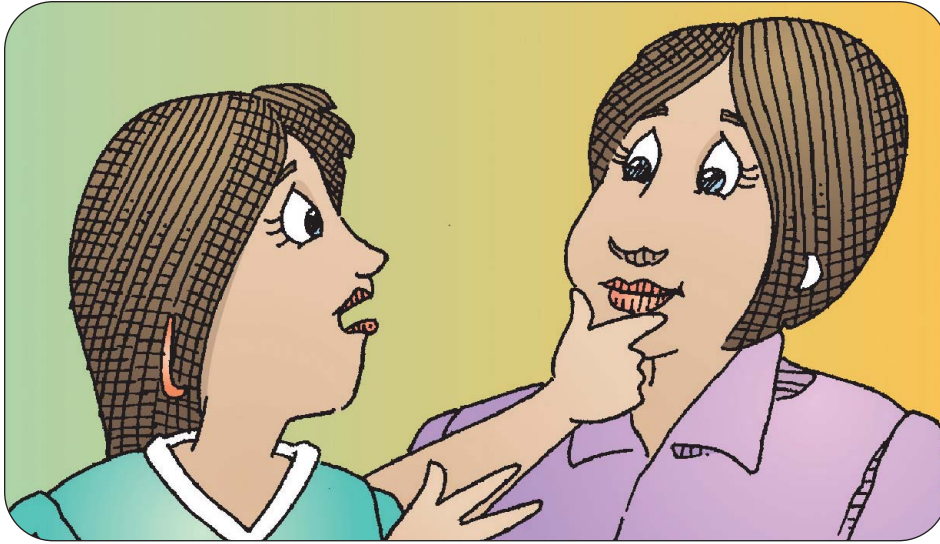


Middle School Parents[®]

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Family Support Section
Hawaii State Department of Education

still make the difference!



Take four steps to eliminate behavior problems in school

Middle school can be tough for preteens. And if your child is struggling in school, she can develop behavior problems. If this sounds like your preteen, it's important to take action.

To tackle the issue effectively, you should:

- **Volunteer at school.** Not only will it show your child how seriously you take school (and her behavior there), it will let the school staff know it, too. If you can't volunteer, attend as many conferences and other school events as possible.
- **Be a good listener.** If your preteen mentions problems she's having at school, really listen. Ask questions about the things she's telling you, too. Don't just pat her on the arm and tell her it will be fine.

- **Be honest** about your preteen's abilities. Take a hard look at her needs and abilities, and ask yourself if she's taking the right classes. It's always important to set the bar high and encourage your child to excel. But it's just as vital that she experience success in school—or she may be more likely to act out.
- **Treat school staff with respect.** Advocate for your preteen, but treat her teachers and principal respectfully when you do. Their goal is to help your child succeed. If you have a problem with the school staff, don't complain to your child. It may encourage disrespect on her part.

Source: Terri Mauro, "Five Ways to Stop School Behavior Problems," About.com, <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/behavioranddiscipline/qt/stopbehavior.htm>.

Share strategies to liven up your preteen's writing



Does your child "hate to write?" Does he claim to be "no good at writing?" Knowing a few strategies that

instantly brighten up most kinds of writing may fix both problems.

Suggest that your child:

- **Tell a story.** This can be something that really happened to him or something he made up.
- **Play with language.** One way to do this is by starting several words in a row with the same letter. "The blue ball bounced in the breeze." Another way is by using phrases with *like* or *as*. "He tried to sing, but the song fell flat as a pancake."
- **Put humor into his writing,** such as an appropriate joke.
- **Quote someone.** "'You can't judge a book by its cover,' my Grandpa always said. But I never knew what he meant until I met Kevin."
- **Give tired verbs a rest.** Get a thesaurus. Have him go through his writing and replace words like *was*, *said* or *walked* with words like *prevailed*, *drawled* or *sauntered*.

Source: Jane Bell Kiester, *Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test*, ISBN: 0-929895-93-2 (Maupin House, 1-800-524-0634, www.maupinhouse.com).

Find effective ways to keep your child motivated in middle school



Struggling to keep your preteen motivated at school? Try thinking of motivation as more than a carrot-and-stick type of thing. In other words, don't assume you should reward her when she does well or punish her when she does poorly.

Instead, you can keep your preteen motivated if you:

- **Challenge and support her.** It's a bit of a juggling act, but strike a balance between urging your preteen to succeed and supporting her as she tries. She may not always do well, but she always needs your love and acceptance.
- **Avoid competition.** Don't assume you'll motivate your preteen by pitting her against someone else. "Your sister got an 'A' in science. Think you can, too?" Competitions tend to motivate only the person

who feels she has a shot at winning. If your preteen thinks she's going to fail, she'll probably have no desire to compete.

