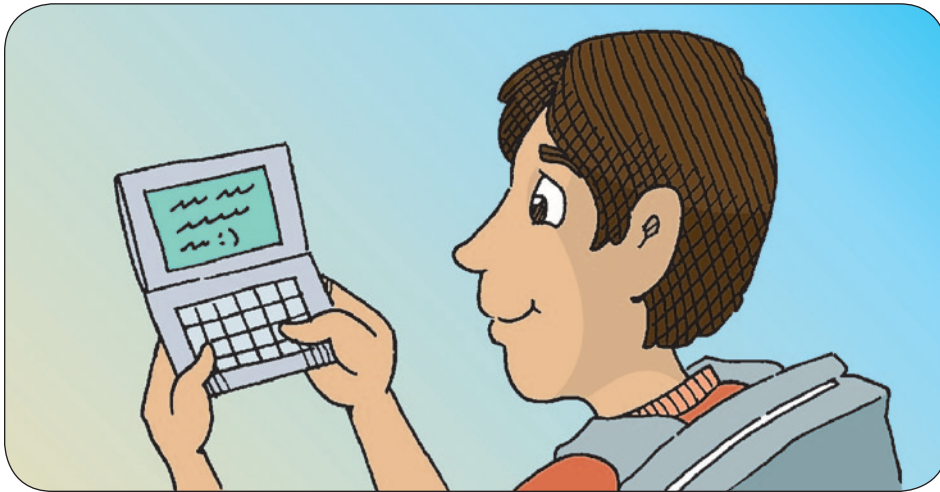


# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Katy Independent School District

*still make the difference!*



## Text messaging can help you and your child stay connected

If your child has a phone, he almost surely communicates in the Language of Middle Schoolers—text messaging. Most texting will be to friends, but he will also want to text you. And this can actually be a good thing. Texting can:

- **Keep you informed.** Middle schoolers don't want their friends to hear them talking to their parents. But they will send a text to tell you where they are, who they're with and when they will be home.
- **Cut down on your worry.** Again, your child may not want to answer a ringing phone. But you can text him to ask, "You're late. Are you okay?" He'll probably get right back to you.
- **Get your child to follow directions.** Nagging your child to do

his homework or make his bed is a good way to meet his resistance. But texting is neutral—it can't betray exasperation or an irritated tone of voice. And there's a written record on his phone to help him remember.

But beware of:

- **Avoiding other forms of communication.** You still need to talk to your child. Make clear that his phone may go away if he won't talk to you.
- **Being on an "electronic leash."** Some middle schoolers text their parents too much. Do not let your child make a habit of getting you to answer, by text, things he can and should figure out for himself.

**Source:** K. Tuttle, "Texting tips for parents and teens," The Boston Globe, [www.boston.com/community/moms/articles/2010/09/11/texting\\_tips\\_for\\_parents\\_and\\_teens/](http://www.boston.com/community/moms/articles/2010/09/11/texting_tips_for_parents_and_teens/).

## Use report-card time to set goals, celebrate success



Your middle schooler just brought home a report card. You can use this as a learning opportunity if you:

- **Talk about it.** Are there any surprises—good or bad? Discuss them. If you're upset about a particular grade, though, don't start yelling. Not only will it shut down communication with your preteen, it's also pointless. So stay calm. "I'm disappointed about that C in language arts. We need to talk about it some more."
- **Set goals.** Use your preteen's report card to chart a course for the rest of the year. If she did well, talk about how she can keep up the good work. If she struggled, brainstorm ways to improve things going forward. "You did a good job of turning in your science homework, but you stumbled on tests. What if I start quizzing you each night the week leading up to a test?"
- **Celebrate.** Straight A's are always a reason to celebrate, but if your preteen worked hard to bring a C up to a B, she deserves a pat on the back—or an ice cream cone—too!

## Teach your middle schooler how to manage money responsibly



Learning to manage money isn't just a vital life skill for your child—it's also a terrific way to help him become more responsible overall. To boost your preteen's "money smarts":

- **Give him an allowance.** It's hard to teach your middle schooler to handle money responsibly if he has no money to handle.
- **Share your financial values.** Your child's attitudes about money are largely shaped by your own.
- **Talk about the difference** between *needs* and *wants*. Have in-depth chats about the idea of *wanting* something vs. *needing* it.
- **Encourage him to set goals.** Is your preteen anxious to buy a new video game? Suggest he start saving for it now. Have him write down the game's price and figure out how much he'll need to save each week in order to get it.

