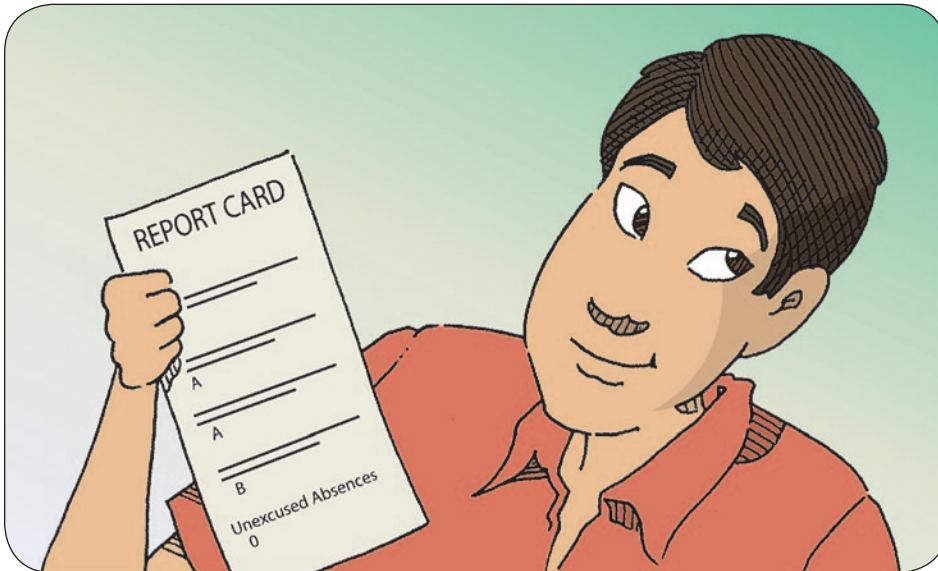


Middle School Parents

April 2011
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Katy Independent School District

still make the difference!



Reinforce the importance of attendance all year long

You know that in order to learn, your child must be in school. When your child is absent, he misses instruction. In middle school, several absences in a row can mean quickly falling behind.

But your child's attendance matters to more than just your child. *Every* child's attendance is important. A school where the vast majority of students have good attendance is usually a school that performs well.

Here are some ways to promote good attendance for your child and his peers:

- **Do not allow your child** to miss school except for illness, emergency or religious holidays.

- **If you know of any reasons** (such as a safety issue) that makes *any* child fearful of going to school, report them to school authorities.
- **Do not condone** skipping school for *any* student. Tell your child that you will report truancy if you see it. You won't let his friends "off the hook."
- **Praise good attendance!** Grades are not the only important information on your child's report card. Look at the "days absent." Always tell your child you are proud of him when a report card reflects no unexcused absences.

Source: "School Attendance: Issues to Consider," Great Schools, www.greatschools.org/parenting/behavior-discipline/school-attendance-issues.gs?content=644.

Set reasonable expectations for your child



It's important to set expectations for your child, but it's equally important to make sure those expectations are reasonable.

To determine whether you're "setting the bar" at the right level, ask yourself if your expectations:

- **Are flexible.** Have you read parenting books telling you what your child "should be" doing, thinking or feeling at this age? Then you may have lost sight of the fact that most of that information is based on *averages*. It doesn't relate specifically to what any one individual should be doing (or achieving). Keep that in mind if you find yourself setting a goal for her just because "all the other sixth graders" seem to be meeting it.
- **Reflect who she really is.** Do you see your child clearly when you're imagining what she should achieve? If she has been a reluctant reader since preschool, then pushing her toward honors English may not make sense.

Source: "Set Reasonable Expectations and Goals for Your Child," FamilyEducation.com, <http://life.familyeducation.com/parenting/responsibilities/45286.html>.

Be patient and creative when communicating with your child



When he was in elementary school, your child probably couldn't wait to tell you what he learned in math class or who he played with at recess.

But now that he's older? You're lucky to get a mumbled "Fine" when you ask how his day went. And as hard as that can be for parents, it's a normal part of moving toward adulthood.

Of course, that doesn't mean the lines of communication between you and your child must slam shut. It just means you need to be creative about keeping them open. Here's how:

- **Keep asking questions.** Prepare for curt replies, but don't give up on learning about your child's life. Don't interrogate him, but do let him know you care about him. Try simple questions like, "Who did you eat lunch with?" or "What did you work on during study hall?"

