

Middle School Parents[®]

January 2009
Vol. 12, No. 5

Family Support Section
Hawaii State Department of Education

still make the difference!



Nurture your middle schooler's thinking skills in four easy steps

Sharpener your middle schooler's thinking skills and you'll boost her brainpower! Here's what to do:

- 1. Slow down.** Try not to rush through every conversation with your middle schooler. Instead, take the time to really discuss various topics, from the upcoming science fair to the weather. The more you explore things in depth, the more opportunities you'll be giving her to think.
- 2. Don't swoop in.** When your middle schooler is struggling with a question, don't be so quick to answer it for her. Instead, give her a chance to mull it over on her own. For example, if she says, "Which sport should I try out for?" get her to think it over carefully.

"Well, which one do you most enjoy? Is one more challenging than another?"

- 3. Ask her to explain herself.** When your middle schooler reaches a decision about something, have her put her thought process into words. ("I'm surprised that you picked basketball. Tell me why you chose that one.") By explaining how she made the decision she did, she'll be clarifying it in her own head.
- 4. Withhold judgment.** You may not agree with your middle schooler's way of thinking on every topic, but you should still respect it.

Source: Anthony J. LeSorti, "Developing Thinking in the Gifted," The Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, www.penngifted.org/pubs/PageBulletinThinking.cfm.

Be aware of prescription drug abuse



The easiest drug for kids to get may not be marijuana or alcohol. Many families don't keep alcohol in the

home. But most families keep some kind of medication.

Only the person named on the label should take a prescription medication. All medications should be used only as directed.

The abuse of any drug can affect your child's success in school. You can guard against abuse of prescription medications if you:

- **Keep close track** of prescription medications. You may need to lock them up.
- **Know that some kids abuse** everyday medications. Cough syrup is one example.
- **Warn your child** never to take someone else's medication. Discuss the dangers.
- **Take extra care** if your child takes a medication for ADHD. Kids could share or sell these.
- **Speak with a pharmacist** or doctor for more information about children, medications and abuse.

Source: Neil I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can't*, ISBN: 0-7611-1570-6 (Workman Publishing, 212-254-5900, www.workman.com).

Learn how you can be a positive academic coach for your preteen



A good coach is someone who guides, encourages and inspires. A noted clinical child psychologist says thinking of yourself in this role is a good way to make sure your child is ready to learn.

Start the new calendar with a resolution that you can be a “positive academic coach” for your child.

Here are some guidelines:

- **Be a resource.** Never do your child’s homework for him. But be around, whenever you can be, to give encouragement, answer questions and suggest places (such as a website) that your child might go to find out more.
- **Don’t scold.** Remember, you are a *positive* coach. So skip the comments like, “You’re doing it all wrong.”
- **Don’t feel you have to know it all.** There will be times when you are not familiar with the curriculum your child is expected to know. It’s okay to say, “I never learned that. Are there any hints in your book?”

- **Talk about what your child is learning.** Grades are important, but they are a product of learning. It is equally important (many experts say even more so) to emphasize the process. This includes hard work, effort and making progress.
- **Understand your child has strengths and weaknesses.** Your child may never need help in social studies, but that doesn’t mean he may not sometimes get confused in math. Support and encourage your child in every class, but do not expect the same performance in every subject.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth–Adolescence*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4808-4 (Teachers College Press, 1-800-575-6566, www.tcpress.com).

“The child supplies the power but the parents have to do the steering.”

—Benjamin Spock

Teach your middle schooler how to construct solid paragraphs



If your child dreads writing, he may need practice constructing paragraphs. Once a writer knows how to build paragraphs, his paper will go together more easily.

To build a good paragraph your child should:

- **Pick a topic** and come up with a topic sentence. This sentence tells what the paragraph is about. “Skateboarding is the most challenging sport I have ever tried.”
- **Select details** that will support the topic sentence. These details

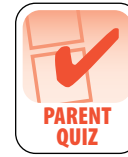
answer the question *why*.

