Middle School Parents®
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Boise City Independent School District
still make the difference!

Why is it so important for your student to be in every class?

Every day of school is important. The consequences of missing classes and instruction can be especially tough on your middle schooler, especially during the second half of the school year. Here's why:

- **Every class is packed** with essential material. Regular attendance helps students keep up with the curriculum and learning pace.
- **It's easier for students** to get the support they need from teachers when they are in class and can ask questions.
- **Once the year is half over,** many teachers turn a serious eye to the end-of-year exams. The pace of instruction picks up.
- **In just a few weeks,** teachers will also begin to review for these exams. This review will go on at the same time as regular teaching.
- **Your child may have** more assignments as a result of faster instruction and review. The more time out of class, the more the schoolwork piles up, which can overwhelm middle schoolers.

To support learning, prioritize attendance. Continue to:

- **Emphasize** the importance of arriving on time to every class prepared and ready to participate.
- **Accept no excuses** for missing school—except true illness or emergency. Skipping a class to finish an assignment is not a valid reason.
- **Avoid making appointments** or plans for your child that would result in a missed a class.

Set reasonable expectations for your child

It's vital to set expectations for your middle schooler's academic success, but it's equally essential to make sure those expectations are reasonable.

To determine whether you're setting the bar at the right level for your child, ask yourself if your expectations:

- **Are flexible.** Have you read parenting books telling you what your child "should be" doing, thinking or feeling at this age? If so, you may have lost sight of the fact that most of that information is based on *averages*. It doesn't relate specifically to what any one individual should be doing (or achieving). Keep that in mind if you find yourself setting a goal for your child just because "all the other sixth graders" seem to be meeting it.
- **Reflect** who your middle schooler really is. Be realistic when setting goals. For example, if your child has always been a reluctant reader, signing up for a class with a heavy reading load may not make sense. Work together with teachers to set your child up for success.

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Help your student develop an effective note-taking system

Every student needs note-taking skills to succeed in school. Taking notes by hand reinforces material in students' brains, and reviewing them daily helps kids be ready for the next class.

Share these note-taking pointers with your middle schooler:

- **Write down lists.** If the teacher says, "Here are five causes of the Revolutionary War," your child should write them down.
- **Write down what's on the board** or screen. Information a teacher takes time to display is usually something your child should learn.
- **Listen for "extreme" words.** Anytime a teacher describes a concept as the *best*, the *weakest* or the *last*, your child should take note of it.
- **Take advantage of pauses.** When teachers pause after saying something, they are likely giving students time to write.
- **Write down any information** that the teacher repeats.
- **Stay with it.** Teachers sometimes squeeze in important information near the end of class if they realize they are running out of time.

> **"Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."**
>
> *—Benjamin Franklin*

Protect your middle schooler from the downsides of social media

The average middle schooler spends an alarming nine hours a day engaging with social media. And not everyone your child's interacts with online is a real friend. Who has 639 friends in real life anyway?

The US Surgeon General recently issued a warning about the effects of social media use on youth mental health. Since the frontal cortex of the brain (which is in charge of managing distractions and planning ahead) is not well-developed in adolescents, they are vulnerable to the damaging effects of social media, such as sleep loss, distraction and depression.

To protect your middle schooler:

- **Talk about privacy.** Remind your child not to share personal information online with strangers. Also talk about how nothing posted on social media is private.
- **Set limits.** Don't allow devices at mealtime or during family time. Keep devices out of your child's bedroom overnight.
- **Talk about what is appropriate** to post and what's not. If your child wouldn't want the whole world to see it, it's probably not OK.
- **Stay connected.** Follow your child's social media accounts and make it clear you will look at them.
- **Tell your child** to come to you about any content that seems upsetting or concerning.
- **Create a family account.** This lets your middle schooler stay in touch with friends, but in a safer space.

Source: E. Abi-Jaoude and others, "Smartphones, social media use and youth mental health," *CMAJ*, Canadian Medical Association.