- **Open a savings account** for him. Each time he receives a statement, he'll see how much money he has and the interest it's earned.
- **Demonstrate real-life budgeting.** Bring your preteen with you the next time you go grocery shopping. "Okay, we have \$100 to spend and we need to buy a week's worth of food. Let's talk about how we can do it."

**Source:** P. Richard, "15 Ways to Teach Kids About Money," FamilyEducation.com, <http://life.familyeducation.com/money-and-kids/parenting/36332.html?detoured=1>.

**"Even though your kids will consistently do the exact opposite of what you're telling them to do, you have to keep loving them just as much."**

—Bill Cosby

## A good strategy can help your preteen make good decisions



Learning to make good decisions, and to deal with the fallout from bad ones, is part of growing up. Your job isn't to decide things for your preteen. It's to teach her how to decide them for herself.

To do that, help your preteen follow this decision-making plan:

1. **Have her define the issue.** What decision does she need to make? The more clearly she can define it, the better able she may be to make a smart choice.
2. **Have her explore her options.** What are some reasonable responses to the problem? Are

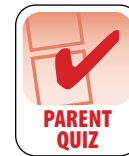
some riskier than others? What does she stand to gain or lose?

3. **Have her consider** the consequences. What's at stake if she chooses one option over another?
4. **Have her make her decision.** Once she's considered the issue, there's nothing left to do but decide.

When it's all over, talk to your preteen about how things went. If her decision was a good one, discuss how she can adopt the same problem-solving strategy the next time. But if it was a bad one? Talk about what she might do differently.

**Source:** W. Parker, "Helping Your Children Make Good Decisions," About.com, [http://fatherhood.about.com/od/succeedingasafather/a/good\\_decisions.htm](http://fatherhood.about.com/od/succeedingasafather/a/good_decisions.htm).

## Are you prepared for your child's first romance?



Early as it seems, the middle school years are when many children have their first girlfriend or boyfriend. Are you ready to handle it? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out: \_\_\_ 1. **Have you talked to your child** about the basics of dating—respect for yourself, respect for the other person, kindness and consideration? \_\_\_ 2. **Are you remaining calm?** Middle school relationships are more about friendship than they are about getting "serious."

\_\_\_ 3. **Have you discussed rules** with your child for this relationship?

\_\_\_ 4. **Do you show respect** for your child's feelings?

\_\_\_ 5. **Do you share your family's** values about appropriate behavior? Have you talked about the consequences of risky behavior?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are prepared to help your child through this new phase. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

**Middle School**  
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# What should you do if your child is involved in a bullying situation?



Bullying is a growing problem that families and schools must address together.

Today, experts recognize the serious effects of bullying, including problems with emotions and schoolwork.

Bullying involves cruel actions or words. It can happen in person (such as at school) and from afar (such as online).

Here are some ideas of things to do, whether your child is a bully, a victim or a bystander:

- **Let your child know** you will not condone bullying in any form. That includes the writing of nasty comments on the Internet or in text messages. Follow through with severe consequences if you discover your child is bullying.
- **Encourage supervision** and the buddy system. Bullying is most likely to happen when one person can get another person alone. At

school, encourage your child to stay in areas where adults can supervise. When no adults are present, your child should always be with at least one other child.

- **Tell your child** that simply watching while someone is bullied is nearly as bad as doing the bullying. He should report bullying situations to an adult. Your child can support the victim by inviting him to join his group, by standing next to him or just by putting a hand on his shoulder. If your child feels safe doing so, he can also stand up to the bully, “Leave Jimmy alone! Bullying isn’t cool.”
- **Give your child** anti-bullying strategies. He can walk away. It’s harder to bully someone who won’t stand still to listen. He can also practice comebacks such as “Stop it. I don’t like that.”

**Source:** J. and R. Sommers-Flanagan, “The Buzz on Bullying,” American School Counselor Association, [www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=282](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=282).

# Marijuana use by preteens raises risks of further drug use



Marijuana use at any age is highly risky and illegal. But the earlier you start, the worse it is. That’s the finding of a study from

Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. The study looked at the risks of starting marijuana before age 13. It compared them to risks of starting marijuana in the teen years.