- **Give occasional rewards.** Don't make every test or quiz an opportunity for a reward. Instead, surprise your preteen with an *occasional* treat for a job done well. It will show her that you appreciate her hard work, but that she doesn't need a prize for every good thing she does.

Source: Tracey Wong Briggs, "How kids can get over the 'motivation brick wall,'" USA Today, www.usatoday.com/news/education/2007-10-03-lavoie-motivation_N.htm.

"Where parents do too much for their children, the children will not do much for themselves."

—Elbert Hubbard

Experts say early middle school may be prime time for bullying



The first year of middle school can be stressful enough, but it may also be the time students and parents need to worry most about bullying.

During other years, boys who bully tend to be disliked by peers. But research from the University of Illinois shows that boys who bully in sixth grade are popular.

Researchers say boys might turn to bullying in sixth grade to cover up feelings of being the "little kids" in school.

Bullying is serious. Don't look at it as "part of growing up," even if the bullying is not physical. Any of the following can be bullying:

- **Calling others names** or insulting them. (This is different than lighthearted, good-natured teasing between friends.)
- **Taking or destroying possessions.**
- **Making threats.**

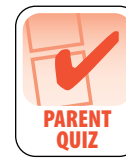
Researchers found that children who are bullied are more likely to:

- **Feel anxious.**
- **Feel depressed.**
- **Think about suicide.**

Report bullying to your child's school. Most schools have strict policies against bullying. Work with school officials to help your child.

Source: "In early middle school, popularity and bullies often connected," News Bureau of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, www.news.uiuc.edu/gentips/00/08bully.html.

Are you helping your child maintain healthy habits?



The school year is well past its halfway point and good habits may slip. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if

you are supporting healthy habits in your middle schooler:

___ 1. **Do you offer your child healthy foods?** These include fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein.

___ 2. **Do you encourage sleep?** Research shows that middle school students need at least nine hours a night to function at their best.

___ 3. **Do you promote exercise for the whole family?**

___ 4. **Do you talk with your child about the dangers of underage drinking and illegal drugs?**

___ 5. **Do you encourage your child to have fun?** Stress is a major problem for many middle schoolers. Your child needs healthy ways to "blow off steam" and enjoy life.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child stay on track for health right through the school year. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Be your child's best ally when faced with learning struggles



Few parental heartbreaks match that of knowing that your child is falling behind in school. It is hard to think your child might have learning differences, or even a diagnosed learning disability.

But finding out what is going on and beginning as soon as possible to tackle the problem is the only way to help your child.

Here are some tips:

- **Be sure.** Consult the professionals at your child's school. Her doctor may also be helpful. Attention problems, difficulty hearing and anxiety can all masquerade as learning disabilities.
- **Get informed.** Find out what services your child's school can provide for her learning disability.
- **Get connected.** Do you know which school staff members will

be helping your child? Make an appointment to meet if possible. At the least, speak on the phone. Exchange contact information.

- **Read and write.** Read all you can about your child's learning issues. Stick to research and be careful of what you see on the Internet.
- **Fully participate.** You know more about your child than anyone. You have information that can help the school staff teach your child. Share what you know about your child and don't be afraid to make suggestions.

At the same time, listen carefully to what staff has to say. You may not always agree, but educators speak and act to promote what they see as your child's best interest.

Source: "Learning Disabilities in Public School Students—What Parents Need to Know," Public School Parent's Network, www.psparents.net/LearningDisabilities.htm.

Recognize the many milestones middle schoolers will face



Middle schoolers are still reaching milestones. And the more you're aware of them, especially the emotional ones, the better you'll understand where your middle schooler is coming from.

Along with the physical changes of puberty, your middle schooler may be dealing with:

- **A need for independence.** The preteen years are prime time for this particular milestone. So expect your middle schooler to separate a bit from you as she begins figuring out who she is. Yes, she still needs your love and support. But she may be less likely to admit it right now.
- **A desire to feel responsible.** Your middle schooler may bristle at being "treated like a kid." Honor her need to feel more grown up. Give her real responsibilities and allow her to make some decisions on her own, such as when to do her homework.
- **Waves of self-doubt.** Along with more maturity, the preteen years can bring a great deal of insecurity. Help your middle schooler weather these bouts of self-doubt by praising her when she does well and catching her when she stumbles.

