

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

May 2021  
Vol. 24, No. 9

Shelton Youth Service Bureau

*still make the difference!*



## Help your middle schooler finish the school year strong

This school year has been filled with challenges—and most students are looking forward to a break. But summer isn't here just yet. Remember: The last few weeks of school, are just as important as the rest. It's vital for your middle schooler to stay focused so he can finish the school year strong.

To motivate your child to keep working hard as the year winds down:

- 1. Stick to routines.** It's easy to get wooed by warmer temperatures and more daylight. If you find yourself letting him put off schoolwork longer and longer and stay up later and later, it's time to get back on track. Morning comes as early as ever, and if your middle schooler doesn't get
- 2. Stay interested** in his schoolwork. Don't stop asking your child about what's happening in his classes just because by this point you're pretty familiar with what goes on there. Show him you still care about his education and the things he is learning in school.
- 3. Maintain expectations.** Remind your child that if his grades begin to slip near the end of the year—or if he stops completing his assignments—there will be consequences. The thought of missing an anticipated event or may inspire him to buckle down.

## Learn about the different types of peer pressure



Middle schoolers can be easily influenced by their peers—and that's not always a bad thing. Get to know the types

of peer pressure and learn how to respond to each.

Peer pressure can be:

- **Positive.** Your child's friends volunteer for a good cause. They want good grades on the next history project. They enjoy participating in fitness challenges. Your response: Encourage these activities. Praise the effort your child and her friends make.
- **Neutral.** Your child wears her hair on top of her head in a messy bun because her friends do. Your response: Do nothing. Imitating styles is an innocent and harmless behavior.
- **Negative.** Your child got caught helping a friend cheat. You find vape pods in her room. Your response: Steer your child to positive activities and monitor her closely. Don't allow hangouts with friends who spell trouble. Encourage friendships with more responsible peers and allow more freedom when she earns back your trust.

# Exercise can decrease stress and boost academic success



Stress has a negative effect on student achievement. That means that no matter how much your middle schooler has studied or prepared, if she is stressed-out, she's not ready to learn.

One effective way to help your child decrease stress is to promote daily physical activity. Here's why. Exercise:

- **Helps students feel happier.** The endorphins exercise releases also increase energy levels. If your child is facing writer's block, a quick run might help her return to her task focused and energized.
- **Is calming.** When your child is focused on the exercise or sport at hand, she's likely to stop focusing on her worries.
- **Improves memory.** Studies have shown that the increased blood flow to the brain caused

by exercise can help students remember more.

- **Increases self-confidence.** If your child feels like she has more control over her body, she may feel more in control of her studies as well.

If your middle schooler says she doesn't have time to exercise, help her rearrange her schedule so she can fit some activity into her day.

**Source:** "Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress," Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, [niscw.com/mid\\_activity](http://niscw.com/mid_activity).

**"True enjoyment comes from activity of the mind and exercise of the body; the two are ever united."**

—Wilhelm von Humboldt

# Boost your child's math skills with an imaginary stock portfolio



Nearly every middle schooler is interested in making money. See if your child can "make" some money by playing a stock market game.

First, explain to your child how stocks are small pieces or *shares* of a company. If enough people are buying pieces of that company, the value of its stock will go up. But if people are selling off pieces of that company, the value of its stock will go down. Then, show her where the stock prices are listed online or in the newspaper.

Next, come up with an imaginary amount of money to invest. Then, have your child pick stocks for several companies. She'll have to decide how

much of her imaginary money she wants to spend on each stock.

Now ask your child to track the stocks online for one month. She should chart the prices each day and figure out how much money she has made or lost.

Explain that if she purchased 100 shares of a \$10 stock on the first day, she would have \$1,000 worth of the stock. But if the stock goes up to \$11, she would have \$1,100 worth of the stock. If it goes down to \$9, she would have only \$900.

Have her look at her stocks this way for the entire month. At the end of the month, have her give the family a report on how she did. Don't forget to ask if there is anything different she would do next time, based on what she learned.

# Are you preparing your child for a safe summer?



Summer is prime time for fun and also for taking risks—especially for middle schoolers, who may not always be

in sight of an adult. Are you doing all you can to make sure your child is safe over the summer? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you remind** your child to wash his hands regularly and maintain appropriate social distance when in public places?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you require** your child to wear sunscreen when he is outdoors?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you insist** that your child wear a helmet when on a bike, scooter or skateboard?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you consider** your child's maturity before assigning chores, such as mowing the lawn with a riding lawn mower?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to drink plenty of water when working, playing or exercising outdoors in the heat?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are focused on summer safety. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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

For subscription information call or write:  
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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

## Encourage your middle schooler to find and enter a contest



There are many opportunities for your middle schooler to keep learning during the summer months. And without the demands of schoolwork, he can choose what he'd like to learn more about.

Entering a summer contest can allow your child to spend time developing his talents and interests. Contests can also:

- **Motivate your child to excel.** Whether he enjoys art, writing, photography or science, the idea that he is competing against others may drive him to produce a “personal best.”
- **Boost your child's self-image.** Even if he doesn't win the contest, he'll have taken a healthy risk and given

his best effort. Be sure to emphasize this. “You worked so hard. You got your entry in on time and tried something different. You should feel really proud of yourself. I know I'm proud of you.”