The study done last year found that children starting marijuana before age 13 are more likely to:

- **Abuse other illegal drugs.**
- **Become addicted.**
- **Have stress disorders.**
- **Attempt suicide.**

- **Have traffic violations.**
- **Smoke cigarettes.**

As a parent, you can:

- **Let your child know** you strongly disapprove of illegal drug use and underage alcohol use.
- **Set an example for your child.** Do not abuse drugs or alcohol.
- **Know your child’s friends.** Insist on knowing where your child is and what he is doing.
- **Encourage your child** to do well in school—more education is linked to less drug use.

**Source:** B. Boughton, “Preteen Marijuana Use Linked to Comorbid Substance Abuse and Psychological Disorders,” *Medscape Medical News*, [www.medscape.com/viewarticle/720652](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/720652).

**Q:** My seventh grader is a good student, but getting her to do her homework feels like torture sometimes! How can I get her to complete her assignments without it turning into a nightly screaming match?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** When it comes to homework, not even the experts agree. Some say at-home assignments are critical for reinforcing what’s taught in class. Others argue that homework turns students off to learning and makes them less enthusiastic about school.

Regardless of who’s correct, the reality is that homework isn’t going away anytime soon. So that means your child—and you—will have to live with it.

To make homework time less of an ordeal for both of you:

- **Explain why it matters.** Talk to your child about the purpose of homework—that it helps her practice the skills she’s learning in class.
- **Give her more control.** No, your child can’t choose not to do her homework, but she can choose *how* to do it. Would she rather sprawl on her bedroom floor than sit at her desk? Let her. Does she prefer music to utter silence? Turn on the radio. Is after dinner a better time for her to work than before dinner? Fine.
- **Get involved.** Take an interest in the things your child is learning. Ask her to teach you something new. If you become engaged in her work, she might, too.

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Motivation

## Keep on track with goals and conversations



People do their best work if they are self-motivated. That is, the desire to achieve comes from within them, not because someone has threatened a punishment or even dangled a reward in front of them.

But many middle school students still need help becoming motivated when it comes to school work. So be your child's partner in this effort. Here's how:

- **Have a goal list.** Your child should write down her classes, and next to each of them, a goal. What grade would she like to see on her next report card? Encourage her to aim high but be realistic.
- **Have a daily talk.** Use the goal list as a conversation starter. Ask your child questions such as, "Is there homework in the class? Did you turn in today's homework? When is the next test, quiz or project? Did you get any tests or quizzes back?"
- **Stay in touch with teachers.** Get their input on how your child is doing. Emphasize to your child that it is a three-way partnership between with her, you and the school. It is important for your child to know you and her teachers care deeply about her success. Having caring partners promotes motivation. Thinking no one cares promotes discouragement.

**Source:** M. Whitley, "Motivating students to improve achievement," CNN, <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/COMMUNITY/08/29/whitley>.

## Try turning to technology to motivate your middle schooler

**D**oes your middle schooler roll her eyes when it's time to do homework? If so, let her do some of it on the computer.

Studies show that students are more motivated to learn when they're actively engaged in that learning. And one of the best ways to engage them is by using technology.

Your child can use the computer to type vocabulary words and their definitions. She can type notes after reading a section in a textbook.

If you child has a project, she can use the Internet to do research. When your child uses technology to gather data, experts say she:

- **Improves her ability** to analyze facts and predict outcomes.



- **Becomes a "real-world" learner.**
- **Sharpens problem-solving skills.**

**Source:** "Using Technology to Motivate Middle School Students," Teaching Today, <http://teachingtoday.glencoe.com/howtoarticles/using-technology-to-motivate-middle-school-students>.

## Motivate your underachieving middle schooler with questions



Your child is struggling in school and you know he could do better. You want answers. So you question him.

Your child responds with one-word answers or not at all.

If your child is to improve, he has to participate in the conversation, not just sit in stony silence while you talk. Here are some ideas:

- **Ask questions** that encourage your child to think and provide real answers. Not, "Is everything okay at school?" He will say *yes* and the conversation will be over. Try, "I hear Ms. Jone's class is challenging. Tell me what you read about in the last chapter?"

- **Focus on concern,** not criticism. Your message to your child should always be: I care about you. I would like to talk about ways that I can help you.
- **Think before giving** your child advice, especially advice like "study harder" or "how about spending less time in front of the TV?" Instead, when your child comes to you with a school problem, say, "I can understand how you would be concerned about that. How can you solve the problem?"

**Source:** Natalie Rathvon, *The Unmotivated Child: Helping Your Underachiever Become a Successful Student*, ISBN: 0-684-80306-2, Fireside, a Simon & Schuster company.