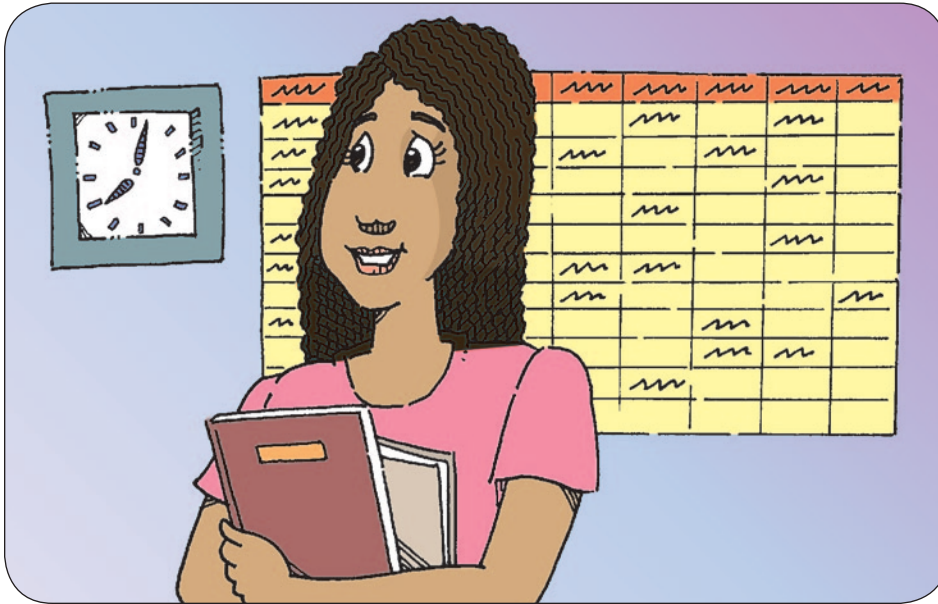


Middle School Parents[®]

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Katy Independent School District

still make the difference!



Encourage your child to make learning resolutions for 2011

It's the New Year! So help your middle schooler start it off right by adopting stronger school-related habits. After all, it may technically be the middle of the school year, but it's never too late for a fresh start!

Depending on her particular strengths and weaknesses, encourage your preteen to make New Year's resolutions related to her:

- **Homework habits.** Did she spend the first semester scrambling to get her assignments finished each night? Help your preteen turn over a new leaf this time around. Set aside a specific time for studying each night and remind her to stay with it.
- **Weekends.** Does she stay up late every Friday and Saturday and then snooze away much of the next day? And does that make waking up for school a major struggle on Monday morning? Have your child stick to a more reasonable bedtime on weekends. It might help her start the school week stronger.
- **Test prep.** Cramming for exams is a bad idea. So if it's your preteen's preferred way to study, something needs to change. This semester, have her hit the books for a short time each night during the week leading up to a test. She may see a payoff in her grades!

Get your child to open up just by hanging out



As a parent, you want your child to open up to you. This is especially critical from now on, when your child will be exposed

to more new ideas, opportunities and people—not all of them good for him. But as you may have already found out, trying to “sit your child down” for a serious talk usually doesn't work.

So what does work? *Time*. The more time you spend with your child, just hanging out, the greater your opportunity to show your child you can listen. And when he knows you'll listen, he'll talk.

Hanging out time includes:

- **Eating meals.**
- **Cooking.**
- **Doing errands.**
- **Driving to activities.**
- **Sitting with your child in the waiting room.**
- **Walking the dog**—or just walking.
- **Reading** or paying bills while your child does homework.
- **Watching** a TV show or movie your child enjoys together.

Source: N. Brown, Ph.D., “Talking With Preteens,” Palo Alto Medical Foundation, www.pamf.org/preteen/parents/talking.html.

Research shows that better nutrition leads to better grades



Not everything your child needs for school is in her book bag. Some of it is in her lunch bag.

According to research, a healthful diet can help your preteen stay sharp in class and better retain the information she learns there.

Unfortunately, packing nutritious foods doesn't necessarily mean she'll eat them. That's because kids routinely trade lunches with fellow students, or even toss out things they don't feel like eating.

