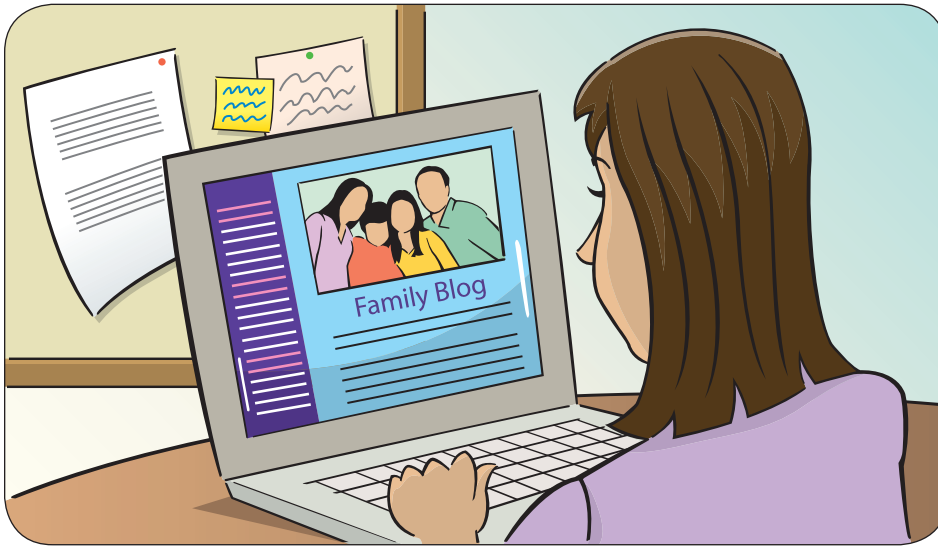


Middle School Parents[®]

February 2012
Vol. 15, No. 6

Educational Service Unit #8
Linda Miller, Service Representative

still make the difference!



Use blogs & texting to build your child's writing skills

Your middle schooler may prefer communicating via texts and short social-media bursts. But don't let him abandon the art of writing. Writing is too vital a skill to be tossed aside in favor of short 140-character posts!

To keep your middle schooler's writing skills sharp, despite the lure of texting acronyms and choppy online communication:

- **Help him start a blog.** Don't run from technology. Embrace it. Help your child start a family blog. Remind him to update it frequently and invite out-of-state relatives and longtime friends to follow it. (Tell him to make his blog invitation-only if he wants to keep it private.)

If he seems unsure what to write about, prompt him every so often. "Remember what a mess we made when we were making those Valentine's Day cookies? I bet Uncle Jim would love to hear about it."

- **Demand proper grammar.** If your child uses maddening "e-shorthand" whenever he texts or emails you, insist he stop. Say, "I'm finished trying to decipher your scattered words and weird abbreviations. The next time you need a ride to the mall or want me to pick something up on the way home from work, text me an actual sentence. Yes, with punctuation, correct spelling and everything."

You can support your middle schooler in math



In middle school, math lessons become more complex and abstract. So unless you are in a math or science field yourself, you may feel you are no longer able to help your child.

Not true. There are still many things you can do. You can:

- **Be positive about math.** If you look at your child's work and say "Ugh, I never had a clue about this stuff," your attitude will rub off on her. Instead, try, "This is challenging. But I know you can handle it."
- **Start at the beginning.** Offer to read the directions with your child. Talk about what the problem is asking for. Then, discuss where your child can find more information.
- **Continue to use math at home.** Everyday math reinforces the fact that math is an important and useful subject. Cook and measure with your child; shop with your child; ask your child to compare prices and suggest a better deal.

Source: "101 Simple Ways to Help Your Child with Math," Jefferson County (Kentucky) Public Schools, www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Pubs/MathTips.pdf.

Show your middle schooler how to make valuable contributions



The myth that middle schoolers are lazy is just that: a myth. The truth is that kids want to be useful and feel like their contributions matter.

So help your child find ways to contribute at home and in the community. Not only will it make him feel good about himself, it may help nurture his sense of responsibility toward people around him.

