

Middle School Parents[®]

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Katy Independent School District

still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler finish the school year strong

The calendar says “May,” but chances are your middle schooler’s brain is already thinking “summer vacation!”

The last few weeks of school are as important as any other, though. So it’s vital that she stay focused and finish strong.

To help keep your child working hard as the year winds down:

- **Stick to routines.** She’s probably not the only one being wooed by warmer temperatures and extra daylight. If you find yourself letting her hang out with friends longer and longer and stay up later and later, it’s time to get back on track. Morning comes as early as ever, and if your middle

schooler doesn’t get enough sleep at night, she may be cranky and worn out in class.

- **Stay interested in her work.** Don’t stop asking your child about what’s happening in class just because, by this point, you’re pretty familiar with what goes on there. Show her you still care about her education.
- **Issue a warning.** Remind your child that if her grades suddenly slip near the end of the year—or her homework stops being completed—there will be consequences. The thought of missing a summertime movie or trip to the pool may inspire her to buckle down.

Don’t let your middle schooler grow up too fast



For most middle schoolers, being older seems “cool.” Be sensitive to your child’s feelings. But

do not let him adopt ways you know he’s not ready for. The gap between a 12-year-old and a 17-year-old is just a few years in time. But it is miles in terms of maturity level.

Be aware of:

- **Where your child is,** and the age of his companions. Older high school students, of either sex, are not your child’s peers. He should not be with them unsupervised.
- **Your child’s behavior.** A sudden change in behavior, habits or grades is one of the warning signals for substance abuse.
- **Your child’s respect** for your limits. Your child needs some freedom at this age. If he can assume it and still stay within your boundaries, that is a good sign that he is actually becoming—not just trying to be—more mature.

Source: G. Hermann, “Growing Up Too Fast—Helping Your Preteen Transition from Child to Adult,” iParenting, www.dadstoday.com/articles/parenting-strategies/growing-up-too-fast-1184/.

Test-taking hints can help your child ace standardized tests



May means the school year is almost over. But first, most middle school students must take standardized exams.

Knowing the content is most important. But knowing *how* to take tests helps a lot, too.

Here are some tips you can give your child to help him do his best:

- **Get plenty of sleep** the night before. Most middle school students need at least nine hours of sleep. This also helps your child get to school on time, another indicator for success on tests.
- **Take deep breaths.** Many students get nervous for tests. If your child is among them, encourage him to take a few moments to relax before he begins. One technique is to close your eyes and visualize each worry exiting your mind.
- **Give yourself a pep talk.** Have your child tell himself: "I can do this. I have worked hard all year

long. I can do this. So let's get to it."

- **Spend time with the directions.** Countless students under perform on tests because they don't follow the directions! Read directions carefully.
- **Answer questions** you definitely know first. The goal for any student on a test is to get as many questions right as possible. The first step toward this goal is to immediately answer all the ones you are sure of. Then go back and tackle more challenging questions.

Source: It's My Life, "Test Stress: Ten Terrific Test-Taking Tips," PBS Kids, www.pbskids.org/itsmylife/school/teststress/print_article10.html.

"Adolescents understand everything that we're *not* saying."

—Brad E. Sachs, Ph.D.

Babysitting builds responsibility, gives your child work experience



Part-time jobs are great for teaching your child responsibility. But middle schoolers aren't quite old enough for gainful

employment. Still, there's one job that seems tailor-made for preteens—it's babysitting.

But not every preteen is mature enough to handle babysitting. To decide whether yours is ready to take on the job, ask yourself:

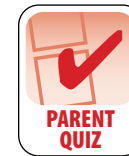
- **Has your child shown an interest** in babysitting?
- **Does she have experience** caring for children? If so, is she patient?

- **Does your child do well** when she's home alone? If she gets jittery the moment you leave, she may be uncomfortable babysitting in a strange house.
- **Is your child self-sufficient?** Can you count on her to take care of an emergency situation?

If you've considered these points and your preteen seems like a natural babysitter, help her find some jobs. It will nurture her sense of responsibility.

Source: K. Marmarou, "Is Your Preteen Ready to Babysit?" TweenParent.com, www.tweenparent.com/articles/view/138.

Do you know what your child needs for high school?



The transition from middle to high school is a big one. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are preparing

your child for the huge transition to high school:

___1. **Do you encourage** your child to use a planner to keep track of all school assignments?

___2. **Have you told your child** that while the friends he has are important, he should also be open to making new ones?

___3. **Have you talked** with your child about the importance of respecting school staff and students?

___4. **Do you encourage** your child to ask for help when he needs it? This is not a sign of weakness. It shows maturity.

___5. **Have you practiced strategies** with your child for resisting peer pressure?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping to prepare your child for high school challenges. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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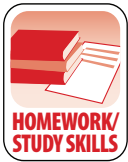
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Teach your child how to take notes with the column method



As a middle school student, your child is moving into a phase of education where taking good notes will be necessary for success. Note-taking is essential when listening to a teacher give a lecture, or when reading longer and more difficult texts.

Organizing notes into columns is a strategy that works for many students. Columns are easy for the eye to take in. This may help your child remember the material better than if she were looking at a mass of words.

For-two column notes:

- **One column should be narrow.** The other column should be wide.
- **In the narrow column,** your child should write down main ideas. When taking notes from a text, look for words in bold-face type. When taking notes from a lecture, listen for the teacher's

clues. Phrases like “You should remember this,” or “It’s important to know that” mean the teacher is about to discuss a main idea.

- **In the wide column,** your child should fill in four to six facts about the main idea.

