

Middle School Parents

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Educational Service Unit #8
Linda Miller, Service Representative

still make the difference!



Mid-year is the perfect time to check in with teachers

The school year is already almost half over. How is your child doing so far? This is an ideal time to communicate with her teachers. Try email first, unless there are serious concerns.

Here are some things to find out:

- **How is your child** handling the curriculum so far?
- **What are her strengths?**
- **What are the areas** in which she needs improvement?
- **What part of each class** does she most enjoy?
- **Does she have difficulty** with any part of each class?
- **Are there behavior concerns?** If so, what?
- **Does she pay attention** in class?
- **Has she been turning** in homework consistently?

- **Is she missing any assignments?**
- **Are there any social problems** that should be noted?
- **What can you do**, as a parent, to help your child?

Remember that your involvement in your child's education remains as important as ever. This is true even if it seems that your child does not want you to be involved.

Do not listen to your child's protests that "No one else's parents email the teacher," or "You don't have to go to that parents' meeting." Much research shows that children have fewer problems, and more success in school and beyond, when parents are involved.

Source: P.L. Benson and others, *What Teens Need to Succeed: Practical Proven Ways to Shape Your Own Future*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Remember that learning builds on prior lessons



Your child's education is not like a movie. You don't go one day, experience the story, and then it's over. Instead, it's like a serial television show spanning 13 or more years. You have to start at the beginning and continue to the end. And if you miss an episode, you may fall behind.

This is the whole point behind regular attendance. Your child must be in school if he is to truly learn. Remember that:

- **Winter break** is often a time to sleep in. But it's over now. Your child should go to bed in time to allow nine hours of sleep.
- **Cold weather** is not an excuse to miss school. Your child should wear a jacket and hat, or several warm layers, and get to school.
- **Children** often become ill in the winter. If your child is sick, keep him home until he has been free of fever and severe cough for 24 hours. When he is better, he should return to school immediately.

Source: "The Importance of Attendance: Learning is Cumulative," Mt. Polson School District, www.polson.k12.mt.us/district23/greetings/LearnAbout/Learning_is_Cumulative.pdf.

Reinforce learning at home to help your child succeed in school



Reinforce your child's learning at home and you may help him become more successful at school. Here's how:

- **Make sure your home** is "learning friendly." Does your child have a quiet spot where he can do his homework? Are the right supplies and other materials available? Is there enough light?
- **Be patient.** Remember that it takes time to master new subjects. So don't get frustrated if your child doesn't grasp something right away. Instead, be supportive as he works at his own pace.
- **Encourage him to do his best.** Your child may get his work done, but is it done well? Remind him to try his best on every assignment he brings home. Don't let him fall into the habit of just doing the bare minimum to get by.

- **Set the bar high.** Let your child know you believe in him by expecting him to excel in school. And don't act surprised when he brings home a good grade. It may make him think you had your doubts.
- **Take action.** If you discover your child is struggling in class, do something about it. Try not to wait until his teacher comes to you or the issue balloons out of control. The sooner you can head off problems, the better.

Source: E. Hamilton, M.Ed., "Reinforce Learning," Empowered Parent.com, <http://joansbook.com/parenting/reinforced.shtml>.

"It's no exaggeration to say that the challenges of growing up are more daunting than ever."

—Dr. Neil I. Bernstein

Improve critical thinking skills by analyzing and evaluating



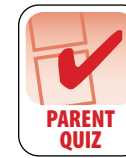
To sharpen your child's critical-thinking skills, choose a current event that involves a two-sided dilemma. Outline the details of the story, or just hand him an article to read. Then ask your child to:

- **Analyze the "whys"** of the issue. He knows *what* happened. Now get him to consider *why* it happened. Why does he think the people in the story said or did what they did? What motivated them? The better able he is to mull over the "whys" of this story, the more likely he may be to think critically about other things, too.

- **Evaluate the data.** Does he believe one side of the argument is stronger than the other? Why? What, if anything, could improve the weaker side?
- **Suggest a solution.** Now that he's carefully considered the issue, what would he do to solve it? Which details or facts from the story support his proposed solution? Give him time to think of a response, and don't interrupt him as he explains himself. And don't settle for a mumbled, "I don't know," either! Nudge him a bit.

Source: S. Garland, "Bloom's Taxonomy: Critical Thinking Skills for Kids," Exquisite Minds, www.exquisite-minds.com/idea-of-the-week/blooms-taxonomy-critical-thinking-skills/.

Are you helping your child prepare for the future?



The steps your child takes in middle school will influence her future success. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to

see if you are encouraging your child to prepare for the future:

- ___ **1. Do you encourage** your child to take the most rigorous math class she is capable of taking each year?
- ___ **2. Do you recognize** the importance of reading in middle school and urge your child to read often?
- ___ **3. Do you encourage** your child to learn about current affairs to boost her interest and knowledge in civics and history?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to use the Internet as a learning tool for some school assignments?
- ___ **5. Have you talked** with your child about her interests and how they might translate to a life after school?

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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Help your child develop a study system to tackle chapter tests



If your child tends to be a “seat of her pants” studier 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 she:

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. The point is to study one section at a time.
2. **Imagine what questions** her teacher might ask. Looking back over the section she just read, have your child think of things her teacher could ask about the material. If she can’t think of any, have her read it again.
3. **Write down those questions.** Have her jot down each of her

“imagined” questions on a separate index card and write down 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 imagine several questions about it on the test, suggest she break it into smaller parts.
5. **Identify new vocabulary words.** After she’s made her “question cards” for the chapter, have her go back through and look for unfamiliar words. She can write each one on the front of an index card and its definition on the back.