Are you helping your child with time management?

Time management can be a real challenge for kids. The challenge gets greater as they get older and have to deal with complicated projects and schedules. Students often feel the pinch particularly during the second half of the school year.

Are you teaching your middle schooler how to manage time? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___**1. Do you encourage** your child to write all academic and personal commitments on a calendar?

___**2. Do you talk** about priorities and explain that when everything can't be completed, your child should focus on what's most important?

___**3. Do you suggest** your child make and follow a schedule each week?

___**4. Do you show** your child how to break down large assignments and tasks into smaller, more manageable steps?

___**5. Do you set an example** by using your own time wisely?

How well are you doing?

Each *yes* means you are helping your child learn how to manage time. For *no* answers, consider trying those ideas.

Middle School Parents still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Teach your child to follow four steps after making mistakes

While it may be comforting for students to hear, "Don't worry. You'll learn from this mistake," that's not always the case. Sometimes, students just keep making the same mistakes over and over again.

In order to really learn from mistakes, students need to think about them. Here are four steps your child can take to do just that:

1. **Look at what was right.** You could say, "Your test wasn't perfect. But let's see where you succeeded." Pointing out that all is not lost will motivate your child to take the next step.
2. **Figure out what went wrong.** It's hard to fix a problem if you don't know what caused it. Sometimes, the solution is easy: *I didn't follow the directions.* But other times, it requires more analysis.
3. **Take steps to correct the problem.** Perhaps your middle schooler didn't learn all of the content. In that case, your child may need to ask the teacher for help. Work together to create a plan, outlining what your child should do differently next time. Express confidence in your child's ability to improve.
4. **Apply knowledge** to a new situation. For example, have your child try a problem that is similar to the ones missed on the test. After stopping at the place where the mistake was made, your child should try something different. Successfully solving the problem will prove that your child really did learn from the mistake.

Source: H.S. Schroder and others, "Neural evidence for enhanced attention to mistakes among school-aged children with a growth mindset," *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience,* Elsevier B.V.

These strategies can help your child strengthen resilience

Resilience is the ability to adapt well in difficult times. And it's a skill that can be learned. To strengthen resilience, encourage your middle schooler to:

- **Build solid relationships.** Have your child join clubs, athletic teams or other groups of peers with shared interests. Stay in touch with grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Remind your child that teachers, coaches and the school counselor are available to support students, too.
- **Stick with comforting routines.** Children feel secure when they can rely on certain things being the same, such as a nightly reading time or a family breakfast every Saturday morning.
- **Be positive.** This includes "editing" negative statements and thoughts. If your middle schooler says, "I doubt I'll get a role in the play," suggest saying "I'm going to practice my lines every day until tryouts" instead.
- **Help others.** Volunteering in the community, tutoring younger students or reading aloud to a younger sibling can give your middle schooler something to feel proud of and good about when times are tough.

Source: "Resilience for teens: 10 tips to build skills on bouncing back from rough times," American Psychological Association.

Q: I am so frustrated with how ungrateful my middle schooler acts. No matter what I do, it never seems to be enough for my child. How can I get my middle schooler to be more thankful and stop taking people and things for granted?

Questions & Answers

A: Behavioral psychologists say all children are born with feelings of gratitude. Unfortunately, kids can lose this natural inclination. One way is when they are given rewards regardless of how they behave. Another is when they are given too many things, with nothing expected in return.

To foster a grateful attitude:

- **Model gratitude.** Let your child see you writing thank-you notes or returning a favor. Thank your child for things, too.
- **Prioritize appreciation.** Focus attention on the necessities your family has. Downplay discussions of material possessions.
- **Sensitize your child** to others who have less. Kids realize how fortunate they are when they see others with less.
- **Start a tradition** of sharing gratitude. Have everyone around the dinner table tell what they feel grateful for in the last week.
- **Discuss kind gestures.** Note how wonderful it was for someone to take the time to do or give something nice.
- **Separate privileges** and gifts from rights. If your child wants something extra, ask your child to perform a chore in return.
- **Offer praise** whenever your child does show gratitude.
- **Don't ignore** times when your child isn't thankful. Instead, remind your child again why gratitude is important.

