

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Educational Service Unit #8  
Linda Miller, Service Representative

***still make the difference!***



## Teach your middle schooler to bounce back from failure

**N**o parent ever wants to see his child fail. But failure is a part of a life, and many students first begin to realize this during the middle school years. Now classes are more challenging. More study is needed. And a lack of organization can really set a child back.

You can't always prevent your child from falling. But you can do something even more important: Encourage her to get back up and try again. To do this:

- **Be a role model.** Adults do not succeed at everything they try either, especially the first time. Every day, show your child you are trying, whether it is to get a new job, learn a new skill or get organized at home. Say things like, "Sometimes I get discouraged, too, but I know I will make this happen if I keep at it."

- **Emphasize effort.** Children often think that ability is the only key to success. If they fail a math test, they may say: "I just stink at math." The way not to "stink" at something is to keep practicing it. Praise your child's *efforts* and not just *results*.
- **Encourage interests.** Your child is just like any other person—she is more willing to stick with an activity she enjoys. And by sticking with it—whether it is reading, sports or piano—she will get better. This helps her overall self-concept. With a boost in confidence, she may be more willing to tackle less desirable and more difficult activities, because she believes she can eventually prevail.

**Source:** L. Clark, "Helping Children Achieve Success and Learn from Failure," The Ohio State University Extension, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm01/pdf/FS14.pdf>.

## Be a voice for safety at your child's school



Student safety is one area of school life that many parents never think much about. But it is an area where parents can make a big difference.

You can:

- **Learn what the school does** to keep students safe. Support the school in these efforts. Encourage your child to follow school rules.
- **Speak out** forcefully against bullying. Make clear to your child that bullying is *always* wrong. But watching bullying occur and staying silent is just as wrong. Tell your child to come to you with any knowledge he has of bullying. Inform the school—school officials will not divulge your name or your child's if you ask them not to.
- **Volunteer** in a way that helps student safety. For example, offer to watch the door during a school dance. If your child protests, explain that your help is needed to keep the dance safe and fun for all students.

**Source:** J. Shea, "Parents Can Help Make Schools Safer," National PTA, [www.pta.org/2881.htm](http://www.pta.org/2881.htm).

## Help your child figure out how to connect with classmates



Your child just uttered those dreaded words: “I don’t fit in at school!” What should you do? First, don’t overreact.

Instead, take a deep breath and get the facts.

If you discover your child is being bullied, you must intervene and tell the school. Bullying is too serious a problem to be chalked up to “kids being kids.”

On the other hand, if he feels like an outsider simply because he doesn’t know how to jump in and participate with his peers, here’s how you can help him overcome this:

- **Explore his likes** and dislikes. Your child is maturing, and his interests are surely expanding. Maybe there’s an activity or sport that appeals to him now, even if it wasn’t on his radar screen before.
- **Find out what’s available.** Once you’ve discussed his

interests, see what school clubs or teams might be a good fit. “You love graphic design and working on the yearbook could be a way to meet other kids who like it, too.”

- **Look beyond the school.** Volunteer organizations, community theaters and county recreation leagues are excellent places to meet other kids and make friends. If your child finds his niche in one of them, he may feel more confident and less like the “odd man out” in school.

**“There are few situations in life more difficult to cope with than an adolescent son or daughter during the attempt to liberate themselves.”**

—Anna Freud

## Take time to share memories from your middle-school years



Do you remember being 13? Unless you were a very unusual child, there were some difficult times. You might have felt clumsy,

nervous, misunderstood or unpopular. It’s important that you talk about these times with your child.

Some college professors do something similar to this with their classes. They ask students who want to be teachers to write about how they felt as middle school students.

Why bring up these old feelings? The feelings actually help the new teachers see into the hearts and minds of the middle schoolers they

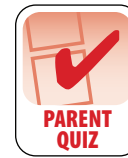
will be teaching. The new teachers agree that this helps them find common ground with middle schoolers.

It works for parents, too. It’s likely you will be closer to your child and more understanding if you can remember having had similar experiences.