“Keeping my balance on a fast-moving wheeled board took me months to learn. I still fall a lot. And even after a year of skateboarding, I still don’t feel ready to go down a hill.”

- **Check the paragraph** to make sure each sentence is related to your topic. Then read it aloud to see if it makes sense.
- **Proofread the paragraph.** Correct mistakes in spelling or grammar.

Source: Susan Taylor Drumm, *Study Skills Grades 5–8*, ISBN: 0-88724-448-3 (WELS Board for Parish Education).

Are you raising a self-sufficient middle schooler?



Middle school children gain a healthy self-concept from being able to do things on their own.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are promoting self-sufficiency:

- ___ **1. I expect my child** to assume responsibility for her schoolwork.
- ___ **2. I encourage my child** by offering tools (such as a calendar for writing down assignments) that can help her complete tasks on her own.
- ___ **3. I encourage my child** to try new things and keep trying if she doesn’t succeed at first.
- ___ **4. I expect my child** to care for her personal needs and belongings. I also expect her to care for a plant, pet or sibling (on a limited basis that does not interfere with schoolwork).
- ___ **5. I teach my child** to do tasks that will prepare her for life, such as shopping, cooking, washing clothes and making appointments.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child become self-sufficient. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for suggestions.

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

For subscription information call or write:
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: 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 © 2009 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. *Managing Editor:* Pat Hodgdon. *Editor:* Rebecca Miyares. *Writers:* Maria Koklanaris & Holly Smith. *Illustrator:* Joe Mignella.

Encourage your middle schooler to build friendships that will last



BUILDING SOCIAL SKILLS

Middle school is the age of the peer. There will probably never be a time in your child's life when people within a year of her own age are as important to her as they are now. And while your child may dream of being the most popular girl in the class, she doesn't need that for happiness and fulfillment. She does, however, need a few friends she can count on.

Encourage your child to:

- **Introduce herself** to new students, or any students who seem friendly. A smile is usually a good sign that a child is open to a new friendship.
- **Look for classmates** with interests that match hers. Most middle schools have a variety of clubs and extracurricular activities. These can be a haven for kids who may

need help making friends. It may be hard for her to spot a child of similar interests as she walks through the halls, but if she meets a student at the photography club, it's a safe bet she likes taking pictures, too.

- **Build on friendships** that have potential. It's important to have people to talk to at school. But the strongest friendships also include spending time together outside the school building. Say your child has been eating lunch and walking to class with the same three girls for the last month. Suggest that she ask them to come to your house to eat pizza. Or offer to drive them to the movies.

Source: Linda Sonna, The Everything Parenting a Teenager Book: A survival guide for parents! ISBN: 1-59337-035-0 (Adams Media, an F+W Publications Company, 1-800-258-0929, www.adamsmedia.com).

Take parent involvement to the next level in middle school



WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Attending parent-teacher conferences isn't the only way to stay connected with your preteen's school. You can also build a strong partnership with your preteen's school and her teachers if you:

- **Stay in touch.** Is your schedule too crazy for face-to-face meetings with teachers? Be sure your preteen's teachers have your email address and cell-phone number. If she'll be starting different classes soon, introduce yourself to her new teachers.
- **Take an interest** in schoolwork. Don't just glance over at your preteen when she's studying. Stop and ask her about what she's

learning. It'll show her that you care about what goes on at school. And who knows? You just may learn something new yourself!

- **Go beyond the basics.** Once you've talked with your preteen about the things she's learning, take that learning to the next level. A museum visit would bring the great artists to life.
- **Get involved in the school community.** If possible, consider becoming active in your local PTA. It may give you the chance to connect with your preteen's school on a much deeper level than you have before.

Source: "Epstein's Six Types of Involvement," National Network of Partnership Schools, www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/sixtypes.htm.

