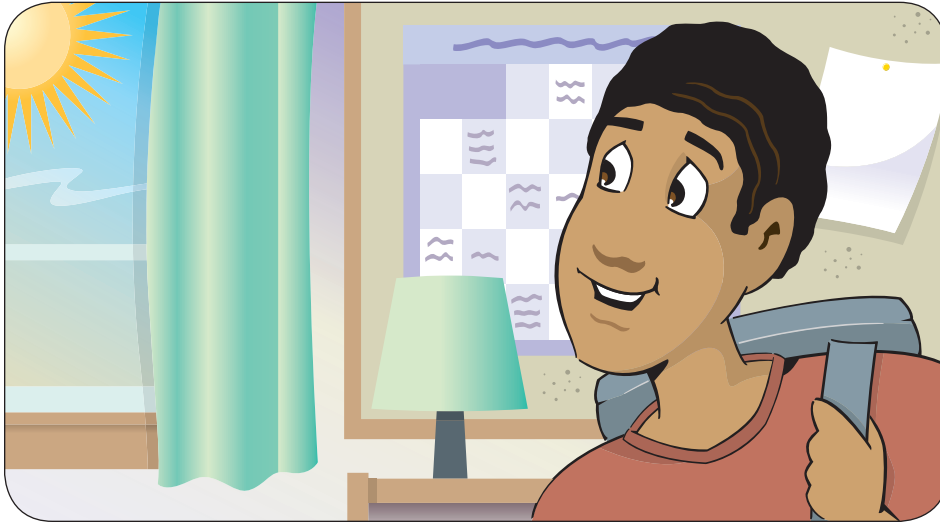


# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Shelton Youth Service Bureau

***still make the difference!***



## Don't let spring fever affect your child's attendance

**F**ever is a reason to keep your child home from school. Spring fever, however, doesn't count.

The first rule for doing well in school is a simple one: Your child needs to be there. That's true even on warm spring days when he'd rather be doing something else.

Poor attendance can lead to all sorts of problems, including:

- **Poor grades.**
- **Having to repeat a grade.**
- **Dropping out of school.**
- **Trouble with the law.** Children with too much time on their hands may be tempted to try illegal activities.

The good news is that you can play a big role in making sure your child attends school. Be sure to:

- **Tell your child** that school is his most important job at this time in his life. Let him know you expect him to be there every day.
- **Don't let your child** stay home for frivolous reasons. Being tired or unprepared are not valid excuses.
- **Make sure the school** knows how to contact you if your child is absent.
- **Work with the school** if you discover your child has been skipping school or some of his classes. There may be a bigger problem going on.

Talk to your child first, then to his teachers and other school staff if necessary. Most problems can be solved when parents and schools work together.

## These healthy habits enable school success



Healthy habits make it easier for your child to do well in school. But what if, like many kids her age, she's not getting the nutrition, sleep and exercise she needs?

The key to developing a healthier lifestyle is to make small changes, one at a time. Health experts agree that middle schoolers need to:

- **Get enough sleep.** They need between nine and 10 hours of sleep each night in order to perform at their best in school.
- **Wash their hands regularly.** Preventing the spread of illness can be as easy as washing hands. And fewer illnesses lead to fewer school absences.
- **Think about nutrition.** They should eat a healthy breakfast every morning and make nutritious choices for school lunches.
- **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, playing a sport, dancing, walking, etc.

## Share strategies to help your child strengthen vocabulary



A strong vocabulary helps students be successful in school and beyond. To help your child strengthen his vocabulary, encourage him to:

- **Read.** Most of what he reads should be at his reading level. If he likes a book by a certain author, encourage him to read others by that author. If he has a special interest, such as sports, suggest that he read a biography of a famous athlete. Every so often, encourage him to challenge himself by reading something beyond his reading level.
- **Look it up.** The dictionary is one of your child's most valuable tools. Have him use it whenever he encounters a word he doesn't know.

- **Practice.** It is a great start when your child learns the meaning of a new word. But that new word will soon be lost to him if he doesn't use it repeatedly. Encourage him to practice using each new word he hears.
- **Speak to adults.** When your child has conversations with adults, he will likely be exposed to new words. Don't "do the talking for him" when he is around adults.

**"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think ... and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."**

—Wilfred Funk

## Your child can improve writing with a teacher-created checklist



It's hard to help middle schoolers with their writing assignments. By nature, adolescents are very sensitive to

criticism and suggestions for improvement.

Students are more likely to write often when they feel secure and confident about their writing. 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 teacher-created 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 writing flows logically from one concept to another.
- 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 deleted or replaced overused words.
- I indented new paragraphs.
- I checked spelling, punctuation and capitalization.

## Do you monitor your preteen's after-school time?



Warmer weather and longer days can also mean more opportunity for your child to get into trouble in the first few

hours after school. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out how well you are monitoring your child's after-school time:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you make sure** your child has an adult contact after school, such as a relative, neighbor or sitter?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you keep in touch** by phone when your child is out of school and you are not with him?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you encourage** your child to be involved in supervised extra-curricular activities after school?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you have rules** about who may be in the house when you are not there?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Have you discussed** with your child the dangers that kids can get into after school (such as alcohol, illegal drugs) and how to avoid them?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are working hard to keep your child safe and productive after school. For *no* answers, try those suggestions.

**Middle School**  
**Parents**  
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## Be absolute when speaking to your child about alcohol & drugs



Now that your child is getting older, there are many topics—curfew, free time, chores—that are open to negotiation.

Others, however, are non-negotiable. They include alcohol and drug use. It is your job as a parent to present them as such.

