

Middle School Parents®

St. Helen Catholic School

still make the difference!

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Expect your middle schooler to be successful this year

Don't just *hope* your middle schooler succeeds in school this year—*expect* her to succeed! Studies show that when parents have high, yet realistic, expectations for their children, they are likely to rise to meet them.

To promote success in the classroom and beyond:

- **Believe in your child.** Don't act surprised when she succeeds. Did your child just bring home a B+ on a challenging science test? Tell her you never doubted that she'd do well. "That's awesome! I knew all of your extra studying this week would pay off!"
- **Support your child** when she stumbles. Never belittle her when

she messes up. Remind her that failure happens to everyone and mistakes can help her grow. Always be your child's "safe place," providing her with constant love and acceptance.

- **Empower your child** to take action. When unfortunate things happen, don't chalk them up to bad luck. That will make your child feel as if she's a victim and has no control over situations. Instead, encourage her to think about what she can learn, and help her brainstorm ways to handle similar situations in the future.

Source: V. LoBue, Ph.D., "Expect the Best: On the Power of Expectation," Psychology Today, niswc.com/mid_expect-best.

Help your child adopt some healthy habits



Healthy habits make it easier for your child to do well in school. But do you know if he's getting the nutrition, sleep and exercise he needs?

Health experts agree that middle schoolers need to:

- **Get enough sleep.** The American Academy of Pediatrics says they need between nine and 10 hours of sleep each night in order to perform at their best in school.
- **Focus on nutrition.** They should eat a healthy breakfast every morning and make nutritious choices for school lunches and snacks.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Brains can't store water, but they need it to work properly. Staying hydrated is one way kids can keep their brains sharp.
- **Make exercise a habit.** PE class isn't enough! Adolescents need 60 minutes of physical activity every day—biking, running, shooting hoops, playing a sport, dancing, walking, etc.
- **Wash their hands regularly.** Preventing the spread of illness can be as easy as washing hands. And fewer illnesses lead to fewer school absences.

A peaceful home environment promotes academic success



Today's families are busy and stressed—which can have a negative impact on your child's health and grades. While it's nearly impossible to lead a stress-free life these days, you can work to make home a haven away from the daily grind.

To help your entire family feel mentally and emotionally well:

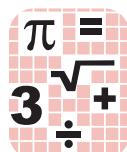
- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories.
- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach your child to take deep breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music whenever he feels stressed.

- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report at least one good thing (no matter how small) that happened. Try to do this during a family meal.
- **Pitch in.** Chores go so much more quickly when everyone works together. Have a family chore time and then reward yourselves by doing something fun as a family.

"It's not the load that breaks you down. It's the way you carry it."

— C.S. Lewis

Strengthen your child's math skills with estimation challenges



Math is a subject that typically depends on precise answers. But the first step to arriving at those answers is often to look the problem over and make an "educated guess," or an estimate.

You can give your child lots of opportunities to practice estimating by using scenarios from your daily life. Just encourage him to check his answer by working the problem through, or by comparing the actual answer to his educated guess.

Here are a few estimation challenges to give your child:

- **How many** containers of coffee would we have to buy in a year if Dad drinks an average of two cups of coffee each day, and each container of coffee makes 50 cups?
- **How long** will it take us to get to Grandma's house? We're going

27 miles an hour and she lives five miles away.

- **How many** people are sitting in the first three rows of the movie theater?
- **How many** yards would you have to rake to earn \$10,000 if you get \$18 every time you rake a yard?
- **How much** time do you think it will take for you to read that book?
- **How many** bowls of cereal do you think we will be able to pour from this box?
- **How much** will the grocery bill be based on this list?
- **How much** money is there in that change jar?
- **How long** do you think it will take you to finish your homework?

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math—The Middle School Years*, University of California at Berkeley.

Are you helping your child make a smooth transition?



The change from elementary to middle school is significant. How well are you helping your child manage this transition? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

1. **Have you and your child** researched the school? Have you checked out the website? Have you reviewed the school handbook?
2. **Have you reassured** your child that, while this is a big change, you believe she can do well in school?
3. **Do you ask your child** what she thinks about middle school, her classes and her teachers? Listen carefully to her responses.
4. **Do you plan to attend** parent events at school in order to get more information that can help you support your child this school year?
5. **Do you encourage** your child to come to you and her teachers right away if she is having difficulty?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are supporting your child during this transition time. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.



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Have a discussion with your middle schooler about bullying



Experts say that middle school is the prime time for bullying. Studies show that nasty behavior seems to boost kids' popularity.

The bullies of the 21st century aren't just your typical schoolyard bullies. They also include the:

- **Verbally abusive bully** who calls people names and spreads rumors.
- **Social bully** who gets others to exclude or reject someone.
- **Cyberbully** who posts cruel or embarrassing comments and photos on social media platforms, such as SnapChat and Instagram.