Your child could:

- **Join a service organization.** Whether national or local, service organizations can be a perfect place for kids to make a difference. But be sure to find one that aligns with your child's strengths. If he's handy, for example, he may thrive in a group that repairs things around the neighborhood.
- **Help an elderly or ill neighbor.** Is the older gentleman down the street still buried under a recent

snowfall? Have your child grab a shovel and get busy. The same goes for bringing in a sick neighbor's trash can from the curb. Point out ways for your child to pitch in, and he may begin to see how his being responsible contributes to the overall well-being of the community.

- **Write letters of thanks.** Ask your child to write a thank-you note to a firefighter or police officer. It'll show him how nice it feels when one responsible member of society applauds another!

Source: E. Medhus, M.D., Raising Everyday Heroes: Parenting Children to Be Self-Reliant, Beyond Words Publishing.

“Children are a great comfort in your old age—and they help you reach it faster, too.”

—Lionel Kauffman

Too much stress can decrease your child's ability to learn



Middle school students often have a lot on their plates—and on their minds. They can easily become overwhelmed, and the results aren't good. As anxiety goes up, grades go down.

If your child seems stressed, suggest ways he can relax. He could:

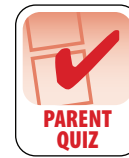
- **Enjoy time with a friend.** Suggest they do something that makes them laugh, such as watching a favorite funny movie.
- **Participate in a hobby** (other than playing video games). Hobbyists—people who paint, read, collect, do puzzles, you name it—usually

“lose themselves” in what they are doing for a while. Focusing on these pleasant thoughts helps to defeat stress.

- **Breathe deeply.** Research shows this truly works. A few minutes of slow deep breathing can calm your child when he is feeling overwhelmed. Practicing it for a brief time each day can lower your child's overall stress levels.
- **Stretch.** Doing yoga is linked to lower stress levels. Tell your child to try a few minutes of relaxing music and slow, gentle stretches.

Source: “12 Healthy Ways to Relax,” WebMD, <http://fit.webmd.com/teen/recharge/slideshow/slideshow-teen-relax>.

Are you teaching your child to be kind to others?



Being a “mean girl” or a bully is never the way to succeed in school—or in life. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are promoting kindness in your child:

- ___ **1. Do you model** kindness by treating your child and all others with kindness and respect?
- ___ **2. Do you tell** your child that the Golden Rule (treating others as you would like to be treated) is a very important value in your family?
- ___ **3. Do you promote** empathy in your child? “Remember how you felt when you didn't get invited to Kaitlyn's party?”
- ___ **4. Do you praise** your child whenever you see her being kind to somebody else?
- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to befriend a wide variety of students?

How well are you doing?

The more *yes* answers you have means you are demonstrating kindness to your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas from the quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1283

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-
7474. Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2012 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Miyares.

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Try audio books and e-books to get your middle schooler to read



Reading is the foundation of learning. But it doesn't have to involve heavy, dusty titles perched on tall shelves!

Times are changing—for better or worse—and there are now more ways than ever to expose your child to words and stories.

To encourage him to read more often, “think outside the book” and nudge your child toward:

- **Audio books.** These can be a great resource, especially if your child struggles with fluency. These recorded stories offer the same benefits as print books—exposure to story structure, compelling plots and new vocabulary words—but in an interesting format. Even better, they're often recorded by gifted performers or beloved authors. Like traditional titles, audio books are available at the library. Along with finding them on CD, you

can often download them from home. For a list of kid-friendly options, visit the American Library Association's “Amazing Audio Books for Young Adults” page (www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklistsawards/booklists/amazingaudiobooks/audiobooks.cfm).

- **E-books.** Short for “electronic books,” e-books are stories presented digitally. (Not every e-book is a digital version of a print story, though. Many don't have printed counterparts.) E-books are read on a computer or “e-reader.” While some are strictly text, others include graphics, videos or links. This can be a big help when it comes to holding reluctant readers' attention. E-books can be purchased just like regular books. They're also available at the public library. For a list of free e-books, visit the Online Books Page (<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu>).

Encouragement can build your middle schooler's self-esteem



The middle school years can be a tough time for your child's self-esteem. These years usually bring many physical changes.

Many children are not satisfied with the results. Middle school also means more challenging classes. These are also years where your child may be constantly comparing herself with others. Sometimes she may feel she comes up short.