- **Stop and listen.** Occasionally, your child may surprise you by wanting to share something. Don't miss it because you're busy checking your email. If he comes up and says, "The coolest thing happened today," stop what you're doing and give him your undivided attention.
- **Go high-tech.** Rather than poke your head into his room every five minutes, send him a text or instant message. He'll be so shocked, that you'll definitely get his attention!

Source: E. M. Alderman, M.D., "Communicating with Your Preteen," ParentsConnect, www.parentsconnect.com/articles/communicate_with_preteen.jhtml.

"There is no such thing as a perfect parent, so just be a real one."

—Sue Atkins

Explore the concepts of area and perimeter with your child



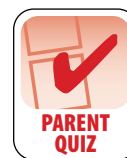
Your child should know how to use *area* and *perimeter*. They are part of arithmetic, as well as many higher math courses. They also have "real life" uses. Here are some tips for you and your child:

- **Learn the meanings.** When you think about area, think *inside* the box. Area (length times width) is the inside of an enclosed space. When you think about perimeter, think *outside* the box. Perimeter is what you get when you add up everything on the outside. It measures borders of an enclosed space.

- **Have your child practice** finding area and perimeter of spaces around your home. You'll need a ruler or tape measure and a rectangular or square surface. A hardback book, a box or a table top will do. Your child will also need a pencil and paper or a calculator.
- **Try larger surfaces,** such as a window or door once your child is comfortable. Enlist her help any time you have a household project that requires measurement.

Source: Virginia Thompson & Karen Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math, The Middle School Years*, ISBN: 0-912511-29-X, University of California, Berkeley.

Do you know how to say *no* to your middle schooler?



Your child will demand many freedoms at this age. He is ready for some, and may not be ready for others. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you are able to say *no* when you need to establish limits:

___1. **Do you set limits** according to what is in your child's best interest, and stick to them?

___2. **Do you communicate limits** and expectations clearly to your child?

___3. **Do you give your child a firm answer,** but not an aggressive or angry response?

___4. **Do you give your child a chance** to demonstrate that he is ready for new freedoms?

___5. **Do you understand** that loving your child does not mean you are his "buddy"? It is your job to provide kind, but firm, authority for your child.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* means you are adept at setting limits and saying *no* when you must. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Review test-taking skills with your child as finals approach



May is around the corner—and so is testing. School districts typically schedule standardized tests for late

April or May. Your child may also have to take final exams, which may be something new for him.

For test success, have your child:

- **Begin early.** At the end of the year, tests can come one after another. Your child may face a week with four tests. Studying must begin weeks in advance—not days.
- **Make a schedule.** For example: Monday—math homework, study science 30 minutes, study English 30 minutes. Tuesday—history homework, review math problems, study science 30 minutes. Wednesday—math homework, study history 30 minutes, study English 30 minutes.
- **Get enough sleep.** The night before a test, your child should

review the material for a final “boost.” Then he should get into bed at a time that will allow him to get at least nine hours of sleep.

- **Get the “easy ones”** out of the way first. When your child receives the test, he should look it over and determine which answers he can confidently give without too much difficulty. He should answer those first. Then he can go back to the ones he is not as sure about and give them additional thought.
- **Think about the wrong answers** on multiple-choice tests. When answering a multiple-choice question, your child should cross off any answers he knows are not right. Then he will likely be looking at a choice between two final answers, rather than four.

Source: “Top Ten Test-Taking Tips for Students, Pearson Education, www.teachervision.fen.com/study-skills/teaching-methods/6390.html.

Connect with your child by unplugging, completing a task



One of the easiest and most effective ways to keep tabs on how things are going with your child is to spend time with him. By simply hang-

ing out together—with no formal plans—you’ll be giving him a chance to share a bit of his life with you.

To get the most out of time with your middle schooler:

- **Unplug.** Sitting side-by-side on the couch and staring at the TV doesn’t count as spending time together. Watching TV together can be a fine way to pass an hour or two on a rainy afternoon, but

it’s not a good way to communicate. So make sure it’s not the only time you enjoy with your child that day.

