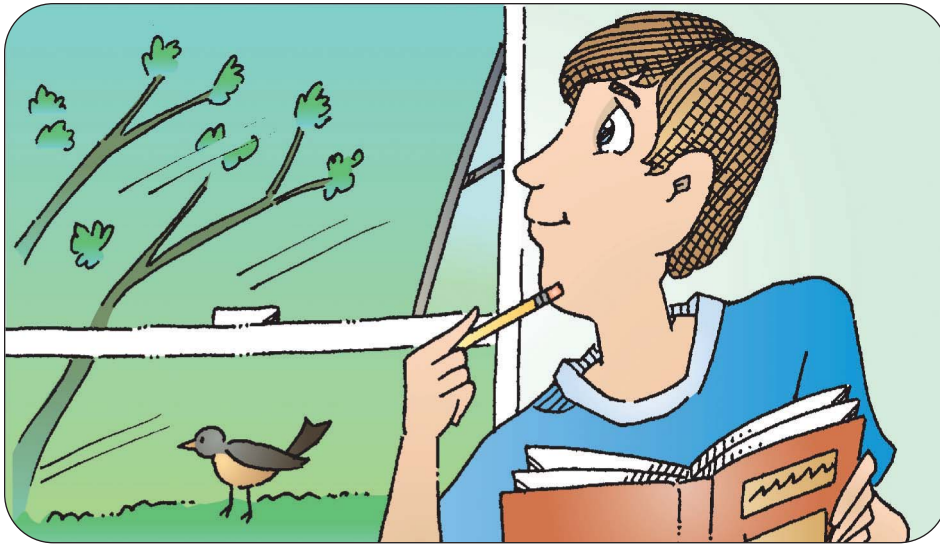


Middle School Parents[®]

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Family Support Section
Hawaii State Department of Education

still make the difference!



Make school attendance a high priority for your middle schooler

Fever is a reason to keep your child home from school. “Spring fever,” however, doesn’t count.

Yes, the weather is turning warmer in many places. Yes, the days are longer. Yes, school is still in session and your child needs to be there.

As tempting as it may be to let your child “take a break” after staying up too late, or because it’s a beautiful day outside, don’t give in. Here are some reasons that attending school is critical:

- **End-of-year exams approach.** Sometime in the next few weeks, most students will take the end-of-year exams mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. Class review for these is important to student success. And it’s going on now. Your child needs to be there.

- **Regular schoolwork.** Even in the midst of review, your child may still have assigned projects and homework. Missing school at this busy time can cause your child to fall behind—quickly.
- **Priorities.** Your child’s education should be at the top of your list of priorities. That’s true even when the spring weather beckons. Allowing your child to miss school (except for illnesses, emergencies or religious observances) calls your priorities into question. It also confuses your middle schooler, who may get the message that school is only important some of the time.

Source: “Report to Parents—School Attendance,” National Association of Elementary School Principals, www.naesp.org/resources/2/Report_to_Parents/2008/rtp09-08.pdf.

Develop your child’s sense of time with a timer



Middle schoolers dawdle and waste time. That’s because most of them don’t have a good sense of time.

They might talk on the phone for an hour and think it has only been five minutes. When their evening vanishes, they’re amazed they don’t have any time left for homework.

Here’s one strategy to help your middle schooler develop a better sense of time:

- **Get a kitchen timer.** You can use the timer on your oven or any other device that sounds an alarm after a certain amount of time has passed.
- **Create a time limit.** Limit phone calls and homework breaks to a certain time—10 minutes. Set the timer for that time to warn her when her time is up.
- **Challenge you child.** Use the timer when you need your child to complete a task in a certain amount of time. You won’t have to remind or nag her when the time comes. The timer will do that for you!

Source: Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, *The Roller-Coaster Years: A Comprehensive Guide for Parents of 10- to 15-Year-Olds*, ISBN: 0-553-06684-6 (Broadway Books, 212-782-9000, www.randomhouse.com/broadway).

Five steps can help your preteen sharpen decision-making skills



You can't make all of your preteen's decisions for her, but you can help sharpen her decision-making skills. Encourage your middle schooler to:

- 1. Define the problem.** Before she can solve a problem, your preteen needs to understand what that problem is. Remind her to put a tough issue into words before she tries tackling it.
- 2. Brainstorm solutions.** Once your preteen has defined the problem, get her to run through a number of possible fixes. During this step, she shouldn't get bogged down in gauging each idea—she should simply put her ideas out there.
- 3. Evaluate her options.** Now that she's come up with several potential plans of action, your preteen needs to weigh the pros and cons of each. Does one solution seem especially strong? Does another sound impossible? This is the time

to decide which option seems the most workable.