For three-column notes:

- **Separate the page** into three sections—the first column should be narrow, the second wide, the third narrow again.
- **Think of a visual** to go with the notes. This could be a picture, a graph or even just symbols. Again what matters is that they are meaningful to your child.
- **Draw your picture,** symbols or graph in the third column. Now your child has another piece of information to help the main idea “stick” in her mind.

Source: Ann K. Dolin, *Homework Made Simple*, Advantage Books, LLC.

Good manners will help your child be respectful, courteous



Teach your child good manners now, and he may grow into a more courteous, respectful adult. To remind him of

what polite behavior looks like:

- **Model it.** Let your child see you hold the door for an elderly person or give up your seat on the train to a pregnant woman.
- **Survey the table.** Don’t expect Emily Post-like manners at the dinner table, but insist on basic etiquette. If you notice your child talking with his mouth full or reaching across someone to grab the butter, call him on it.
- **Rein in critical remarks.** Don’t let your child hear you criticizing

his teachers or other adults. If he hears too many not-so-friendly comments from you, he may start thinking it’s okay for him to make similar remarks himself.

- **Role-play.** Show your child the proper way to respond when you are introduced to someone. Say, “Hello, it’s nice to meet you,” as you shake your child’s hand and look him in the eye. Now, have him practice doing the same thing with you.
- **Insist on thank-you notes.** There is no substitute for a written thank-you.

Source: Kate Thomsen, M.S., C.A.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose*, ISBN: 1-57482-199-7, Search Institute Press.

Q: My eighth grader loves middle school, but the thought of starting high school seems to overwhelm her. Is there anything I can do to make the transition go more smoothly?

Questions & Answers

A: Absolutely! Although you can’t guarantee your child an easy transition from middle school to high school, there are things you can do this summer to prepare her for the change. You can:

- **Listen to her.** When your child talks about her fears surrounding high school, pay attention. It may help you get to the bottom of the problem. For example, you might assume she has a general fear about starting a new school. It could turn out, though, that she’s really just worried about getting lost in the halls or riding on a different bus.
- **Help her get organized.** High school means more classes and a bigger workload. Help your child prepare this summer by teaching her to stay organized. Give her a small, backpack-sized calendar she can use during the school year to write down assignments. If her school allows cell phones, have her download a calendar app instead.
- **Visit the school.** If it’s okay with the principal, take your child on a tour of the high school during the summer. The more familiar she is with its layout before school starts, the more comfortable she may be on the first day of class.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Summer Learning

Encourage your child to read over the summer



It's important to keep your child reading over the summer. Reading for pleasure helps stem "summer learning loss."

But what if your child doesn't even like to read during the school year, let alone when she doesn't *have to*? Use summer to try a few strategies to lure her into the world of good books. Consider:

- **Time in the car.** One family relied on movies to keep the children entertained during long car trips. Then one day, the parents decided to experiment with listening to a novel on CD instead. It worked well and now they have listened to dozens of books. Best of all, the listening inspired the kids to pick up the paper versions of the books and read them.
- **Time spent waiting.** Summers is often a time to schedule doctor's appointments and do errands that never seem to get done during the school year. Bring books or magazines along any time your child will be waiting. Choose any reading material that will entertain her.
- **Alternative formats.** If your middle schooler has never tried graphic novels, summer is a great time to try one. These novels have turned many young people onto reading. See if her favorite story comes in graphic form.

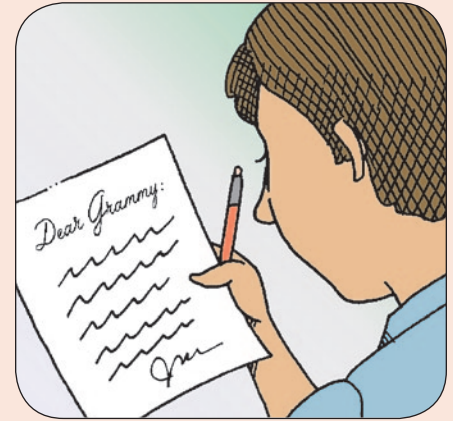
Source: M. Salvadore, "How Do You Get a 12-Year-Old Boy to Read?" *Adolescent Literacy*, www.adlit.org/ask-the-experts/27739?theme=print.

Have your child explore different forms of writing

Summer vacation is a good time to help your child learn two important things about writing. First, writing has a purpose. It is not something teachers make up to torture their students! Second, writing can be a lot of fun, especially when you love the topic.

Here are some fun and purposeful writing ideas for your child. Your child can write:

- **A book review** of a book he has read. This is different from a book report. He should focus on whether he liked the book, why or why not, and whether he would recommend it.
- **Trivia questions** about a favorite sport. This is a wonderful way to show what an "expert" he is.
- **A letter to the editor**, or a letter of complaint to a company. Airing your gripes is a purpose for writing. Have him share his.



- **A letter**—yes, a real letter on paper. Make Grandma's day, or that of another relative or family friend.
- **Fan fiction.** Choose his favorite characters from any kind of media. Put them in a story that he creates.

Source: "Resources for Grades 7-8," National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, www.readwritethink.org/parent-afterschool-resources/grade/7-8/.

Community strengthens your middle schooler's character



Get your preteen to learn something new and build his character at the same time. How? Have him volunteer during summer vacation!

Pitching in at a local organization isn't just an honorable thing to do. It may also teach your preteen to be more compassionate and less self-centered.

To help him find the "right fit" as far as volunteering, have him ask himself:

- **What do I enjoy doing?** Is your preteen a terrific cook? Does he love web design? Find volunteer work that capitalizes on his natural talents.
- **What would I rather not do?** Does your child prefer working indoors? Is he introverted? Then don't sign him up to referee a kids' soccer league! Instead, be honest about what he's comfortable doing and proceed accordingly.