You can battle these feelings with encouragement. Here's how:

- **Remind your child** that this stage of her life is temporary. The changes of puberty can be awkward. Tell your child you

understand what she is going through.

- **Give your child** the opportunity to take a healthy risk. This means trying something new. Learning a new skill is an almost surefire way to increase confidence.
- **Talk about** the good things going on in your child's life. Did she finish her homework, get invited to a movie this weekend, teach the dog to shake hands? Help your child come up with one or two things she is grateful for each day.

Source: “Building my self-esteem,” Florida Department of Health, www.doh.state.fl.us/Family/wh/lifespan/Tweens/selfesteem.html.

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: Preteens 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, you need to find out what it is. This is especially true if the issue drags on for days or weeks.

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

- **Let her know** you're 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.”
- **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 we will get to the bottom of this after dinner tonight.”
- **Call in reinforcements.** If your child still refuses to talk, go to a teacher, pediatrician, guidance counselor, coach or other trusted figure in her life. Ask this person to help you uncover what's wrong.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Motivation

Find ways to motivate your underachiever



It's frustrating for you as a parent, and for others who care about your child, when you know he has the ability to succeed, but seems not to want to. This is the trap of underachievement. Here are some ways out of it:

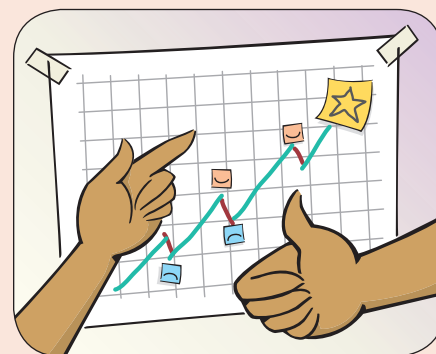
- **Show your child you care** about him as a person, not just a student. If a rousing lecture about getting better grades was the trick to motivation, there would be no such thing as an underachiever. Instead, focus on something your child does want to do—talk to him about his friends, go with him to see a favorite movie, even play a video game. This helps your child feel valued—a step toward getting him motivated.
- **Recognize improvements.** It might not thrill you if your child brings home a low C. But if the last grade was a D, that's real progress. Say something simple like, "You brought your grade up. I want you to know I believe in you."
- **Harness the power of friends.** If your child doesn't want your help, consider a friend. Tell your child, "Maybe the homework would go better if Michael were here doing his, too. I can make a pizza if you want to have him over on Friday."

Source: "How to Motivate an Underachiever," FamilyEducation.com, <http://school.familyeducation.com/educational-issues/support/39283.html>.

Tackle mid-year slumps with empathy, goals and activities

A mid-year slump can be bad news for students and their grades. To keep your child from getting bogged down in the middle of the school year:

- **Watch her language.** Does she frequently mention that class is *always* boring or that she *never* does well? Call her on it. "It sounds like you're frustrated about school. Let's figure out how we can make things better."
- **Shift the focus.** Turn her attention to other things—such as extracurricular activities or volunteer work. The novelty of doing something different may help her feel motivated again.
- **Suggest goal-setting.** Help her set concrete goals and then



become her cheerleader as she tries to meet them. Working hard toward something specific may make her feel less like she's merely "plodding along."

Source: "Motivate your middle schooler during the mid-year doldrums," SchoolFamily.com, www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/9621-motivate-your-middle-schooler-during-the-midyear-doldrums.

Teach your child to ask three questions when setting goals



Having high expectations can be a great way to motivate your child—but only if your child believes he can actually meet them.

Ask your child to answer these three questions for each of his classes:

1. **"What do I want to achieve in this class next quarter?"** This can be a grade, or some other achievement, such as turning in all homework on time.
2. **"What is my plan for achieving it?"** He could make a study chart and follow it. Or organize his

binder, so that homework gets home and then back to school.

3. **"How will I avoid distractions that may conflict with my goals?"** He could turn off his phone during study hours. Or decide he will not check social media during study hours.

Post the list of expectations and goals where you can both see it. Check it frequently to see how things are going. Make changes as needed.

Source: G. Winch, "The importance of setting expectations with children about study habits," Psychology Today, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201108/the-importance-setting-expectations-children-about-study-habits.