Follow these guidelines:

- **Be explicit**, but give reasons. “Underage drinking is against the law and unacceptable. So is illegal drug use. Both can be harmful to your health. You are never allowed to participate in these behaviors.”
- **Do not expect your child** to experiment with drugs or alcohol. Yes, many young people do. But plenty of others do not! This is not

a “rite of passage.” One experiment can harm your child. Be sure she knows you expect her *not* to take the risk. Do not say, “Be careful.” Say, “Do not do it.”

- **Do not approve** of friends who drink or use drugs. You can’t control who your child spends time with at school. But if you know a peer who drinks or uses drugs, tell your child that she is not allowed to socialize with this person outside of school without supervision. If your child does anyway, she is disobeying you, and consequences should follow. Again, make sure she knows that the reason is her health—research shows that children who hang around users are more likely to become users.

## Don’t fall into the trap of being your middle schooler’s ‘friend’



Your child is growing up before your eyes. He may look more like a young adult and less like a young child. He

can also understand concepts that escaped him a year ago.

However, he is still your child and not your peer. He needs you to be the parent and he should respect you and other adults. To promote a respectful relationship:

- **Insist that your child** speak politely to you and others. Don’t allow your child to talk to you when he is being rude. Walk away and tell him you will respond when he speaks respectfully.
- **Require your child** to follow your rules. Middle schoolers shouldn’t have a huge list of rules, but they

should have a few important ones that must be followed. Agree on consequences and enforce them every time.

- **Do not try to be the cool parent** in the neighborhood. You should be kind and caring to your child and his friends, but you are not “one of the girls/boys.” Children lose respect for parents who act like children.
- **Do not make decisions** based on what would please your child and his friends. They might like it if you paid for them all to see an R-rated movie, but is it a wise parenting choice? Trust yourself as the adult and make decisions accordingly.

**Source:** C. Giannetti and M. Sagarese, *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*, Broadway Books.

**Q:** My child does well on tests and quizzes, but she’s really lazy about doing her homework. How can I get her to take these everyday assignments seriously?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** It’s critical that your child learn to take her assignments seriously. Although quizzes and tests have more “drama” surrounding them, it’s homework that reinforces her knowledge on a daily basis.

To help your child take her homework more seriously:

- **Tell her how you feel.** If you haven’t spelled it out yet, do so now. “I’ve noticed that you blow off your homework quite a bit. That’s not OK, so let’s figure out how to change the situation.”
- **Enforce a daily work time.** Find a time that works for her and stick to it. “Your homework session starts at five o’clock. No arguments.” If she doesn’t have any homework, she can use the time to review her notes, work on a long-term project or read.
- **Tie homework to privileges.** “After you have finished your homework, you may watch TV or play basketball.” To show your child you’re serious, be sure to check her work before taking her word that she’s finished with everything.
- **Follow up at school.** If your home strategies don’t work, get her teachers involved. Warn your child that you’ll be checking with them each week to see whether she’s turning in completed assignments. If she isn’t, be sure to enforce immediate, appropriate consequences.

# It Matters: Motivation

## Motivation can keep your middle schooler focused



Middle schoolers can fall into the “Why work hard?” trap any time, especially near the end of the school year.

Don't let your child!

Keep your middle schooler focused until the final bell rings by reinforcing what he learns and encouraging him to stay on task. Here's how:

- **Make connections.** Your child may not want to bother with schoolwork because he can't see why it's important. Talk to him about it. Does he love video games? Can he imagine working with computers someday? Remind him that solid math skills could be his ticket into that field.
- **Praise your child's efforts.** When he works hard on a test or paper, let him know how proud you are. Middle schoolers may act like they don't want your approval, but they really do. There's no motivator like a pat on the back from Mom or Dad.
- **Celebrate success.** Did he earn a B on that tough history test? Prepare a special dinner! Or take everyone out for ice cream. Celebrating his hard work could be just the boost your child needs to keep buckling down.
- **Encourage him to challenge himself.** It's too late to take a new class this year, but what does he think about choosing tougher courses next year? The idea just might inspire him to keep learning all summer.

## Don't let your middle schooler develop 'learned helplessness'

A student who has had several failures in a row is at risk of refusing to try a new or challenging task. This fear of failure is often referred to as *learned helplessness*—in which a child's first decision is to avoid a task because she believes it will be impossible for her.

To help your child guard against learned helplessness, have her:

- **Focus on being positive.** If she believes she can be successful and decides to give a task or assignment her best effort, she is more likely to succeed.
- **Try easier work first.** Students are often told to do harder work first, to get it out of the way. But some kids gain self-confidence by finishing an easy task.
- **Try new learning strategies.** Does she need to move around?



Does making pictures or graphs help her understand material better? Does her comprehension improve if she records herself reading and plays it back?

Be sure to watch what you say to your child, too. Sarcasm and labels such as *lazy* don't motivate your child—they hurt her.

## Keep your child on track as the calendar turns toward spring



Motivation has a way of decreasing as the outdoor temperature starts increasing, especially for middle schoolers.

Your child may need more encouragement and structure as he copes with an increased number of projects, papers and tests during the final months of the school year.

To support your child:

- **Make sure he has a set place** for homework. You probably did this at the beginning of the year. Still, many families find that kids start to spread out their work all over the house as the year goes on.
- **Have him write down** his homework schedule and post it where he can easily see it.
- **Encourage him to make lists.** He should list the assignments he needs to complete, the materials he needs for projects and the dates for upcoming tests.
- **Offer to help.** You should never do homework for your child, but you can help in other ways. For example, you could stop by the library on your lunch hour and pick up a book he needs.