So what's the solution? Help her become an informed eater who knows how to make wise food choices. Here's how:

- **Start with the facts.** Tell your child that studies show that good nutrition leads to better classroom performance. Period.
- **Expose her to a variety of foods.** Go grocery shopping together and explore one new food each week.

Sample fresh produce and choose whole-grain breads.

- **Make it easy for her to eat well.** Instead of stocking your fridge with soda and junk food, fill it with pre-washed, cut veggies and skim milk.
- **Insist on breakfast.** It really is the most important meal of the day, so don't let your child skip it. She can't do her best in class if she shows up with an empty "fuel tank."

Source: "Proper Nutrition Adds to Success in School," BabyBoomers.com, www.babyboomers.com/proper-nutrition-adds-to-success-in-school/188.

"Parents who are afraid to put their foot down usually have children who tread on their toes."

—Chinese Proverb

Help your preteen brainstorm new ideas for volunteer projects



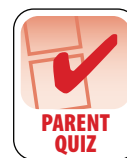
Sometimes middle school students and their parents are not sure how to get involved in the community. Here are

some ways to volunteer your time:

- **Conduct** a different kind of drive. Food drives are always a good idea, but other items are needed, too. Contact a local homeless shelter—they may need such items as diapers or mittens and gloves. Remember children in the hospital—they often have a lot of downtime in between procedures. Collect gently-used books, toys and DVDs to donate to the children's ward.
- **Do what you love.** If your child loves reading, he could read to younger children at a library story hour or in an elementary class. If he loves basketball, he could act as an assistant coach to younger children. If he likes board games, he could volunteer to play with children at daycare or after-care.
- **Help out a senior citizen.** Here are some ideas for the cold weather: Clear a driveway or walkway. Bring in mail or newspapers. If the resident has a dog, offer to walk it or take care of other pets.

Source: "Community Service Ideas!" Derry Cooperative School District, www.derry.k12.nh.us/wrb/pdf/CommunityServiceIdeas.pdf.

Are you helping your preteen focus on the future?



As a middle school student, your child is not quite ready to begin filling out college or job applications. But she is

ready to begin thinking about her future. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to find out if you are encouraging your child to plan:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to take challenging courses?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about what she might like to pursue when she is an adult?
- ___ **3. Do you discuss** different post-high school options (college, trade school) with your child?
- ___ **4. Do you tell** your child that you want her to gain the maximum education possible?
- ___ **5. Do you work** with your child to establish good study habits now, knowing she will need these even more in the future?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you and your child are preparing a foundation for her future. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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More research confirms that kids should choose what they read



Parents often complain that children don't want to read. But the truth may be a bit more complicated. It may be that your child does want to read—just not what *you* think he should be reading.

Researchers at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville would probably agree. They did a three-year study that found children did far better on reading tests if they were given books to read over the summer and they were allowed to choose the books they got. The message seems to be that children, like most people, want to read about their interests.

Here are some pointers:

- **Talk to your child** about his interests. If you don't already know, find out such information as his favorite sports hero, favorite

celebrity, TV shows he likes to watch and favorite way to spend free time.

- **Go to the library.** Check out three or four books that match your child's interests. Choose books that are at his reading level, or lower. Remember that most of what children read, especially when they read for pleasure, should be easy for them.
- **Ask your child to look** at the books you've checked out. Tell him to try reading at least one of them. If he likes it, great! If he doesn't, ask him to tell you what he would like in a book. Then go to the library together to find a match.

Source: T. Parker-Pope, "Summer Must-Read for Kids? Any Book," August 2, 2010, *The New York Times*, <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/02/summer-must-read-for-kids-any-book/>.

Consider using goals, incentives to motivate your middle schooler



She's only midway through the school year, but is your middle schooler already running out of steam?

To help her feel more enthusiastic and positive about the second half of the year:

- **Help her find an activity.** If your preteen was intimidated or too shy to get involved in a school club or activity last semester, she may feel like it's too late to join in now. But it's never too late! Talk to her guidance counselor about which activity might be a good fit, and then have her sign up. Feeling like she's a part of something and "belongs" can be very motivating for your child.