Source: "Adolescent Development," KeepKidsHealthy.com, www.keepkidshealthy.com/Adolescent/adolescent-development.html.

Q: When I try talking to my seventh grader, he looks at me like I'm from another planet! I want to communicate better with him, but where do I start?

Questions & Answers

A: You've already hit upon the magic word: *communicate*. Although it may be tougher now than ever to communicate with your child, it's vital that you keep trying. The middle school years can be a minefield of emotions, physical changes and academic challenges, and he truly needs you now more than ever.

To encourage effective communication with your child:

- **Let him know** where you're coming from. Be very clear when telling your child about your values, but don't lecture him. Instead, briefly explain why you feel something is right or wrong, and then let it go.
- **Remember that he's not you.** Don't assume your child's issues are identical to the ones you faced in middle school. Times change. So acknowledge that you may not know exactly what he's going through sometimes.
- **Be clear about expectations.** It's important that your child know what you expect from him both at school and at home.
- **Never let him forget** that you love him. Even if your child is being "less than lovable," make sure he knows you're still on his side. Your guidance and support are everything to him and will help you both get through the challenges of middle school.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Test Success

Help your child keep learning *after* the test



Your middle schooler is used to learning material *before* a test. But what about *after* the test?

Unless your child gets a perfect score on every test, every time, there is still learning to be done after the test. Proper review after the test is one way to improve scores on the next test.

After a test, your child should:

- **Review the test** when she gets it back. She should make notes about which answers she got right and which she got wrong. After finding wrong answers, she should correct them and learn the corrected answers.
- **Know the types of errors** she makes. Mistakes generally come in two forms: Carelessness—your child may have rushed through the question. Lack of preparation—your child didn't study enough.
- **Make adjustments.** Brainstorm with your child about how she can reduce careless mistakes. She could read each question twice, think about the question before answering and check her work before turning in her paper.

For mistakes based on lack of preparation, the solution is probably more study. Experts suggest beginning to review at least five days before the test. The last 24 hours should be spent going over everything a final time, not trying to learn new material.

Source: William R. Luckie & Wood Smethurst, *Study Power*, ISBN: 1-57129-046-X (Brookline Books, 1-800-666-2665, www.brooklinebooks.com).

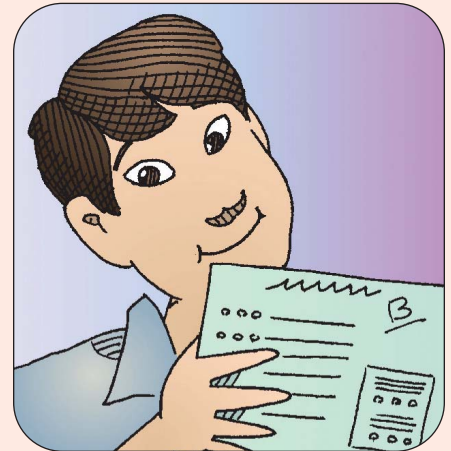
Prepare your middle schooler for success before & after tests

Help your middle schooler do well both before and after a big test! To prepare him the morning of the test:

- **Be sure he wakes up** on time. Too much hurrying may frazzle his nerves.
- **Give him a nutritious breakfast.**
- **Encourage him to dress** comfortably.
- **Sound upbeat** and confident as you send him off.

And when your child returns home on test day? Be sure you:

- **Ask him what he learned** from the test. Were there surprises?
- **Be supportive** when he receives his grade—regardless of how things turned out.



- **Speak with his teacher** if you have questions about the results.

Source: "Test Wiseness Tips for Parents," Challenger Middle School, San Diego, CA, www.challengerms.org/testing_tips.jsp.

Teach your middle schooler how to make a study guide



Many times teachers will give students study guides to prepare for tests. But your child can't count on this happening all the time. Your child will benefit from knowing how to make his own study guide.

When making a study guide, consider:

- **Classroom resources.** Does the teacher follow a text? Does your child have a notebook with materials, such as notes?
- **Main ideas.** If the textbook is the classroom guide, your child should focus on the highlights in the chapter. Words in bold, chapter questions and chapter

summaries may all be relevant. If the student notebook is the guide, vocabulary lists, papers that introduce new concepts and ideas are probably important.

- **Format.** How does your child learn? This is important when making a study guide. If your child learns best by hearing, he may want to record his material as he reads. Then he can play it back to help him remember it. If he learns best by seeing and doing, his preferred strategy may be to create drawings, diagrams or flash cards.

Source: Ron Fry, *How to Study*, ISBN: 1-56414-229-9 (Career Press, 1-800-227-3371, www.careerpress.com).