- 4. Put her plan in motion.** It's time for your preteen to try out the solution she thinks is best. To do so, she should start by devising a plan. Let her follow her plan by herself, but offer guidance if she's unsure how to proceed.
- 5. Reassess the situation.** How is her strategy working? Is it helping her solve the problem or reach her goal? If yes, wonderful! If not, suggest that your preteen go back to the "evaluating" stage to find another approach.

Source: Susan Carney, "Problem Solving Skills for Teens," Suite101.com, http://youthdevelopment.suite101.com/article.cfm/problem_solving_skills_for_teens.

"Kids can be a pain in the neck when they're not a lump in your throat."

—Barbara Johnson

Show your middle schooler how to triumph over peer pressure



As upsetting as the idea of negative peer pressure is, there are ways to help your middle schooler avoid falling victim to it.

Here are a few:

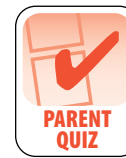
- **Give him a script.** If your middle schooler struggles to respond to pressure from other kids, rehearse scenarios with him. "Okay, pretend I just asked you to ditch school with me. What are you going to say?"
- **Encourage him to take a stand.** Let your middle schooler know it's okay to have strong opinions about things like drinking, drugs

and violence. He has a right to express—and live by—your family's values, so give him the self-confidence to stand up to peers when they're trying to lead him astray.

- **Insist he not become a bully.** Imposing negative peer pressure is just as bad as—if not worse than—falling victim to it. So you should never tolerate any type of bullying behavior from your middle schooler. Ever.

Source: Mike Hardcastle, "Beating Peer Pressure," About.com, <http://teenadvice.about.com/cs/peerpressure/a/blpeerpressure.htm>.

Do you know what your preteen is doing after school?



Warmer weather and longer days can also mean more opportunity for your child to get into trouble in the first few

hours after school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out how well you are monitoring your child's after-school time:

- 1. Do you make sure** your child has an adult contact after school, such as a relative, neighbor or sitter?
- 2. Do you keep in touch** by phone when your child is out of school and you are not there?
- 3. Do you encourage** your child to be involved in supervised extra-curricular activities after school?
- 4. Do you have rules** about who may be in the house when you are not there?
- 5. Have you and your child** discussed the dangers that kids can get into after school (such as alcohol, illegal drugs) and how to avoid them?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are working hard to keep your child safe and productive after school. For *no* answers, try those suggestions.

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Look for strategies to help your preteen improve vocabulary



It is almost impossible to have a vocabulary that is too strong. The greater your child's working vocabulary, the more he will understand higher-level conversations, a skill that will help him in high school and beyond. A stronger vocabulary can also increase his reading comprehension.

Encourage your preteen to:

- **Read.** Most of what your preteen reads should be easy for him. If he likes a book by a certain author, encourage him to read others by that author. If he has a special interest such as sports, suggest that he read a biography of a famous athlete. Every so often, encourage him to challenge himself by reading something beyond his reading level.
- **Look it up.** The dictionary remains one of your child's most important tools. So is a thesaurus, a dictionary of synonyms. Keep these

handy. Send your child to them whenever he meets a word he doesn't know.

- **Practice.** It is a great start when your child finds the meaning of a new word. But that new word will soon be lost to him if he doesn't go any further than that. Remind him to use the new words he learns when he speaks. If he feels awkward about practicing with others, ask him to practice with you. Compliment him for strong vocabulary. For example: "You sound like a college student."
- **Speak.** Talking comfortably with his peers is an important social skill. But it may not do much to increase your child's vocabulary. He should talk often with adults in your community. Be careful not to "do the talking for him" when he is around adults.

Source: Eric Jensen, *Student Success Secrets*, ISBN: 0-8120-9488-3 (Barron's Educational Series, 1-800-645-3476, www.barroneduc.com).

Encourage your middle schooler to build time-management skills



Most preteens could use some help when it comes to managing the clock! To improve her time-management skills, remind your middle schooler to:

- **Separate *have-to's* from *want-to's*.** In other words, get your preteen to understand the difference between things she must do and things she'd like to do. Her *have-to's* might include things like homework and chores. Her *want-to's* may include hanging out with friends, playing on the computer or watching TV.