Q: The first half of the school year didn't go so well for my seventh grader. His grades were lower than we both would've liked. How can I make sure he does better during the second half?

Questions & Answers

A: Encourage him to use the new year as a "starting over" point. Help him make a fresh start by adopting—or recommitting to—good school habits. Here's how:

- **Schedule homework time.** Has your child been slacking off on getting his assignments done? Insist on a regular homework time. If he's freshest right after school, then make that his work time. But if he does better with a little rest first, give him an hour before having him crack open the books.
- **Enforce bedtime.** If your child always stays up for "just one more TV show," there's a good chance he's not getting enough shut-eye. Research shows that sleepy kids don't perform as well in school, so insist that yours hit the sack at a reasonable hour.
- **Monitor his progress.** Don't wait until your child fails a quiz or brings home a note to discover he's struggling in class. Instead, touch base regularly with his teachers.
- **Set goals.** You can't expect your child to turn his year around overnight. But you can set reasonable, attainable goals for him. For instance, if he earned straight C's last time, see if he can bring at least some of his grades up to B's.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Motivation

Mind the way you discuss your child with others



Remember that what is casual conversation to you may be very important to your child. It could be the difference between motivating your child or discouraging him. The way you talk about your child with others—in your child's earshot—can have a major effect on him.

Follow these tips for discussing your child in front of others:

- **Never think your child** isn't paying attention. Kids instantly perk up their ears when they hear their names. And your preteen child picks up more than your words. He is mature enough to take note of the tone of your voice and the context of the conversation.
- **Never make negative comments** about your child to another person. This includes talking to his other parent or relative. Think of how you would feel if two people you love talked of how "lazy" you are, right in front of you.
- **Do not discuss your child**, in a positive or negative way, with his siblings.
- **Think before you speak.** Save conversations about your child's great grades or sports victories for when your child can't hear. Instead, talk about his kindness or sense of responsibility. And if you really want to motivate him, praise his effort. Tell about a time that he didn't quit, even when the going got tough.

Source: Sylvia Rimm, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades and What You Can Do About It: A Six-Step Program for Parents and Teachers*, ISBN: 0-910707-87-1 (Great Potential Press, 1-877-954-4200, www.giftedbooks.com).

Keep your middle schooler motivated with organization

Does a cluttered desk stress you out at work? Well, your preteen may feel the same about a cluttered backpack or bedroom at home. If he can't find his assignments, textbooks, etc., he may feel overwhelmed or unprepared.

To help your preteen stay motivated to do well in school, help him stay organized. Here's how:

- **Have him organize his backpack.** He should throw away any trash, organize his papers and stock it with pencils and erasers.
- **Maintain a calendar.** Post a calendar on the fridge and have your preteen use it to keep track of upcoming assignments.



- **Help him break down large assignments.** If your preteen needs to complete a huge project, have him divide it into smaller tasks (such as by starting a research paper with an outline).

Beware of the 'bribery trap' when motivating your child



A child who expects something in return for accomplishing even the smallest task is not motivated. She is

letting you know that if you want something from her, you are going to have to bribe her.

Are your efforts at motivation really just a form of bribery?

- **Are you are trying** to strike a bargain? "If you clean your room, I'll get you those new shoes everybody has." Your child may not even have been thinking of the shoes. But now, with your words, she expects them just for cleaning her room. This is a bribe.
- **Does your child understand** the worth of what she needs to do?

If you stress that nightly studying helps her master the material and prepares her for class, that is motivation. If you stress studying because you pay for grades, that's a bribe.

- **Does your child understand** that in "real life" people usually have to work before they play? With motivation, she chooses the "play," such as going somewhere with a friend. You provide the motivating statement: "When you have taken the dog for her evening walk, then I can take you to Kelsey's house."

Source: Jody Johnston Pawel, *The Parent's Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, ISBN: 1-929643-34-9 (Ambris Publishing, 1-877-748-4541, www.parenttoolshop.com).