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

Five steps can help your child master a challenging subject

Learning challenges in one class can make a middle schooler feel stuck everywhere. But here's the secret: Success breeds success. If your child is struggling with a subject, pivot and shine a light on an area where your child is doing well.

This simple strategy helps students stop seeing themselves as "bad at" one thing and start recognizing that their personal strengths can be applied to any challenging subject.

Follow this five-step plan:

1. **Ask your child,** "Which class are you most proud of your work in lately?" The key is to get your student to focus on current accomplishments and feel confident.
2. **Have your middle schooler** write down exactly why that class is going so well. What specific actions has your child taken? This list can be the start of a plan for doing well in other classes.
3. **Add your own observations** to your child's list. For example, "You are a great listener," "You never give up easily," or "You always complete assignments on time."
4. **Brainstorm together** and make a plan. For example, "One of the reasons you have succeeded in math is that you always asked questions after class if there was something you didn't quite understand. What do you think might happen if you did the same in your science class?"
5. **Have update meetings.** Commit to meeting together once a week for a brief update. Ask for specific examples of a strength your child used that week. Talk about the results and discuss strategies for next week.

Encourage connections with classmates

The school year is moving fast, but even with just a few months left, it's not too late for your middle schooler to make new friends and strengthen existing connections.

Forming friendships with kids at school can help your child feel more connected and engaged with the school environment. So right up until summer break, encourage your child to:

- **Say hello to new students** or any student who seems friendly.
- **Look for peers** with similar interests. Clubs and activities can be a haven for kids to make friends.
- **Ask questions.** Your child could start a conversation by asking, "What did you think of the assignment?" or "Did you watch the game last night?"
- **Develop friendships** that have potential. The strongest friendships involve spending time together outside school. If your child regularly sits with a few students at lunch, suggest inviting them over to your home or including them in a family weekend activity.

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Discuss the benefits of honesty with your middle schooler

Honesty is a key ingredient for academic success. Why? Because true learning requires integrity.

Your middle schooler won't master algebra by simply copying a friend's answers. Your child won't become a skilled writer by having artificial intelligence ghostwrite a paper. Genuine understanding and growth come from your child's own effort.

Practice honesty with your child and share these benefits:

- **Honest people have self-respect.** They know what they stand for and they never have to worry about being caught in a lie.
- **Honest people are respected** by others. This respect can open doors. For instance, a teacher is likely to want to help a student who tries hard and does honest work—even if it needs some improvement.
- **Honesty is the simplest path** forward. Telling the truth, even when it's hard, helps keep problems from spiraling and shifts the focus to finding real solutions.
- **Honesty leads to more freedom.** When you know you can trust your child, you are more likely to grant additional privileges. Teachers also tend to give more freedom to students they trust.

> **"Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom."**
>
> *—Thomas Jefferson*

Turn tests into powerful learning tools by taking these four steps

Your child probably knows that a test is a tool to see what students have learned. But does your child know tests are also a powerful *way* to learn?

Unless your child earns a perfect score, every test should be a learning experience. Educators agree that a proper review after a test is one of the most effective ways to boost future scores.

To get the most out of the next test, encourage your middle schooler to follow these steps:

1. **Jot down thoughts** about the test after taking it. What did your child struggle with? What did your child know best?
2. **Review and correct errors.** Your child should take notes on which answers were right and which were wrong. Then it's time to correct every wrong answer and figure out why the initial answer was incorrect. If this is a struggle, have your child check with the teacher.
3. **Identify types of mistakes.** Mistakes generally come in three forms: carelessness, confusion and lack of preparation.
4. **Adjust study habits.** Based on the type of errors, your child needs to make a game plan for the next test. To reduce careless mistakes, your child could read each question twice, think about the question before answering and check work before turning in the test. For mistakes based on confusion or lack of preparation, the solution is asking for help and more studying.

Are you giving your child the right kind of attention?

Middle schoolers still need their family support and guidance, but in different ways than they used to. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are connecting with your middle school student in age-appropriate ways:

1. **Do you make plans** to spend time together doing something your child is interested in?
2. **Do you take advantage** of times when you have your child's undivided attention to have conversations? Device-free time in the car is great for this.
3. **Do you allow** your child to invite friends to some family activities?
4. **Do you make** a strong effort to share at least one meal a day with your child?
5. **Do you keep** directions and explanations simple and to the point so your child doesn't tune you out?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, then you are adapting to and meeting your child's changing needs. Mostly *no* answers? Check the quiz for suggestions.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Start your child thinking about a possible career for the future

Families want their children to grow up and have satisfying work that suits their skills and interests. Middle school is the perfect time to start planting the seeds for future career success.