- **Make a time budget.** Have your preteen write down how many free hours she has each day. Next, work with her on dividing up those hours between her *have-to's* and *want-to's*. (Obviously, the *have-to's* come first.)
- **Evaluate the situation.** After a week or so of using her time budget, ask your preteen how she's doing. Is she better able to handle her time? If not, brainstorm ideas for getting her schedule back on track.

Source: "Time Management: You Vs. The Clock," PBSKids.org, <http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/school/time>.

Q: My eighth grader is much more computer-savvy than I am, and he knows it. How can I monitor his online activities and keep him safe if so much of this stuff is over my head?

Questions & Answers

A: Your child may be tech-savvy, but you're world-savvy. And your first responsibility is to keep him safe when he's online (regardless of how much more he thinks he knows than you do).

To help your child use the computer responsibly:

- **Set time limits.** Decide how much time he can spend on the computer and stick to it. If his school-related use varies day to day, at least set limits on how much leisure time he can spend online.
- **Spell out what he can and can't do online.** Is "chatting" with others off-limits? Tell your child. Are adult-oriented or violent sites absolutely forbidden? Say so from the outset.
- **Talk about Internet safety.** Go over the basics of online safety with your child. If you're not sure of them yourself, visit sites like www.wiredsafety.org or www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm and learn together.
- **Keep the computer out in the open.** Don't put a computer in your child's bedroom. Instead, keep it in the kitchen, the living room or another well-traveled area of your home.
- **Set parental controls.** Ask your Internet service provider about ways to block certain websites. Also consider investing in parental-control software.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Spending Time Together

Bond with your preteen through volunteering



April 22 is the 39th anniversary of Earth Day. This is a time when many community activities take place to encourage all of the Earth's citizens to do their part for our planet. Two days later, April 24 marks the first of three days named as Global Youth Service Days for 2009.

Why not commit to at least one act of service with your child? It's not how big or small your effort. It's that you're *making* the effort.

Here's what to do:

- **Call a family meeting** to discuss volunteering.
- **Talk about any type of service** family members may be doing right now. This includes volunteering at school, through a house of worship or through a charitable group. Is there some way the whole family can join in?
- **Make a list of projects** your family members might like to do. If you are stuck for ideas, you can ask your child's teachers for suggestions. You can also do an Internet search for volunteer activities in your area. Your local newspaper may be a source, too—many have “volunteers needed” sections.
- **Make your choice.** You can even try a one-time activity, such as a park clean-up day. This will give you a “taste” for a certain type of service. Then you can decide if you want to commit to more.

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, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

Use ‘downtime’ to communicate with your middle schooler

What's more vital than family time? Nothing! According to research, “downtime” spent with your family should rank right up there with education, athletics and community service, in terms of importance.

Some of the most meaningful things you can do with your preteen—talking, listening and letting her ask you questions—are also the easiest to do.

Why? Because you don't need to schedule them at all! You can have relaxed conversations with your preteen while you:

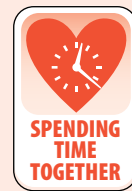
- **Prepare lunch together.**
- **Play a game of cards.**



- **Shop for groceries.**
- **Go for a neighborhood walk.**
- **Drive in the car.**
- **Do the dishes.**

Source: Nancy Brown, Ph.D., “Talking with Preteens,” the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, www.pamf.org/preteen/parents/talking.html#Activity%20B%20-%20Quality%20Time.

Clear your schedules and plan some weekly ‘family only’ time



People usually accomplish important tasks for work or school like this: They set aside the time, clear their schedules and write them down to make sure they don't forget.

Unfortunately, this doesn't happen as often when it comes to carving out family time. Family members expect it to “just happen.” But they're pulled in different directions and miss opportunities for special family time.

Don't fall into this trap. Take charge of family time! Pick a weekly time when everyone can spend one hour together. Write it down. Observe it without exception—except real emergencies.

Here are some guidelines to follow:

- **Keep this time** for the family only. Allow your child to “bring a friend” for other occasions, but not this one hour.
- **Eliminate distractions.** No phone (except emergencies). That includes text messages! No Internet.
- **Go outside** when possible for a walk or other activity. Now you've accomplished two goals—family togetherness and fitness.
- **Prepare a list of things** you can do inside when the weather doesn't permit outdoor fun.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? For Teens: A Guide to Building Character*, ISBN: 1-57542-029-5 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).