So the next time your child seems upset, share a story from your middle-school years. Your child may be more willing to open up if she thinks you can relate to what she is saying.

**Source:** J. Davies and N. Adams, “Exploring Early Adolescent Identity Through Teacher Autobiography,” *Middle School Journal*, National Middle School Association.

## Are you keeping communication lines open?



Middle school is a time of change. Your child needs you to be the constant. He must be sure that he can come to you when

he needs to talk. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you and your child are communicating well:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you have** regular conversations with your child?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you strive** to remain calm, even during disagreements with your child?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you respect** your child’s point of view and require that he do the same?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you use** nonverbal communication, such as smiles, “thumbs up” and hugs?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you avoid** nagging by using tools such as a homework and chore checklist?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean that even at this time, when relations between parents and children can be rocky, you are working to keep the lines of communication open. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

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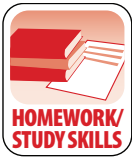
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# Encourage your child to get back on track with homework



Your child has already been hard at work in middle school for at least six months. This is the time that many kids start to slack off—encouraged by the end of winter weather. Your child may resist homework, make excuses or just not do it.

To keep your child engaged:

- **Remind him to manage his time.** If he seems to have too much homework, he may be putting too many assignments off to the last minute. Help him make a weekly planner for his homework.
- **Remember the words** of former President Ronald Reagan—“Trust, but verify.” This is what you should do if your child comes home day after day saying he has no homework! Check the school’s online homework bulletin board,

if there is one. Otherwise, get in touch with his teachers. Let your child know you understand that homework isn’t his first choice. But school is his job, and the homework must get done.

- **Check to see** if your child has fallen behind with organization. This is a top reason for missed assignments and lower grades in middle school. Find out how he is tracking assignments. What is his method for keeping papers in his binder? If you get a blank stare, or an argument, have a frank talk. Be sympathetic, but emphasize how much organization helps. Offer to help him brainstorm some ideas for staying organized.

**Source:** P. Ghezzi, “Homework: Why it Matters,” SchoolFamily.com, [www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/10658-homework-why-it-matters](http://www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/10658-homework-why-it-matters).

# Middle schoolers need parents to be present and available



When she was a toddler, your child required lots of hands-on parenting. But now that she’s in middle school, does she still need that level of attention?

*Absolutely.* The only difference these days is that you may need to be more hands-off—although present and available—as you help her navigate the choppy waters of adolescence. And one way to do that is to talk to her and listen to her.

To keep the lines of communication open with your child:

- **Share your values.** Let her know how you feel about loyalty, honesty and responsibility. Your core values will likely form the foundation for hers.
- **Offer guidance, not judgment.** Help her learn to make smart decisions by discussing the various ways she might handle a certain situation. And be open-minded. Don’t make her feel like your approach is always right and hers is always wrong.
- **Acknowledge your differences.** She isn’t a miniature version of you, and her childhood isn’t a replay of yours. Keep in mind that your child’s experiences in middle school could be vastly different from what you remember.
- **Be affectionate.** Tell your child often that you love her and believe in her.

**Source:** “Parenting a Preteen,” Palo Alto Medical Foundation, [www.pamf.org/preteen/parents/parenting.html](http://www.pamf.org/preteen/parents/parenting.html).

**Q:** My eighth grader is in good shape, but now that she doesn’t play sports anymore, I worry about her becoming a “couch potato.” How can I keep her healthy without turning into a drill sergeant?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Obesity is a serious epidemic, so you’re wise to pay attention to your child’s physical fitness. The tricky part—especially during the body-conscious preteen years—is to keep her focused on *wellness*, not weight.