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It Matters: Mental Health

Monitor your child's mental well-being

Half of middle schoolers say feeling depressed, stressed or anxious is their biggest hurdle when it comes to learning, according to a recent student survey. While occasional sadness and stress are normal, it's vital for families to be alert to potential problems.

Here's how to stay in the loop:

- **Do mental "temperature" checks.** Talk to your child regularly about school, friends and activities. Ask, "What was the best thing that happened to you today? The worst?" Find good times to chat, such as in the car, on a walk or at bedtime.
- **Be aware of influences** in your child's life. Get to know your child's friends. Encourage your child to invite them over, or offer to drive in a carpool. Set rules for social media use and other online activities.
- **Know the warning signs.** It can be difficult to tell if your child's bad mood is a normal part of growing up—or if there's a problem. Pay close attention to symptoms like:
  - » **Losing interest** in favorite activities.
  - » **Low energy.**
  - » **Changes in sleeping** or eating habits.
  - » **Avoiding family** and friends.

If you're at all uncertain about your middle schooler's mental well-being, talk with your child's teachers, school counselor and pediatrician.

Source: *Insights From the Student Experience: Emotional & Mental Health*, YouthTruth Student Survey, Fall 2022.

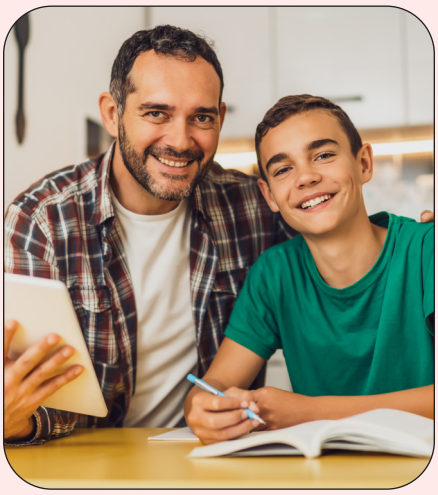
Take time to listen to your middle schooler's opinions

Whether you are in a discussion at work or with a family member, you've probably asked "Could you at least hear me out?" Because even if you don't get your way, you want to know that your point of view was considered.

Middle schoolers feel the same way. Giving kids a chance to express their opinions makes them happier, more engaged and more confident—which affects their motivation to do well academically.

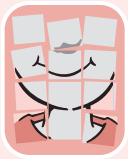
When your child has something to say, listen. And when your child makes a valid point, consider it. Your child might have a reasonable idea about switching up chores. Or, there may be a compelling argument for staying up a bit later on Friday night.

You may not always agree, but by taking the time to listen, you are building your child's confidence to speak up and contribute in class settings and in other areas of life.



Source: K.N. Marbell-Pierre and others, "Parental Autonomy Support in Two Cultures: The Moderating Effects of Adolescents' Self-Construals," *Child Development*, National Library of Medicine.

Making art can help middle schoolers deal with emotions



Creating art gives middle schoolers a productive way to express themselves, and can even reduce anxiety. It can also help them understand and name their emotions—which is often the first step toward learning how to regulate those emotions.

Encourage your child to:

- **Keep a journal.** Suggest writing or drawing about feelings, and adding motivational quotations.
- **Create a display box** from items that make your child happy, such as a small rock from a favorite outdoor place, a dried flower and a photo.
- **Create a "mood mandala."** Mandalas are geometric designs that can start as a series of circles. Your child can use one circle for each day of the month. Then, your student can use color and design to reflect feelings for each day, and link the circles into a pattern.

Some kids like to share their creations, while others like to keep them private. Just let your child know you're a willing and available audience.

Source: J. Fraga, "How Making Art Helps Teens Better Understand Their Mental Health," KQED News.