

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Katy Independent School District

*still make the difference!*



## Routines will get the school year off to a great start

**G**et your preteen to follow some simple school-week routines and you won't just make this school year run more smoothly. You will also be teaching her responsibility by putting her largely in charge of her own schedule.

Here are three areas where responsibility-boosting routines are especially useful:

**1. Homework.** Your preteen will probably have some every day, so teach her to take charge of it! Encourage her to hit the books at the same time each afternoon and suggest she work in the same spot. And wherever her "homework spot" may be, remind her to stock it with paper, pens and other supplies.

**2. Bedtime.** Along with showering and brushing her teeth, suggest that your preteen go over a "mental checklist" before bed each night. Are her clothes for tomorrow laid out? Is her backpack ready and waiting? Did she have you sign any and all permission slips or forms?

**3. Morning.** Hopefully, your child's bedtime routine will minimize scrambling in the morning. Still, it's good for her to follow a regular ritual in the morning, too, such as: "Wake up, eat breakfast, get dressed and go." But if that doesn't keep her from rushing around frantically, have her set her alarm clock to go off 15 minutes earlier.

## Begin the year by committing to attendance



It's hard to overstate the importance of your child's regular school attendance. One of your responsibilities

as a parent is to get your child to school every day unless there is illness or an emergency.

This is essential because:

- **Your child risks poor or failing grades** if not at school.
- **Learning builds every day** on what is learned the day before. This routine is interrupted when students only show up part of the time.
- **The whole school can suffer.** Schools get state and federal money based on average daily attendance. When attendance goes down, so does the funding a school receives.
- **Your child's life as an adult** depends a lot on whether he has a high school diploma. If your child misses too many days of school, he may not be able to get a diploma.
- **Much research shows** that students who skip school will also skip other commitments, like days of work.

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

## Make sure your child knows that teachers deserve respect



Unfortunately, teachers often need to contact parents with less-than-happy news. When they do, the topic is often not academics. It is behavior. Many times, the child has been disrespectful.

Every child gets frustrated sometimes, but disrespecting a teacher is never the solution. You can reinforce this lesson with your child if you:

- **Are a role model.** Let your child see you treating her teachers (and all people) with kindness and dignity.
- **Remind your child** to give teachers her attention. Doodling, looking out the window and getting out her cell phone are all disrespectful actions.
- **Review basic classroom rules** with your child. Discussion is an

important part of middle school learning. But your child still needs to raise her hand and wait her turn to speak. When she does speak, she should speak with appropriate words and a respectful tone of voice.

- **Encourage your child** to use good manners. Teachers love to hear the words *please* and *thank you*. “I appreciate it” is a great phrase, too.

**Source:** Tom McIntyre, *The Behavior Survival Guide for Kids*, ISBN: 1-57542-132-1, Free Spirit Publishing.

**“Kids go where there is excitement. They stay where there is love.”**

—Zig Ziglar

## Talk to your middle schooler about dealing with peer pressure



Peer pressure may be unpleasant, but it's also extremely common—especially in middle school. So what can you do about peer pressure? Teach your preteen strategies for handling it. The better he gets at deflecting pressure from friends, the more immune he may become to it.

Of course, he first needs to understand what it is, so have a conversation about it. “When kids try to get you to do something that you know you shouldn't, that's peer pressure.” Things he might be pressured into doing include trying alcohol or drugs, smoking or shoplifting.

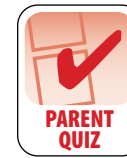
Once your preteen is clear on what peer pressure looks like, teach

him strategies to combat it. Your child should:

- **Think before he acts.** Is the thing he's being asked to try really worth it? How will he feel about himself if he gives in?
- **Laugh it off.** Humor is great for defusing tension. “Yeah, I'd love to steal that CD, but then I'd be grounded for about a thousand years!”
- **Firmly say no.** Sometimes an assertive “no” is all it takes to make peers back off. Help your preteen practice saying it to you until he feels confident enough to say it to them.

**Source:** Harriet S. Mosatche, Ph.D. and Karen Unger, M.A., *Too Old for This, Too Young for That! Your Survival Guide for the Middle-School Years*, ISBN: 1-57542-067-8, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Do you know how to stay involved in middle school?



Parent involvement drops dramatically once kids leave elementary school. Are you prepared to keep making a

difference by staying involved in your child's education? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below:

- \_\_\_ **1. Will you learn** about the school—how to contact the administration and how it is different from elementary school?
- \_\_\_ **2. Will you meet** and keep in touch with your child's teachers?
- \_\_\_ **3. Will you go to school** events even if your child says he doesn't “need” you there?
- \_\_\_ **4. Will you look** for volunteer opportunities that meet your schedule?
- \_\_\_ **5. Will you ask your child** about his schoolwork and keep abreast of how he is doing?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you will continue to be an involved parent. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions on staying involved.

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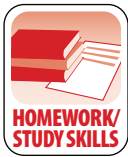
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# Set your child up for success with a homework routine that works



Homework in middle school as opposed to elementary school can usually be summed up with the word *more*.

There is *more* of it, it is given *more* frequently and it is *more* complex.

You can help your child make a successful transition if you:

- **Know what your child is doing** after school. If you are not at home, have a system through which he checks in frequently.
- **Make sure your child has a place** that suits him for doing homework. His nook should be comfortable and well lit.
- **Tell your child** that his school-work is important to you because your family values education.
- **Set up a schedule.** Some children don't need this, but many do.

