

Middle School Parents[®]

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St. Helen Catholic School

still make the difference!



Help your middle schooler make learning resolutions

New Year's resolutions aren't just for adults! Middle schoolers can benefit from them, too. Encourage your child to come up with a few school-related resolutions. If he's not sure where to start, suggest he make resolutions regarding:

- **Projects.** If your child typically puts off big assignments until the last moment, get him to turn over a new leaf. The next time a project or research paper looms, he should break it into small parts and tackle one bit at a time.
- **Homework.** If your child's study habits are haphazard, he can refine them. Instead of hitting the books "whenever and wherever," help him designate a work area. Review his after-school schedule and have him set a regular time for studying.
- **Writing.** If your child groans when he has to write something for school, challenge him to strengthen his writing skills. Writing in a journal for a few minutes every day will help him do just that.
- **Reading.** If your child doesn't like to read for pleasure, help him set reading goals. Start small. Perhaps he can read for 15 minutes every night before going to bed.
- **Extracurricular activities.** If your child signs up for every activity that comes his way, he may be spreading himself too thin. Have him think about which activities can stay and which should go. And remember: School comes first. No activity—regardless of how much he enjoys it—should be allowed to interfere with academics.

Family meals foster strong relationships



Where's the best place to connect with your middle schooler? It may be the dinner table.

To make the most of family mealtimes:

- **Schedule them.** If you can't eat together every night, enjoy the meals you do share. Try to dine together a few times each week.
- **Be flexible.** If evening meals are too difficult to schedule, share breakfast with your child instead. You'll have the same opportunity to connect.
- **Include your child** in mealtime conversations. Ask her specific questions. Instead of the standard "How was your day?" be specific. Ask "What's one interesting thing that happened at school?" It may get her to open up more.
- **Keep it pleasant.** Don't use mealtimes as opportunities to criticize your child or start arguments.
- **Laugh.** Humor can make mealtime fun for everyone.
- **Go low-tech.** Turn off all devices and enjoy family meals free from electronic distractions.

Show your middle schooler how to enjoy some time alone



The middle school years are a peer-driven time of life. It may seem as if your child can't move his own two feet unless he has a friend with him, doing the exact same thing.

But children this age need some time alone, too. Remind your child that he is a worthwhile person and can be happy just with his own company. Encourage him to engage in pursuits such as:

- **Reading.** Your child is always less likely to feel lonely when he's immersed in a good book, or any other material he enjoys reading.
- **Arts and crafts.** Middle schoolers are often wonderfully creative and can produce beautiful work when given the time.

- **Exercise.** Suggest your child go for a walk each day. He can listen to music or an audiobook, or just be alone with his thoughts.
- **Cooking.** Growing middle schoolers are usually drawn to the kitchen. Cooking is a rewarding experience that involves all five senses. And as a bonus, your child can eat what he creates!
- **Daydreaming.** Let your child know it's OK to spend some time doing absolutely nothing!

“With confidence, you have won before you have started.”

—Marcus Garvey

A study system can help your child prepare for chapter tests



If your child tends to study by the “seat of her pants” whenever an end-of-chapter test approaches, it's time to overhaul her habits! Help her develop a system for studying textbook chapters—one she can use anytime a test looms.

Suggest that your child:

1. **Start by reading** the first section of the chapter. She may be tempted to race through and finish the whole thing, but tell her to resist the urge. She'll remember more if she studies one section at a time.
 2. **Imagine what questions** her teacher might ask about the material in that section. If she can't think of any questions, she should read it again.
 3. **Write down those questions.** Have her jot down each one on a separate index card and write its answer on the back of the card.
 4. **Proceed section by section.** If one section is particularly long or tricky, or if she can think of several questions the teacher may ask about it, suggest she break that section into smaller parts.
 5. **Identify new vocabulary words.** After she's made her “question cards” for each section, have her go back through the chapter and look for unfamiliar words and words in boldface. She should write each one on the front of an index card and its definition on the back.
- Once your child has a chapter's worth of information-packed cards, she can use them to study for the test. Better yet, you can use them to quiz her!

Are you setting your child up for future success?



The choices your child makes in middle school can influence his success in high school and beyond. Are you doing all you can to set your child up for success? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your middle schooler to take the most rigorous classes he can successfully handle each year?
- ___ **2. Do you share** with your child the importance of reading in middle school and urge him to read often?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to watch the news and learn about current affairs to boost his interest and knowledge of civics and history?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to take a foreign language? Starting early can give your child a head start for high school.
- ___ **5. Have you talked** with your child about his interests and how they might translate to a career?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child focus on the future. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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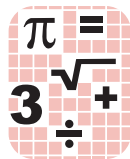
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Share strategies to help your child succeed on math tests



Math tests can be difficult to prepare for. After all, there aren't any dates to remember or essays to write. But you can help

your middle schooler do his best by sharing a few math test strategies.

Before the test, your child should:

- **Practice.** He can redo homework problems or problems from quizzes. Encourage him to focus on the problems he had trouble understanding or got wrong, and work on them until he is confident he can solve them.
- **Create a "formula sheet."** On one sheet of paper, have him write down all the formulas he needs to know. Then, he can create flash cards to help him memorize each formula.

