

Middle School Parents[®]

Katy Independent School District

still make the difference!



Prepare your middle schooler for transition to high school

Moving to middle school was likely a huge change for your child. But an even bigger one looms on the horizon. In high school, your child will be expected to work harder than ever before. He will also be more independent. But one thing will not change—the importance of your involvement as a parent.

Continue to:

- **Be happy and excited** for your child. Some adults loved high school. Others did not. Whatever category you fall into, offer only positive emotions about this transition.
- **Attend orientations.** Most high schools offer information nights for parents and orientation for students. Make every effort to

adjust your schedule to be there—even if your child says he doesn't want you to go.

- **Assure your child** he's not alone. It's a big building full of new faces and experiences. It's okay if he feels nervous, but remind him that the high school staff will be expecting this. They will be there to help, especially during the first few weeks.
- **Emphasize studying** and organization. Your child will have a stronger chance for success if he sets aside certain hours each night for study. He should also use tools such as planners and calendars.

Source: "The High School Years, Preparing for the next steps of their future," Public School Parents Network, www.psparents.net/High%20School.htm.

Keep your child reading over the holiday break!



Holiday break is not a time just for worksheets and textbooks, but your child should continue to learn.

The best way is just to read a little bit every day. And that means reading more than text messages!

Here's how:

- **Link movies to books.** Your middle schooler, like many others, may enjoy watching movies during winter break. Encourage her to watch at least one based on a book—and read the book first.
- **Give books for gifts.** If your child will receive a gift this month, consider giving her a book or a gift card to a bookstore. Suggest this to other family members as well.
- **Read for a purpose.** Practical reading—the kind you do to learn a skill—is both fun and informative. If your child enjoys cooking, she could read a recipe and try it out. If she likes gadgets, she could read the instruction manual and put one together. If she likes sports, she could check out the newspaper for a look at how her favorite teams are faring.

Use routines & consequences to keep your preteen in class



Your preteen won't learn anything in class if he's not there, so it's vital that he come to school each day on time and ready to learn. Here's what to do if his attendance starts to slip:

- **Do his school-day prep** at night. Each evening, have your child check to see that his completed homework is in his backpack. Also, have him pack his lunch and choose his outfit for the next day. (Getting him to bed at a reasonable hour will help, too.) The fewer "loose ends" to tie up in the morning, the better.
- **Talk to his teacher.** If you notice your preteen skipping a particular class (or showing up late for it), make an appointment to speak with his teacher. There could be something going on—such as

bullying—that's causing him to stay away. The sooner you figure out what the problem is, the more quickly you can begin to address it.

- **Lay down the law.** Be sure your preteen knows that casually missing school is not an option. Unless he's legitimately ill, he must be in class every day. And if he isn't? Enforce a consequence.

"In spite of the six thousand manuals on child-raising in the bookstores, child-raising is still a dark continent, and no one really knows anything. You just need a lot of love and luck—and, of course, courage."

—Bill Cosby

Do you know the math skills your child is learning in school?



If your child is to succeed in math, it is important that you be familiar with her work, and that you support it. Don't panic!

That doesn't mean you teach it to her. But you should be positive about math. In addition, look for ways to help her use math skills.

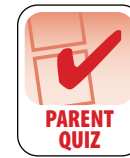
- **For arithmetic,** have your child add up your grocery bill to make sure it is correct. When one of you is doing a job, such as sweeping a room, ask her to estimate (make an educated guess) how long it will take. Then compare her answer with the actual amount of time it took.
- **For measurement,** let your child handle any measurements you

need to do around the house. This includes cooking, baking, finding out the height of your plants—anything to help her feel at ease with measurement. Ask her to estimate before she measures. Then compare.

- **For statistics,** encourage your child to read graphs and interpret them. You can do this easily with a daily newspaper—each edition contains graphs. Make a habit of doing this daily with your child until she can do it herself. Then ask her to explain graphs in the newspaper to you.

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

Do you encourage your child to help other people?



December, which many see as a season of giving, is a great time to help others. Are you encouraging your middle schooler to serve her community? Answer *yes* or *no* to the following questions to find out:

- ___ **1. Have you talked** with your child about the need to help others who are less fortunate?
- ___ **2. Do you suggest ways** your child can get involved, such as by volunteering through a youth group at a community center?
- ___ **3. Do you support** your child in ways you are able to, such as by giving her a ride to do volunteer work?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to volunteer for causes she finds meaningful?
- ___ **5. Do you volunteer** with your child? You can collect canned goods and take them to a homeless shelter.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are supporting your child as she serves the community. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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You can help your middle schooler become 'clique-proof'



More than anything, most preteens just want to fit in at school. But what if your preteen goes from fitting in with her friends one day to being shunned the next? Chances are, she's fallen victim to a clique.

Typically a bigger issue for middle-school girls than boys, *cliques*—ever-shifting groups of peers which actively exclude certain kids—are a fact of life during adolescence. They're unpleasant, but they're also here to stay.

The key to surviving cliques is helping your preteen recognize them for what they are, so she won't be crushed if she suddenly finds herself on the outside looking in. (Ideally, her newfound insight will also keep her from shunning some other unlucky peer later.)

To help "clique-proof" your child:

- **Define cliques.** "Remember, honey, cliques aren't really about friendship at all. They're about

power. So if someone in the group starts teasing you or being mean, she's doing it because it makes her feel powerful."