Homework is more likely to get done if the words: "Do homework from 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m." are written down in a prominent place in your home.

- **Encourage your child to set goals.** Example: Do five math problems daily for weekly assignment. If I complete this goal, I will be done with math by Friday and have my weekend free.
- **Teach your child to plan ahead** for large assignments. Have a calendar for writing down due dates. Break up the assignment into chunks and have a due date for each chunk. That way your child will not be doing everything the night before the project is due.

**Source:** Sydney S. Zentall and Sam Goldstein, *Seven Steps to Homework Success*, ISBN: 1-886941-22-X, Specialty Press, Inc.

# Keep tabs, set limits on your middle schooler's screen time



How much time does the average preteen spend in front of a screen each week?

Much more than the seven to 14 hours recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. According to research, the typical American youth:

- **Sits in front of a screen** for 37 hours every week. This includes TV, computers and video games.
- **Spends 1,500 hours a year** just watching television. But the time spent in school? Only 900 hours. This doesn't mean television or computers are bad. In fact, kids today are more tech-savvy than ever. Besides, countless school assignments require computers.

But all this time parked in front of screens means kids have fewer hours for things like exercise, reading and just hanging out with the family.

To keep your child's screen time from getting out of control:

- **Enforce a time limit.** Aim for no more than two hours of non-school-related screen time daily.
- **Keep the TV out of the bedroom.** Studies show that kids who have sets in their rooms watch an average of 90 minutes more television daily than kids who don't.
- **Lead by example.** Don't spend all your free moments surfing the Web or watching TV, either.

**Source:** "Does Your Tween Need Help Managing Screen Time?" TweenParent.com, [www.tweenparent.com/articles/view/117](http://www.tweenparent.com/articles/view/117).

**Q:** I hate to admit it, but I'm more upset about school starting than my seventh grader is! How can I get back into the groove (like she already seems to be) of homework, earlier bedtimes and after-school activities when I'm secretly pining for summer?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** By being open-minded about the year ahead! While it's true that back-to-school time means more obligations, it doesn't have to mean an end to family fun. In fact, because school brings with it so many chances to experience new things, it can mean the opposite!

To start feeling more upbeat about the new school year:

- **Get excited for your child.** What cool classes will she be taking this year? Will she be studying a foreign language for the first time? Embrace the new culture as a family. Nibble on French food. Listen to traditional Spanish music. Broaden your horizons together.
- **See things through fresh eyes.** Your child may be attending the same school as last year, but that doesn't mean seventh grade will be exactly like sixth. So give yourself a chance to be pleasantly surprised by her new teachers, new friends and even her new confidence as an older student.
- **Participate.** Did you skip the book fair, fall festival and class play last year? Join in this time around. It may change how you feel about your child's school!

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: The Home-School Team

## You still play a key role in your child's learning



If you, like a great many parents, became used to overseeing the homework your elementary school student

brought home, you may feel some dread as your child begins middle school. You may worry that you don't remember higher-level math or science, making your review of homework not very helpful. Or you may simply think your child no longer needs you.

Neither is the case! Of course your child is growing and advancing. So your role may be *different*. But it's no less important. Here are some tips for helping your child:

- **Know what your child** is studying. That doesn't mean you have to be able to teach it or even explain it. But being aware of the subject matter helps you understand what is being expected of your child.
- **Ask questions** that help your child link new information with something she already knows. "Hmm. Order of operations. I see an exponent here and I remember you doing problems with exponents last year. What if reviewing exponents could help you learn order of operations?"
- **Suggest ways** your child can find information. Help your child find a book, article or website that might help her. Is there a friend or family member that might be an expert on the subject?

**Source:** "Staying Involved: Approaches to Helping Our Middle School and High School Students Learn," Parent Academic Resources Incorporated, [www.academicresources.org/learning.html](http://www.academicresources.org/learning.html).

## Find creative ways to volunteer at your child's middle school

**D**o you think volunteers are more important in elementary school than in middle school? Think again! Helping hands are needed—and appreciated—in middle school, too. So consider pitching in at school.

Beyond helping out in one of his classes (which might make him cringe), you could:

- **Offer to chaperone a field trip** or after-school activity. This is a terrific option if your work schedule keeps you from helping out during the regular school day.
- **Handle paperwork.** Check with your child's teacher or the office to see if there are papers that need to be folded or stapled.



Offer to do it over the weekend and bring the finished copies back on Monday.

- **Help other parents.** Provide transportation to a school event for a parent who can't drive.

## Make an extra effort to get to know middle school teachers



One of the greatest differences between elementary and middle school may be the change in communicating with teachers.

In elementary school, your child probably had one teacher. You had one point of contact. In middle school, your child may have seven or eight teachers.

Communication may be more challenging, but it is still important. Here are some tips.

- **Contact** all your child's teachers early in the year. Email is usually the best way to do this. For example: "Hi, Mr. Jones. I'm Ms. Smith and my daughter Kate

Smith is in your first-period science class. I hope we can stay in touch throughout the year on how Kate is doing. Here is my email address and phone number. Sincerely, Susan Smith."

- **Visit** the school. Attend open house. Attend evening events and greet teachers who are there.
- **Attend** conferences. Middle school conferences are usually shorter and more informal than elementary conferences. But they are still a good way to get "face time" with a teacher. Remember to remind the teacher whose parent you are and what period of the day the teacher sees your child.