Middle School Parents®
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Clarke County School District
still make the difference!

Pleasure reading supports students' school performance

Reading for fun can make a big difference for your child's success in school. Research has consistently shown that middle school students who read for pleasure tend to have higher grades in subjects like English, math, science and history compared to those who don't.

To help your middle schooler discover the joy of reading:

- **Keep reading materials handy.** Fill your home with books, magazines and other interesting reading.
- **Help your middle schooler** establish a consistent, daily reading habit. Make sure your child has a well-lit and quiet space to focus.
- **Take trips to the library** or bookstore together. Explore different genres and see what sparks your child's interest. Have your child ask a librarian or bookseller for recommendations.
- **Make it a family affair.** When family members are reading and enjoying it, your child sees that reading can be a fun and engaging activity.
- **Don't force your child** to finish reading a book that's "boring." Pleasure reading should be enjoyable!
- **Read aloud.** Middle schoolers aren't too old for this. Take turns reading to each other. Or have your child read to a younger sibling.
- **Discuss books.** Share a book you've recently enjoyed with your child. Or, ask your child to tell you about a favorite book.

Source: C. Whitten and others, "The Impact of Pleasure Reading on Academic Success," *The Journal of Multidisciplinary Graduate Research*.

Share effective note-taking tips with your child

Taking effective class notes is a valuable skill for middle school success—and it's one students will use even more in high school and college.

Share these note-taking tips with your middle schooler:

- **Be brief.** Instead of writing down every word, your child should focus on the main points and important details.
- **Develop a system** of abbreviating and using symbols for key words, and highlighting phrases the teacher emphasizes.
- **Edit notes after class.** Your child should read over class notes and expand on them where necessary while the memory of the information is still fresh. Then your middle schooler can write short summaries of the most important points. If something in the notes is confusing, encourage your child to ask a classmate or the teacher for clarification.
- **Study notes.** Studying notes each day helps your child remember the material. This practice also prepares your middle schooler for the next class, assignment or test.

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Middle schoolers need respect, confidence and independence

Middle schoolers are still reaching developmental milestones. And staying aware of them will help you support your child.

Along with the physical changes of puberty, kids this age are experiencing:

- **A desire to feel respected.** Middle schoolers don't like to be "treated like little kids." Honor your child's need to feel more grown up. Give meaningful responsibilities and allow your child to make some decisions independently, such as when to do assignments. Middle schoolers also have a greater need for privacy. Respect this by knocking before entering your child's room.
- **Waves of self-doubt.** Along with more maturity, the preteen years can bring a great deal of insecurity. Help your middle schooler weather episodes of self-doubt by praising progress and successes, and supporting emotional needs.
- **A need for independence.** The preteen years are prime time for this particular phase. Middle schoolers begin to separate a bit from their families as they begin figuring out who they are. They may be less likely to admit it right now, but they still need adults' attention, love and support.

"We worry about what a child will be tomorrow, yet we forget that he is someone today."

—Stacia Tauscher

Learn about the different types of assignments in middle school

While doing a math assignment, your child asks, "Why do I have to do the same kinds of problems over and over? I'm tired of them!"

It's true that teachers sometimes assign repetitive schoolwork, and it's helpful for families and students to know why. Here are common kinds of assignments—and the reasons teachers use them:

1. **Practice assignments.** Recalling and applying the knowledge learned in class helps students remember a skill. This is especially true when it comes to learning math, word definitions and vocabulary.
2. **Preparation assignments.** This is a way to introduce students to new topics. For instance, middle schoolers might read a book about animals before studying animal families.
3. **Extension assignments.** Students need to be able to connect separate topics. For example, they might be asked to compare and contrast two historic events.
4. **Creative assignments.** Teachers like to challenge students to use different skills to show what they've learned. For instance, your child might be asked to build a model for science class.

Of course, all schoolwork builds responsibility and self-discipline—which will help your child succeed in school and in life.

Source: M. Martin and C. Waltman-Greenwood, *Solve Your Child's School-Related Problems,* HarperCollins.

Are you showing your child how to be thorough?

So many poor grades result not from a lack of knowledge, but rather from careless mistakes. Are you teaching your middle schooler to do careful, accurate work? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Do you review** your child's planner and reinforce that all assignments should be written there?
2. **Do you encourage** your child to pay attention to details—such as putting one's name and the correct date on papers?
3. **Do you remind** your child to work carefully, and that sloppy, incomplete work will probably be marked down?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to double-check answers before submitting work?
5. **Do you look** over your child's finished work together to ensure it is neat and complete?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child turn in thorough work. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Teach your child the difference between a mistake and neglect

Learning responsibility takes time. So don't expect your middle schooler to demonstrate it perfectly. But do expect your child to take household and school responsibilities seriously. Make sure your child understands the difference between an honest mistake and neglect.

For example:

- **An honest mistake** would be completing the even-numbered problems on the math worksheet instead of the odd-numbered ones; or taking the trash and recycling to the curb on the wrong night.
- **Neglect** would be failing to do the math assignment or household chore at all.

Should you discipline your middle schooler for an honest mistake?

Probably not. No one is perfect and it's only natural to slip up from time to time.