- **Remind her that being shunned isn't her fault.** Preteens might assume that if they were just prettier, thinner, etc., they wouldn't fall victim to a clique. But that's not true. Make sure your preteen understands this.
- **Help her solve the problem.** Brainstorm ways for your preteen to deal with cliques. Can she focus on friendships outside of school? Look for new friends in class? Ignore her tormentors? Whatever she decides, keep reinforcing the idea that she is not powerless.
- **Offer perspective.** Remind her that, like middle school, these clique issues will eventually end.

Source: Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese, *Parenting 911: How to Safeguard and Rescue Your 10- to 15-Year-Old from Substance Abuse, Depression, Sexual Encounters, Violence, Failure in School, Danger on the Internet, and Other Risky Situations*, ISBN: 0-7679-0321-8, Broadway Books.

'Tis the season for your middle schooler to behave responsibly!



Your preteen isn't a little kid anymore, so don't treat him like one! This holiday season, give him a chance to behave like the young adult he's on his way to becoming.

Here are two ideas to try:

1. **Let him give his own gifts.** If you've always done your preteen's gift-giving for him, stop! Instead, help him decide whom he'd like to buy for and how much to spend. Give him tips on sticking to a budget, but let him do the shopping. And if he'd prefer to give

homemade gifts, help him come up with things he can make—or bake—using materials you already have on hand.

2. **Skip the sitter.** Rather than booking a babysitter so you can run holiday errands, consider letting your preteen stay home alone while you're away. Go over some basic safety rules—such as what to do if a stranger knocks on the door or if there's a fire—and then be on your way. Remember, responsible preteens like yours can handle a few hours by themselves!

Q: My eighth grader used to talk to me about everything, but he's become a stone wall! I know he still has feelings. How can I get him to share them with me again?

Questions & Answers

A: First, don't take it personally. Boys this age often struggle to communicate. And as for sharing their feelings? It can be like pulling teeth.

Still, there are things you can do to encourage your son to open up more. You can:

- **Remind him** that feelings aren't bad. Your child may believe that "real men" don't get emotional, so set him straight. "Sweetie, being a man doesn't mean being strong all the time. Real men get upset sometimes. They even cry. And that's okay."
- **Read between the lines.** If your child is acting especially angry or macho, he may be going through a rough patch and trying to mask the pain. Look for clues as to what might be going on. If you're at a loss, speak to his guidance counselor or teachers.
- **Talk for him.** If you know your child is upset about something specific, but he won't talk about it, broach the subject, anyway. "I was just thinking back to when I was in middle school. I was so frustrated when I didn't make the basketball team, I thought I would explode. I was sure I'd never make another team, but I did."

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Homework

Help your child write a better research paper



Middle schoolers are usually a bit daunted when assigned a research paper. These assignments aren't

easy, but some basic rules for organizing, researching and writing can smooth the process.

For organizing, have your child:

- **Start the day** the teacher gives the assignment. Do something, even if it is just gathering needed materials. This makes it less likely that your child will forget about the assignment.
- **Keep a calendar** of due dates and follow them. Week one—gather sources. Week two—rough draft. Week three—final draft.
- **Devote part** of every day to the assignment. Fifteen minutes may be enough. The idea is not to let it slip until the last minute.

For writing, have your child:

- **Use reliable sources.** Find information from journals, universities or government research. Just because it is online does not mean it is a reliable source!
- **Never cut and paste** from the Internet. That is plagiarism—stealing another's written work.
- **Put information** in his own words. Sometimes you can use someone else's words to make a specific point. When you do this you must make it clear that you are quoting. Give the person credit by name.

Source: K. Hayden, "Successful Middle School Research Paper Tips," Suite 101, http://middle-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/tips_for_successful_middle_school_research_paper.

Offer ideas, organization for your preteen's homework time

T rue, your preteen's homework is her responsibility. But there are some ways you can help her tackle her nightly assignments without doing the work for her.

Here's how:

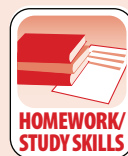
- **Point her in the right direction.** Does your preteen need to look up specific information? Don't do the research for her. But do suggest reliable websites she might want to try. And nudging her toward the dictionary or atlas couldn't hurt, either.
- **Help her stay organized.** Your preteen likely changes classes several times a day. So help her develop a system to keep everything straight. Whether she ends up using a binder full of



dividers or a collection of pocket folders, staying organized may make keeping on top of her homework a bit easier.

Source: Alisa Stoudt, "How to Be a Homework Helper," Education.com, www.education.com/magazine/article/homework-helper.

Evaluate your child's homework habits & find ways to improve



The school year is about half over. This is a good time to look back on the first half of the year to see what worked and what didn't.

Homework is a key area to assess. Here are points to check:

- **Time.** Has your child been spending the proper amount of time on homework? You can tell this by his grades and by speaking with his teacher.
- **Environment.** Does your child have a suitable place for homework? It should be well-lit and have enough space to read, write and store a few materials. No TV,

Internet (except for academic searching) and no cell phone.

- **Organization.** Many students start the year diligently writing homework assignments down in their planners. But then they slack off. Find out if your child is correctly using his planner. Also ask if his teacher posts assignments on an Internet site.
- **Family support.** Continue to tell your child that his schoolwork is a high priority for the family. Encourage him to feel proud of his effort.

Source: "Building Good Homework Habits," Math and Reading Help for Kids, http://math-and-reading-help-for-kids.org/articles/Building_Good_Homework_Habits.html.