- **Work on a task together**—whether it’s planting bulbs or organizing family photos. Not only is it a productive way to spend time together—it can make it easier for your preteen to *hang* with you, because there’s no huge pressure to talk. After all, you’re doing a job. If an opening occurs and he decides to chat about his life? Great! But if it doesn’t, you’re still knocking something off of your to-do list!

Q: We have an opportunity to take a week-long vacation this spring. Unfortunately, it’s the week after my child’s spring break. Is it okay to pull her out of school for those extra days?

Questions & Answers

A: This is a tough call. Educators realize that family time is critical, and it’s often hard to come by these days. However, school should be your child’s number-one priority and she should never miss class for trivial reasons.

To decide what to do, ask yourself:

- **Is there any leeway?** Are your travel dates written in stone, or can you adjust your arrival or departure a little? If you must go away while school is in session, can you go for a shorter period of time?
- **Can I make it educational?** If you are away while school is in session, turn it into a learning opportunity. Take your child to a museum or live performance while you’re on vacation. Ask her to blog about the trip (in real time) and research historical facts about the area.
- **Can my child keep up** with her schoolwork? Is there a way for her to work while she’s gone and email her assignments back to school? Ask her teachers well in advance.
- **Will your child miss any tests?** Talk with her teacher to make sure there aren’t any important tests scheduled for the week you plan to be away.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Reading

Three strategies that will improve comprehension



Middle schoolers are required to read more difficult content. Your child's reading comprehension (being able to understand and use what he reads) will play a huge role in his success.

To improve reading comprehension, encourage your child to:

- 1. Take notes.** Taking notes while reading forces your child to pay more attention. It makes him think about what is important in the material. Should he take notes on this? Why or why not? It also adds another learning style—learning by doing—to the reading process. It allows him to create a study guide as he reads. Keep notes organized by writing down the page number of the book that each set of notes comes from.
- 2. Study the vocabulary.** To comprehend what he's reading, your child must know the meaning of key words. Most chapters include vocabulary words. Your child should write down the definitions and review them.
- 3. Re-read.** Going back to re-read can make a huge difference. Your child will almost always find things he missed the first time. Your child should skim the chapter first. Then go back and do a careful reading. Then go back a third time and review.

Source: "Middle School Reading: Improving your Seventh and Eighth Grader's Reading Comprehension," Math and Reading Help, http://math-and-reading-help-for-kids.org/articles/Middle_school_reading%3A_Improving_your_seventh_and_eighth_grader's_reading_comprehension.html.

Can using SQRW lead to an A for your middle schooler?

Textbooks can be intimidating. But they're also valuable study tools, so your middle schooler should know how to use them.

To help your child, have her follow the SQRW strategy each time she cracks one open. SQRW stands for:

- 1. Survey.** First, she should scan the section titles, maps or charts and summaries. This will give her an overview of the material.
- 2. Question.** Next, have her rephrase each section heading as a question. So, instead of "Modern Medicine," she'll ask herself, "What are examples of modern medicine?"
- 3. Read.** Then, she should read the information below each heading to find the answers to the questions she asked.



- 4. Write.** Finally, she should write down each question and answer. That way, she'll have a ready-made study guide the next time a test approaches.

Source: "A Strategy for Reading Textbooks," How-to-Study.com, www.how-to-study.com/study-skills/en/studying/40/a-strategy-for-reading-textbooks.

Get your middle schooler to read with interesting books



Middle school book selections can be tricky. The book must be a page-turner, and worthy of your child's time and attention. But your child is also too young for mature content.

Here are a few books appropriate for most middle school students:

- *American Born Chinese* (Gene Luen Yang). This is a graphic book which often appeals to boys. Three stories about knowing and liking who you are.
- *Caddie Woodlawn* (Carol Ryrie Brink). This book about

a frontier girl may have been on the school reading list when you were in middle school. It still appeals to middle school girls.

- *Freak the Mighty* and *Max the Mighty* (Rodman Philbrick). The first book, *Freak*, and its sequel, *Max*, will challenge your child's idea of what a hero is.
- *Number the Stars* (Lois Lowry) tells the story of a Danish girl who plays a big part in saving her best friend, who is Jewish, from the Nazis during World War II.

Source: "Top Picks for Middle-Schoolers," Scholastic.com, <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=7945>.