However, if your child neglects a responsibility—whether it's schoolwork or a household chore—don't ignore the situation. Instead:

- **Talk to your child** about what happened and why.
- **Remind your child** that responsibilities come before play.
- **Make it clear** that your child's contributions make a difference to the family.
- **Enforce a consequence.** It's best to agree on the consequence ahead of time and to make sure it is directly related to the responsibility that was neglected.

Source: K. Thomsen, M.S., *Parenting Preteens with a Purpose: Navigating the Middle Years*, Search Institute Press.

Create a family media plan to manage recreational screen time

According to one study, kids who spend seven hours or more per day in front of a screen are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression or anxiety than those who spend just one hour per day in front of a screen.

Research also shows that excessive recreational screen use can negatively affects schoolwork, activity levels and face-to-face communication skills.

To manage your child's technology use, experts recommend creating a personalized family media plan that answers the following questions:

- **What devices** do I want my child to have access to?
- **Where will devices be allowed** and where will they be off-limits?
- **How much time** will my child be allowed to use them?
- **What time** must digital devices be turned off in the evening?
- **Will the same rules apply** during weekends and school breaks?
- **What content is appropriate** for my child to access?
- **How will I monitor** the content my child accesses?
- **How will I maintain** consistency?
- **What consequences** will there be for misusing devices?
- **What example** am I setting through my own use of technology?

Source: J.M. Twenge and W.K. Campbell, "Associations between screen time and lower psychological well-being among children and adolescents: Evidence from a population-based study," Preventive Medicine Reports, Elsevier B.V.

Questions & Answers

Q: I'd like to volunteer to help chaperone an upcoming school field trip, but my child is begging me not to do it. Should I scrap my plans so my child won't be embarrassed?

A: Schools really rely on family volunteers—especially at the middle and high school levels, where the number of families willing to pitch in tends to drop. Still, you don't want your efforts at school to cause a war at home.

To keep the peace:

- **Hear your child out.** Don't ignore complaints. Sit down and talk about it. "I realize you don't want me chaperoning the field trip, but I'd like to know why. Is there something specific that you're worried about?"
- **Validate your child's feelings.** There's huge social pressure to fit in during middle school, so remember that when listening to concerns. "Are you afraid your friends will think you're weird if they see me on the field trip?" If your child says *yes*, ask this question: "Would you think it was weird if your friends' parents volunteered? Or would it be no big deal?"
- **Compromise.** Don't abandon your commitment to be involved, but do respect your child's feelings. If you've talked it out and your child is still nervous about having you on a field trip, sign up for something else instead. Perhaps you could volunteer in the library or assist the front office staff. And if you happen to see your child when you are at school, don't make a big deal out of it. Just give a smile and walk away!

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It Matters: Motivation

Help your child stay motivated and focused

Middle schoolers sometimes fall into the "Why work hard?" trap—especially during the second half of the school year.

Encouraging students to stay on task and think about what they are learning can help them remain focused. To do this for your child:

1. **Connect learning to real life.** Some students don't want to complete assignments because they can't see why they are important. Does your middle schooler love video games? Can your child imagine working with computers someday? Remind your child that solid math skills could be a ticket into that field.
2. **Praise solid effort.** Notice when your child is working hard on an assignment and say that you are proud. Middle schoolers may act like they don't want adults' approval, but they really do. There's no motivator like a pat on the back from a family member.
3. **Celebrate success.** Did your child earn a B on that tough history test? Prepare a special dinner. Or, have a build-your-own sundae party. Celebrating hard work could be just the boost your child needs to keep striving.
4. **Offer a challenge.** It's too late to take a new class this year, but what does your child think about choosing tougher courses next year? The idea just might inspire your child to keep learning.

Three strategies help students overcome 'learned helplessness'

Sometimes, a student who has had several failures in a row refuses to try a new or challenging task. This reaction is often referred to as *learned helplessness*—in which a child's first decision is to avoid a task out of fear that it may be too difficult.

To guard against learned helplessness, encourage your child to:

- **Focus on being positive.** When students believe in their ability to succeed and commit to giving their best effort, they are more likely to succeed.
- **Try easier work first.** Some children gain self-confidence by finishing an easy task first.
- **Try new learning strategies.** Does your child need to review sample problems? Does making pictures or graphs help your middle schooler understand the material better? Does comprehension improve if your child takes notes while reading and writes a summary at the end?

Ensure your conversations have a positive effect on your child

The way children hear family members talk about them to others can motivate them to do their best—or discourage them from even trying.

To make sure your conversations boost your child's motivation:

- **Assume your child can hear you.** Kids are always listening, especially when they hear their names. They pick up on the words you say, your tone of voice and the context of the conversation.
- **Avoid making negative comments** about your middle schooler to others—especially to other family members. Think of how you would feel if two people you love talked about how lazy you were, right in front of you.
- **Avoid discussing** your child's strengths and weaknesses with siblings. This fuels sibling rivalry.
- **Focus on what's important.** Talk about your child's kindness or sense of responsibility. Talk about times when your child didn't give up, even when the going got tough.

Source: S. Rimm, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades and What You Can Do About It: A Six-Step Program for Parents and Teachers,* Great Potential Press.