During the test, your child should:

- **Write down those formulas** as soon as he gets his test. That way, he will

be less likely to forget what he has memorized.

- **Read the directions carefully.** Remind him that he can lose points for simply forgetting to show his work or circle his answer!
- **Use estimation.** If one step in the problem asks him to subtract 32 from 109, he can estimate that the answer should be around 80. So if he gets 17, he should realize that's incorrect and try again!
- **Take his time.** A math test is not a race, so your child shouldn't feel pressured by how quickly other students finish.
- **Go back and check his work.** He should rework any problem he was uncertain about.
- **Look for careless errors.** Are all of the decimal points in the right place? Did he remember the negative sign?

Being involved benefits you and your family in three ways



Family engagement at the middle school level is just as important as it was in elementary school.

Students' grades, test scores, attendance and behavior all tend to be better when parents are aware of what is going on at school.

But your child is not the only one who benefits when you get involved. Here are three ways being involved also benefits you:

1. **You understand more** about how the school works. Perhaps you come from an area where the school system is quite different from the one where you are currently living. Being involved helps

you become familiar with the local education system.

2. **You learn whom to contact** if you have concerns. You know your child's teachers. You know the counselor and are familiar with the administrators.
3. **The school and the teachers** have a better understanding of you and your family. Perhaps English is not your first language. Perhaps you need support. The school staff may be able to direct you to community agencies and organizations who can help. If they know what is going on at home, they can better respond to your child at school.

Q: There's clearly something bothering my seventh grader, but she refuses to open up to me. How can I get her to tell me what's going on without being pushy?

Questions & Answers

A: Adolescents and teens are notoriously tight-lipped when it comes to sharing problems with their parents. But you *must* keep trying to find out what is bothering your daughter.

Although it's very likely the "something" that's troubling her is relatively minor, it's important to address it. This is especially true if the issue drags on for days or weeks.

To encourage your middle schooler to share what's happening without feeling pressured in the process:

- **Tell her you are concerned.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I want you to know I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about absolutely anything. Part of my job as a parent is to help you figure things out."
- **Be clear** about your expectations. "I respect your privacy and the fact that you want to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a little more time to mull it over by yourself, but let's try to figure this out together after dinner tonight."
- **Call in reinforcements.** If your daughter still refuses to talk, go to a teacher, pediatrician, guidance counselor, coach or other trusted figure in her life. By working together, you should be able to uncover what's going on with your child.

It Matters: Discipline

Effective ways to handle your child's back talk



Even the child who gave you no trouble in elementary school may develop a “smart mouth” in middle

school. At this stage in life, adolescents begin to question and challenge. Parents usually bear the brunt of the sharp, dismissive and often disrespectful statements.

To curb your child's back talk:

- **Be a role model.** Your middle schooler hears rude and mocking language everywhere. But he shouldn't hear it from you. Treat your child with respect, even when his behavior doesn't merit it.
- **Point out** your child's language. Say something like “That is disrespectful” or “Your tone is not appropriate.”
- **Use consequences.** Calmly tell your child how you feel about the way he speaks to you. State the consequences: “You are allowed to be angry with me. But you are not allowed to speak disrespectfully. If you continue to do so, you will lose your phone for a week.” Then, follow through!
- **Acknowledge improvement.** If you notice that your child is making an effort to cut the back talk, say so.
- **Consider your child's intent.** Sometimes, what seems like back talk is your child's attempt to show you that his opinion differs from yours. He is allowed to have a different opinion, but he needs to express it appropriately. Show him how by restating his point using a respectful tone.

Respect is the cornerstone of discipline and school success

To be successful in school, your child must learn to respect herself and others, including teachers, school staff and classmates. Still, many kids aren't quite sure what respect really is.

Talk with your middle schooler about the importance of respect and the role it plays in:

- **Behavior.** Your child should always think before acting. She should ask herself, “Would I like to be treated this way?” “Will this action give me a positive result?” If she can answer *yes*, she will probably act respectfully.
- **Disagreements.** Your child can disagree with someone and still be respectful. Teach her how to choose her words carefully.
- **Property.** Your child should take care of her things and return items she borrows on time.



- **Friendships.** Your child should surround herself with peers who treat her and others with respect. Remind her that people will judge her in part by who her friends are. That may be all it takes to convince her to choose her friends carefully.

Approach discipline issues with consistency and compassion



There is no one-size-fits-all method of disciplining your child, especially since she is constantly growing and changing. However, you can adopt a consistent discipline approach. To do this:

- **Control your emotions.** It's tough to think clearly when you're agitated. Avoid disciplining your child when you're angry. Instead, take a moment to calm down before addressing the issue.
- **Notice your child's emotions.** If she's clearly upset, help

her calm down (or at least acknowledge her feelings) before disciplining her.

- **Listen.** This doesn't mean letting your child talk her way out of a consequence. It means demonstrating respect even as you enforce it.
- **Draw the line.** Flexibility is important, but some issues should be non-negotiable. Make sure you are clear about your zero-tolerance policy for things like smoking and illegal drug use.

Source: S. Brown, *How to Negotiate with Kids ... Even When You Think You Shouldn't*, Penguin.