To find a suitable contest:

- **Check with the school.** Sometimes, companies that sponsor contests for students will send materials and entry forms directly to school principals or counselors.
- **Ask a librarian.** Librarians often know about contests for students.
- **Search online.** Research any sponsor offering a contest before you allow your child to enter. You should never have to pay a fee to enter or provide personal financial information.

## Your words can affect your middle schooler's motivation



The way your middle schooler hears you talk about him to others can have a lasting effect on him. It can motivate him to do his best—or discourage him from even trying.

To make sure the things you say have a positive effect on your child:

- **Assume** he is listening when you speak, even if he doesn't appear to be paying attention. Kids instantly perk up their ears when they hear their names. And your child picks up more than your words. He is mature enough to take note of the tone of your voice and the context of the conversation.
- **Avoid** discussing your child's strengths and weaknesses with his brothers or sisters. This can fuel sibling rivalry.
- **Avoid** making negative comments about your middle schooler to others—especially to other family members. Think of how you would feel if two people you love talked about how lazy you were, right in front of you.
- **Congratulate** him on his great grades, but focus on what's *really* important to you. Talk about things he has learned, or about his kindness or sense of responsibility. And if you really want to motivate him, talk about persistence. Remind him of a time that he didn't give up, even when the going got tough.

**Source:** S. Rimm, *Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades and What You Can Do About It: A Six-Step Program for Parents and Teachers*, Great Potential Press.

**Q:** My child has handled this strange school year with grace, but the thought of starting high school next fall seems to overwhelm her. Is there anything I can do to make the transition go smoothly?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Absolutely! Although you can't guarantee your child won't worry, there are several things you can do this summer to help her prepare for the move to high school:

- **Listen to her.** When your child talks about her fears regarding high school, pay attention. It may help you get to the bottom of the problem. For example, you might assume she is worried about handling more difficult schoolwork. It could turn out, though, that she's really worried about the potential for virtual classes and how challenging it will be for her to get involved and meet new people.
- **Help her get organized.** High school means more classes and a bigger workload. Help your child prepare by building her time management skills. Give her a calendar or a planner and encourage her to use it to keep track of her appointments and activities over the summer. This will reinforce the habit of planning her time and writing things down.
- **Check out the school website** together. Find out what types of activities may be available for freshmen. Learn about some of the policies and procedures your child will be expected to follow.
- **Encourage her to talk** to a current high school freshman. Hearing first-hand about how high school classes differ from middle school may ease her fears.

# It Matters: Summer Learning

## Set limits on mindless screen time this summer



This school year has been unprecedented to say the least. For most families, digital devices have become a necessary component for school, work and staying connected with friends and relatives.

As a result, screen time has increased drastically, leaving less time for important physical and mind-building activities. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute recommend setting limits on recreational screen time because too much can affect:

- **Maturity.** Middle schoolers should use part of the summer to take on new responsibilities, learn new hobbies and explore new interests. Binge watching a series on Netflix won't get your child very far on that journey.
- **Health.** Time spent in front of a screen is time kids are not spending on more healthy pursuits, such as exercise. Studies show that overindulging on screen time is linked to obesity, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol—each of which puts your child at risk of heart disease.
- **Social skills.** Students in middle school socialize with friends on social media. Face-to-face interaction is necessary, too. Keep in mind that once it's safe, your child needs to spend screen-free "real life" time with friends and family.

**Source:** T. Bahrapour, "Teens who spend less time in front of screens are happier—up to a point, new research shows," *The Washington Post*.

## Take advantage of unstructured time for fun family activities

**W**ith school out for the summer, your child will likely have more unstructured time. Help her make the most of this time by planning some fun activities together:

- **Get active.** Take advantage of the long, warm, summer evenings. If you and your child both like an activity, such as biking, do it together. Or, just walk and enjoy each other's company—as well as the conversation that happens more naturally at these times.
- **Celebrate the weekend.** Encourage your child to make a list of low-cost activities she'd like to do together. Then, schedule time to do them.
- **Plant a summer garden.** Involve your child in the planning, planting, watering and harvesting.



- **Make memories.** Take photos to record your summer. Spend an evening together making a slide show or putting the photos in an album or scrapbook.

## Offer your middle schooler purposeful writing activities



Summer vacation is a good time to help your middle schooler learn two important things about writing. First, writing has a purpose. It is not something teachers make up to torture their students! Second, writing can be a lot of fun, especially when it's about an interesting topic.

Encourage your child to write:

- **A review of a book** he has read. This is different from a book report. In a review, he should focus on whether he liked the book, why or why not, and whether he would recommend it to others.
- **Trivia questions** about a favorite sport or topic of interest. This is a wonderful way to show what an "expert" he is.
- **A letter to the editor**, or an online review for a company. Offering feedback, whether it is positive or negative, is a purpose for writing. Have your child share his.
- **A letter**—yes, a real letter on paper. Have him make Grandma's day, or that of another relative or family friend.
- **Fan fiction.** He can choose his favorite characters from any kind of media and then put them in a story that he creates.