- **Talk to her.** Is something going on in class or with another student that's upsetting your preteen? It's time to ask her about it. Remember: Middle school can be extremely stressful, and things can go from terrific to terrible in the blink of an eye. So stay connected to your middle schooler and let her know you're available to talk and to listen.
- **Offer incentives.** Whether it's a trip to the mall, a long hike on the weekend or a night at the movies, offer her an occasional "goodie" in exchange for her hard work at school. It may keep the "second-semester doldrums" from getting out of control!

Q: We're moving next month, and my seventh grader will be attending a new school. I know he's dreading the move, but he just gets upset when I bring it up. How can I make the transition easier for him?

Questions & Answers

A: First, don't give up on talking to your son. The idea of moving can be truly daunting for him. After all, not only did he have to start middle school once; he must now do it all over again in a new place. Who wouldn't be upset?

So one of the most important things you can do is to keep the lines of communication open. Don't force him to talk, but do let him know you're available.

Beyond that, you can help your child make the move to a new school smoother by encouraging him to:

- **Take a "virtual" tour.** Encourage your child to visit his new school's website. It can be an excellent way for him to learn about the place before he actually gets there.
- **Connect with school staff.** Suggest that your child send an email to his new principal or guidance counselor. In it, he can introduce himself and ask any questions he might have.
- **Make friends beforehand.** Do you know any kids who attend your child's new school? Put him in touch with them well ahead of moving day. A friendly face can do a lot to ease those "new kid" jitters.

Good luck and best wishes for a successful transition!

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Discipline

Understand why your preteen may be moody



The middle school years are a time of tremendous change for your child. Your child may transform

from a happy-go-lucky elementary student to a sometimes moody, even occasionally surly, middle school student.

Both you and your child will be able to weather this time if you understand what is going on. Your child is not being moody to upset you or make you angry. So do not take your child's moods personally. Instead, look at them as part of her growth. They can result from:

- **Growth in thinking.** Your child is moving away from taking everything at face value. She is able to consider different possibilities. She may not like some of them. This can affect her moods.
- **Growth in emotions.** Your child now has more complex emotions. She can be happy for a friend's success, but also a little jealous. At the same time, she can be angry at herself for the jealousy! These swirling emotions can lead to unsettled moods.
- **Growth in relationships.** Peers become more important to most preteens. They are also forming relationships with more adults, such as coaches or club leaders. With each new relationship comes the chance that something will happen to affect your child's mood.

Source: K. Greder, "Parenting Young Teens," Iowa State University Extension, www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/pm1547e.pdf.

Effective discipline involves natural & logical consequences

Did your preteen leave his field-trip permission slip at home despite your repeated reminders to put it in his backpack? Let him face a natural or logical consequence for his negligence.

Here's what it might look like:

- **A natural consequence** stems directly from his actions. No signed permission slip? Then no class trip for your preteen. It may be harsh, but it's a clear, concrete reminder of why it's crucial to behave responsibly. Maybe he'll be less forgetful next time.
- **A logical consequence** relates to his actions in a more general way. For example, did you take



an hour out of your workday to drive his permission slip to school? Then he can give you an hour of his time later by helping you clean the kitchen or vacuum the basement.

Your preteen is ready for more independence, with boundaries



Most middle schoolers can handle short periods of time without an adult—such as time at a friend's house or a trip to a restaurant or movies.

These new freedoms mean your child also needs to abide by some new rules. A curfew may be one of these. When establishing a curfew, consider:

- **Safety.** Your child should never be in a place where her safety is in question. She should not be out after dark without an adult.
- **Sleep needs.** A middle school child needs nine hours of sleep or more. On school nights, your child should be home early unless it is a special occasion,

such as a school concert she is participating in.

- **How to reach her.** Any time your child goes out, she must tell you where she is going, who she will be with and what she will be doing. If she doesn't have a phone, get the phone number of one of her companions or her location.
- **An "always call" policy.** That means that if your child ever gets in a situation where she is worried or uncomfortable, she can call you to come and get her immediately—no questions asked. Her safety comes first.

Source: J. O'Donnell, "Should Tweens Have Curfews?" About.com, <http://tweenparenting.about.com/od/familyhome/f/TweensCurfews.htm>.