To help your child stay fit while maintaining a positive attitude toward her body and food:

- **Make healthful eating** a family affair. If there are way too many sugary, processed goodies in your refrigerator, commit to bringing home healthier options from the grocery store. Challenge your family to try one new fruit or vegetable each week.
- **Invite her into the kitchen.** Involve your child in meal planning and preparation. It might inspire her to care more about the kind of food she eats.
- **Don’t use food as a reward or punishment.** Food is fuel, plain and simple. Don’t give it more power by turning it into something she *earns* if she’s good or *loses* if she’s bad.
- **Tame the tube.** Studies show that kids who watch more than four hours of TV daily are heavier than those who watch two hours. Rather than veg out in front of a screen, invite your child to join you on a bike ride or a walk around the block.

—Holly Smith,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Reading

## Boost your child's online reading skills



In today's world, your child cannot be a complete reader unless she is also proficient at reading online. You may think surfing the Internet is a waste of time. (Sometimes it is!) But many of the jobs your child will prepare for as a student will require good online reading skills.

When reading online, your child should use:

- **Thinking skills.** When your child does an Internet search, her search will bring up a variety of websites. She should ask herself: "Is this site relevant to the school-work I am doing? How relevant? Do I know who created this site? Is the author trustworthy?"
- **Learning styles.** Visual learners can see photos, charts and graphs to illustrate the written text. But the multimedia nature of websites is good for other learning styles, too. Your child may be able to click on an audio file to supplement the text. And since using the Internet requires using eyes and hands together, it is good for engaging hands-on learners.
- **Predicting skills.** Most sites include links to other sites of relevance and interest. But your child shouldn't just click without thinking. She should ask, "Why am I being asked to click to this other site? What information will it give me? Will it help?"

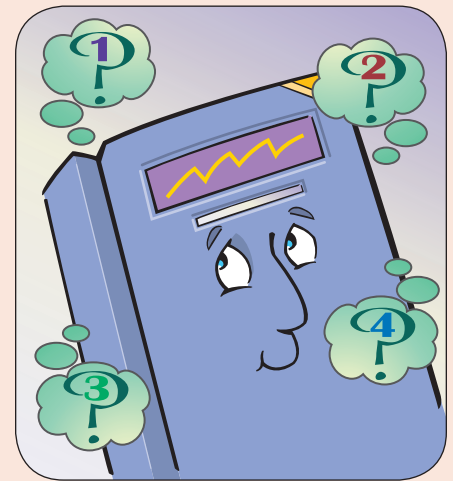
**Source:** J. Atlas, "Reading, Writing, and Technology," International Reading Association, [www.reading.org/InformationFor/Parents.aspx](http://www.reading.org/InformationFor/Parents.aspx).

## Teach your middle schooler to ask four questions when reading

Your child may whiz through reading assignments, but does he understand what he's read?

To encourage him to "read for meaning," have him ask himself these questions each time he finishes a passage:

1. **What is the author's purpose?**  
Is this piece meant to convey information? Is it trying to convince the reader of something?
2. **What is the main idea?** Does the piece have a theme? Does the author keep returning to one central idea?
3. **Where is the evidence?** What facts does the author include to support his theme? Are these facts convincing? Are there enough of them?
4. **What could make it stronger?** If your child were the author, what



additional information would he have included? How would that information have changed or improved the piece?

**Source:** "Reading for Meaning," Colorado State University, <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/reading/critread/pop2c.cfm>.

## Create a book club to foster reading, fun and family ties



Parents and middle school students today often read and enjoy the same books. Build on this mutual interest with a parent-child book club.

Here's how to get started:

- **Get your child on board.** You can't force this, but persuade your child to at least give it a try.
- **Invite a few friends.** Your friends can bring their own children, or a niece or nephew. Your child's friends can come with parents, another trusted adult.

- **Pick a place to meet.** You may want to have the first meeting at your home or in a library near your home.
- **Bring ideas.** Ask everyone to make suggestions for the club's first book. It should be interesting and age-appropriate for all involved.
- **Read!**
- **Meet again in a month** to share book talk and friendship. Then choose a new book.

**Source:** "Starting Your Own Book Club," PBS.org, [www.pbs.org/parents/readinglanguage/articles/bookclubs/start.html](http://www.pbs.org/parents/readinglanguage/articles/bookclubs/start.html).