Once she has a chapter’s worth of information-packed cards, she should use them to study for the test. Better yet, you can use them to quiz her!

Source: J.S. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework*, Free Spirit Publishing.

Q: My eighth grader received a laptop during the holidays and now wants to join the social-media site Facebook. Isn’t she too young?

Questions & Answers

A: Probably not, at least technically. Popular social-media sites like Facebook require users to be 13 years old. Still, if you’ve spent any time on these sites, you know that plenty of younger kids also have their own accounts.

It is important to understand that these sites aren’t going away. So it doesn’t make sense to ban them outright. Instead, ask yourself:

- **Is my child responsible?** Does she keep up with schoolwork? If she says she’s going to do something, does she do it?
- **Is my child mature?** Is she savvy about Internet safety? Does she understand what is, and isn’t, appropriate to post online?

If you answered *yes* to both questions, then it may be fine for your child to join a social-media site. But if you’re nervous, take these steps:

1. **Open the account for her.** Keep the password private so she can’t log on without your knowing. This will give you a chance to see how she conducts herself online and who’s “friending” her.
2. **Make her “friend” you.** Once you allow her to take over control of her account, insist she “friend” you. That way, you can still keep tabs on her. (Just don’t mortify her by posting anything on her “wall”!)

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

Spending time together builds closeness and camaraderie



All kids—even too-cool-to-care middle schoolers—need time with their parents. It’s how they stay connected to family as they begin finding their own way in the world.

So it’s important to resolve to spend more time with your child in the New Year. Be sure you:

- **Are available.** You may be physically present, but if you’re constantly checking email or talking on the phone, you’re not truly available to your child. So mandate some daily downtime for yourself. You don’t need to sit quietly and “wait to be called

on.” But make it clear to him that you’re not so focused on other tasks that you can’t be bothered.

- **Embrace his interests.** Sci-fi movies not your thing? So what! If your child enjoys them, watch one together. The same goes for attending a rock concert or shooting baskets, too.
- **Include him.** Don’t assume your child is too young, too bored or too surly to care about the things you care about. Talk politics with him. Show him your big project from work. Ask for his input on a problem. Invite him to be a bigger part of your life sometimes and show him you value his opinion.

It Matters: Discipline

How should you respond to 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, one of your child's jobs is to question and challenge. As a parent, you bear the brunt of the sharp, dismissive and often disrespectful statements.

Here's a guide for you:

- **Be a model.** Your child hears rude and mocking language everywhere. But she shouldn't hear it from you. Treat your child with respect, even when her behavior doesn't earn it.
- **Point out** your child's language. “That is disrespectful.” “Your tone is not appropriate.”
- **Use consequences.** Calmly tell your child how you feel about the way she 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 TV privileges for the week.”
- **Acknowledge improvement.** If you notice that your child is making an effort to cut the back talk, say so.
- **Consider your child's intent.** What seems like back talk may be your child's attempt to show you that her opinion differs from yours. That is okay, but she needs to express it appropriately.

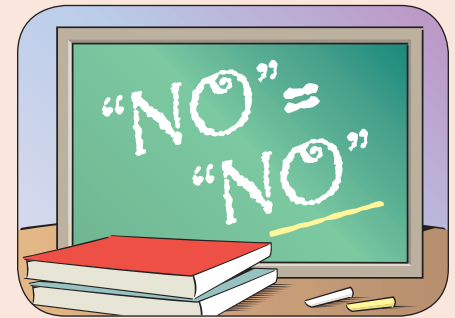
Source: J. O'Donnell, “No More Tween Back Talk,” About.com, <http://tweenparenting.about.com/od/behaviordiscipline/a/TalkingBack.htm>.

Discipline that is firm, fair and consistent is the most effective

Discipline isn't rocket science, but that doesn't mean it's easy. After all, your child is constantly changing, and keeping up with those changes can be daunting.

Luckily, your overall approach to discipline doesn't need to change. To be effective, discipline must always be:

- **Firm.** *No* needs to mean *no*. It shouldn't morph into a grudging *okay* if your child starts to whine or argue.
- **Fair.** Any consequence you give your child for misbehavior should be reasonable and age-appropriate. It should also



relate back to the misbehavior itself.

- **Consistent.** Rules are meaningless if you don't enforce them. If there are things you expect your child to do—or not do—insist on them every single day.

Teach your middle schooler how to control angry emotions



Your child is growing in many ways and dealing with such an array of new feelings that, at times, things can seem a little haywire. All this can add up to an occasional explosion.

In most cases, this is nothing to worry about. Here are some tips:

- **Be understanding yet firm.** Anger is an emotion and your child is entitled to it. Let your child know that it is okay for him to state how he feels, go to his room or go for a walk to cool off. It is not okay for him to scream, damage property or be physically abusive.
- **Talk to your child about stress and stress relief.** Often your

child's anger comes from feeling overwhelmed. Explain the importance of taking time out for things he enjoys. Have fun as a family, too. Devote some time every weekend to cooking a meal together, watching a movie or playing a board game.

- **Have your child practice** calming techniques. Taking deep breaths or counting to 10 (or more!) works for many people.
- **Talk to a teacher or doctor** for advice if your child's anger seems to happen often or results in damaging property or physical abuse to people or pets.

Source: J. Mandel and D. Anshel, “Anger: Helping Children with this Complex Emotion,” Education.com, www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Anger_Helping/.