To help prepare your child:

- **Encourage your child** to explore interests through extracurricular activities.
- **Have your child** take assessments that can reveal strengths and possible career matches.
- **Talk with your child** about your own job experiences. Try to arrange a time your child can shadow you (or a friend) at work.
- **Model positive work habits,** including respect and responsibility.
- **Check out helpful resources.** Research the education requirements, skills needed and salaries of jobs of interest. The Occupational Outlook Handbook from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (*www.bls.gov/ooh/*) is a great place to start.
- **Research educational options.** Look into different options—like technical schools and two- and four-year colleges. What credentials will your child need to reach a particular career goal?
- **Talk about money.** Calculate basic living expenses, including rent, food and clothes. Compare this amount to the average salaries of jobs that interest your elementary schooler.

A good night's sleep improves your child's ability to learn

One essential element in your child's education happens far outside the classroom. It's sleep, and it's vital for school success. Unfortunately, research shows that 60% of middle school students do not get the recommended eight to 10 hours of sleep per night they need.

To determine whether your child is getting enough shut-eye, ask yourself:

- **Does my child fall asleep** within 30 minutes of going to bed?
- **Can my child wake up** fairly easily in the morning?
- **Is my child alert all day**—with no reports from school about an inability to focus in class?

If you answered *yes* to each question, chances are your child is getting adequate sleep. But if you answered *no*, it's time to:

- **Enforce a regular bedtime.** Don't let your child sleep in more than one hour past the normal wake time on the weekends.
- **Keep afternoon naps** under 40 minutes. Longer naps can make falling asleep at night more difficult.
- **Limit caffeine intake.** Watch for this stimulant in things like soda, iced tea and energy drinks.
- **Set a digital curfew** one hour before bedtime. Encourage your child to wind down by reading for pleasure.
- **Charge cell phones** and other digital devices out of your child's room overnight to deter late night texting and social media scrolling.

Consult a health provider if your child has ongoing problems falling asleep or is waking up multiple times at night.

Source: "Sleep in Middle and High School Students," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Questions & Answers

Q: My middle schooler has always been shy and it seems to be getting worse. My child is a strong student; however, in a group of peers, my child just freezes up. What can I do to help my child?

A: Shyness is often an unchangeable trait, so the way you guide your child through managing it can make all the difference. Instead of focusing on it as a weakness, highlight your child's unique strengths.

Your child may be a great listener or have insights into people. Emphasize these positive qualities.

At the same time, gently support your child in developing new skills that will make social life feel easier and more rewarding.

To help your child cope:

- **Offer reassurance.** Many shy kids think they're the only ones who struggle socially. Let your child know that shyness is extremely common and that many successful adults have had to learn how to deal with it.
- **Encourage your child** to share opinions and to be more vocal in family settings.
- **Have your child** practice looking people in the eye and smiling when they meet.
- **Help your child** prepare a question or two to ask when meeting someone new.
- **Find ways** for your child to work with others in small groups. Is there a service club at the school or community center? Could your child paint the sets for the school play? Learning to use and focus on strengths can help your child develop more confidence and grow up to be a capable young adult.

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It Matters: Student Wellness

Keep an eye on your child's well-being

Half of middle schoolers say feeling depressed, stressed or anxious is their biggest hurdle when it comes to learning, according to one survey. While occasional sadness and stress are normal, it's important 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 while doing chores, on a walk or at bedtime.
- **Be aware of influences** in your child's life. Get to know your child's friends and their families. Drive a carpool and listen to the kids. Set rules for social media use and other online activities.
- **Know the warning signs.** It can be difficult to tell if your middle schooler'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.**
  - » **Avoiding family and friends.**
  - » **Changes in sleeping** or eating habits.

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*.

Boost your child's self-image to improve mental health

For many children, self-esteem tends to plummet as the teen years approach. Kids with low self-esteem are more at risk of developing anxiety, depression and other mental health problems.

To improve your child's self-image:

- **Get your child's opinion.** What does your child think about that new law? What should your family do this weekend? Children feel valued when adults seek their input.
- **Focus on effort.** When you look over tests or report cards, start by commenting on what your child did well and acknowledging progress. "You worked really hard to bring up your math grade."
- **Support interests.** You may have imagined raising a star athlete, but your child's passion is playing the trumpet. Show support by asking what songs your child is learning and attending band concerts.

Source: "Ways to Build Your Teenager's Self-Esteem," American Academy of Pediatrics.

Four ways to help your middle schooler strengthen resilience

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

1. **Build relationships.** Have your child join clubs, 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 there to support students.
2. **Stick with comforting routines.** Kids feel secure when they can rely on certain things being the same, such as a nightly video chat with a best friend or a family breakfast every Saturday morning.
3. **Focus on positivity** by "editing" negative statements. For example, your child should change "I doubt I'll get a part" to "I'm going to practice every day until tryouts."
4. **Help others.** Volunteering in the community, tutoring younger students or reading aloud to a younger sibling can give your child something to feel good about when times are tough.

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