Talk to your child about bullying and the importance of standing up for herself and others.

If your child is being bullied:

- **Discuss it gently.** Understand that she might be too embarrassed or scared to admit it.

- **Be supportive.** Assure her that it's not her fault.
- **Ask for help.** A teacher or guidance counselor might have a solution you haven't thought of.

If your child is the one bullying:

- **Let her know** that you will not tolerate bullying behavior.
- **Ask her** what she was trying to accomplish. How might she meet that goal in the future without hurting people?
- **Help her figure out** how to make amends to the person she hurt.

If your child witnesses bullying:

- **Role-play ways to react.** She could say, "That's not cool." Or put her arm around the victim and walk away.
- **Encourage her to report** it to school staff immediately.

Source: *Bullying: Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program, Resource Kit*, The Parent Institute.

Q: I'd like to volunteer to help chaperone an upcoming school field trip, but my son said he would be absolutely mortified if I did. Should I just scrap my plans so he's not embarrassed?

Questions & Answers

A: Schools really rely on parent volunteers—especially at the middle and high school levels, where the number of parents 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 his 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 his concerns. "Are you afraid your friends will think you're weird if they see me on the field trip?" If he says yes, have him put himself in their shoes. Would he find their volunteering parents weird? 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 he's still nervous about having you on a field trip, sign up for something else instead. Perhaps you could volunteer in the media center 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 him a smile and walk away!

An editing checklist can help your child improve writing



It's hard to help middle schoolers with their writing assignments.

By nature, adolescents are very sensitive to criticism and suggestions for improvement.

So when your child asks you to review a writing assignment, first focus on what you like. A catchy title. The introduction. Clear descriptions. Your favorite sentences.

Then, give your child an editing checklist so she can improve her own writing without feeling criticized. Share this checklist with your child:

- I've read through the entire piece to see if it makes sense.
- I've focused my writing on one important topic or idea.

- The title fits the piece.
- The introduction clearly states the main idea of the paper.
- My points flow logically from one to the next.
- I used a variety of transitional words.
- I replaced vague words with specific ones.
- I deleted unneeded words by combining short sentences.
- I shortened sentences that were too long and wordy.
- I replaced overused words.
- I indented new paragraphs.
- I used the correct subject verb agreement.
- I checked spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

It Matters: The Home-School Team

Find ways to support your child's learning



What's the best way to help your child succeed in middle school? The answer is to be engaged and involved in her education.

To get your child off to a great start this year:

- **Make your home learning-rich.** Keep materials on hand that stimulate your child's mind. From simple art supplies to library books, offer creative outlets for her curiosity.
- **Encourage reading.** Reading for pleasure will help your child build the comprehension and vocabulary skills she'll need to tackle more difficult material. Whether she reads poetry or science fiction, set aside time for your child to read every day.
- **Talk to your child** about the importance of paying attention in class. Suggest that she take notes and participate in class. Challenge her to ask one question per day in each of her classes. This will keep her focused and engaged in what she is learning.
- **Start homework routines.** Have a set time for homework. Offer your child a quiet place to work. Good study habits will help her through middle school—and beyond. On days your child doesn't have homework, encourage her to read or review instead.
- **Ask questions.** Show your child that education is a priority in your family by asking her about school every day. Then, be sure to *really* listen to what she has to say.

Attendance should be a priority for middle school students

Strong attendance is as important to your child's school career as the foundation is to a house. Without it, there is nothing to build on. Here are just a few reasons your child should be in school:

- **School attendance is the law.** Every school district requires students to attend. Your child should miss school only for illness or a family emergency.
- **Missing school affects grades.** Studies show that when students miss class regularly, they suffer academically.
- **Peer relationships** often get started at school. A child who misses school often may have fewer friends.

To aim for top attendance:

- **Tell your child** that school is important to your family and that you expect him to be in school on time every day.



- **Schedule vacations** during school breaks or weekends.
- **Schedule appointments** for non-school hours when possible.
- **Don't let your child** stay home from school to avoid taking a test, to catch up on sleep or to finish a project.

Source: "10 Facts About School Attendance," Attendance Works, niswc.com/mid_attendance10.

Make positive connections with your child's teachers



Working with the school helps you form beneficial relationships. And some of the most important relationships you forge will be with teachers.

- To connect with teachers:
- **Get to know them.** Attend parent-teacher conferences, meetings and other family events. Talk to them about their expectations. Exchange contact information.
 - **Volunteer.** Ask if there are ways you can support them. Can you

organize a field trip? Can you donate items to the classroom?

- **Show your appreciation.** Teachers are used to hearing from parents about problems. A note or call expressing thanks will make a teacher's day. Let teachers know when your child really enjoys an assignment. Thank teachers who take extra time to help your child.
- **Be understanding.** Teachers are human. They work hard and are often under lots of pressure. Don't forget you are on the same team!