

Middle School Parents[®]

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Shelton Youth Service Bureau

still make the difference!



Take advantage of summer to connect with your child

Summertime is wonderful family time. You may see your child more during the day. But even if you don't, you can take advantage of the more relaxed evenings that make this an ideal season for spending more time with your child.

Experts agree that children who spend quality time with their parents tend to perform better academically. To make the most of your extra time together this summer:

- **Set aside at least one evening** each week as Family Night. Cook a meal together, talk, play board games. Avoid watching television.
- **Get your child's opinion.** Many middle schoolers enjoy current events. Because kids this age tend to be idealistic and would like to "save the world," they often have strong opinions. Take time to hear your child's thoughts and ideas.
- **Hold regular family meetings** to solve problems and discuss plans. Brainstorm ideas about fun ways you can spend time together.
- **Take your child along** on errands and visits to friends and relatives. Your child may not always want to go and that's OK. But compromise on a schedule that includes her some of the time.
- **Participate in family traditions.** Traditions bond children to their families. If you always go to the same park to watch fireworks or attend summer sports events in your town, keep doing it. No traditions? Create some together.

Source: T. McMahon, *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide For Parents With Kids 11-19*, Gallery Books.

Use positive discipline to create a change



By middle school, your child has probably learned to tune out negative discipline, such as yelling. And you have probably realized that it doesn't work anyway.

This summer, use positive discipline whenever possible. In return, you may see a positive change in your child's behavior by summer's end.

Here's how to get started:

- **Be generally pleasant** to your child, even if he is not. Smile. Show affection with a hug.
- **Notice what your child does** right and compliment him.
- **Thank your child** when he does something for you or the family. Say *please* when you ask him to do something.
- **Trust your child.** If your child has been generally trustworthy, give him the benefit of the doubt. Believe what he says.
- **Send positive messages.** If your child asks to go to a friend's house, don't say "Not until your room is clean." Instead, say "Sure you can, as soon as your room is clean."

Source: J. Thompson, *Discipline Survival Kit for the Secondary Teacher*, Jossey-Bass.

Ease your middle schooler's anxiety about high school



If your child will be going to high school next year, he may feel a bit nervous. The summer is a great time to help ease the transition.

To support your child:

- **Visit the new school together.** There may be a special day planned for eighth graders to visit. If not, call the school to schedule a tour.
- **Encourage him to talk to high school students** and ask, "What do you wish you had known before starting high school?"
- **Promote learning** over the summer. Encourage your child

to write about his experiences in a journal and read at least one novel recommended for ninth graders.

- **Reassure your child.** Rather than talking about how challenging high school is going to be, remain positive. Say things like, "I know you're going to be successful in high school."

"Worry is like a rocking chair: it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere."

—Erma Bombeck

Summer is the perfect time to participate in community service



Community service helps adolescents develop empathy—the ability to understand and share the feelings

of others. It also helps them gain ideals—and the sense that they should be helping.

In addition, community service can help your child learn new skills and find talents she didn't know she had. It can give her opportunities to try out new experiences for short periods of time to see how she likes them.

Another big plus: Community service can contribute to being a healthier person and a better student. Studies show that children who volunteer are less likely to take health risks, such as smoking. One study even showed that students who perform community service do better on some tests.

Encourage your child to get more involved this summer. She could:

- **Read to preschoolers** or senior citizens.
- **Collect items** to include in care packages for deployed troops, veterans or wounded soldiers.
- **Be an assistant counselor** for a children's program.
- **Organize a drive** to clean up a local park or playground.
- **Mow a lawn** or help with laundry for a new mom or an elderly neighbor.
- **Make cards** for nursing home residents.
- **Donate reading materials** to homeless shelters, libraries and schools.
- **Be a volunteer coach** for a youth recreational league.

Source: J. Bandy, "What is Service Learning or Community Engagement?" Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching, niswc.com/mid_engagement.

Are you keeping track of your child's social life?



Middle schoolers put a high priority on their social lives, which tend to kick into high gear during the summer.

Fewer responsibilities often lead to a lot of hanging out with friends.

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you're ready to keep track of your child this summer:

- ___ **1. Do you know your child's friends?**
- ___ **2. Do you have correct contact information for the parents of your child's friends?**
- ___ **3. Do you always ask where your child will be, who she will be with, what she will be doing and what time she will be home?**
- ___ **4. Have you encouraged your child to participate in summer activities such as swimming, camps and volunteering?**
- ___ **5. Do you research movies and activities to make sure they are appropriate before your child goes?**

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are prepared to keep track of your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
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Help your middle schooler handle end-of-year work



Your child is probably facing an array of finals and year-end projects as this school year draws to a close. For some

students, this workload can be daunting.

Here are tips to help your child manage end-of-year assignments:

- **Homework comes first.** Some kids like to do homework as soon as they get home from school. Others work better after some time to unwind. Still others are at their best later at night. Whenever your child likes to work, completing homework on time must have top priority.
- **Keep track of key dates.** Few students can remember when

all of their assignments need to be turned in without writing down due dates. Your child should write everything down in a planner or calendar and check it daily.

- **Jot down reminder notes** during the school day. Writing “Bring history book home tonight” on a sticky note and sticking it to the front of her notebook really can help your child remember to bring the book home.
- **Be careful about distractions.** The TV, the phone and the internet may not be a problem when your child has less of a workload. But at the end of the school year, when her workload has increased, she should make a stronger effort to avoid distractions.

Offer prompts to encourage your child to write this summer



It's important for your child to keep up her writing skills over the summer. Journaling is a great way for her to

do this. Share a few of these writing prompts to get your child's creative juices flowing:

- **If you could solve** any problem in the world, what would it be?
- **Write about three values** that are important to your family.
- **Write a poem** about your favorite activity or hobby.
- **Write about the best vacation** you ever took.
- **Would you rather jump** out of a plane or go scuba diving? Why?
- **Write about a time** when someone helped you.
- **Write a poem about love** and what it means to you.
- **Write about a rule at school** or at home that you'd like to replace.
- **Write about your favorite TV show.** What do you like about it?
- **How would your best friend** describe you?
- **What is your favorite way** to be creative?
- **Why should we give respect** to our elders?
- **Write about the most important thing** in your life.
- **If you could live inside** any video game, which would you choose?
- **What is your favorite thing** about yourself?
- **Write about a goal** you accomplished recently.
- **Write about something** your parents always tell you.

Source: “31 Fun Writing Prompts for Middle School,” Journal Buddies.com, niswc.com/mid_journal.

Q: My middle schooler had a pretty good school year, but his study habits need some improvement. Is there a way I can help him work on these skills over summer break?

Questions & Answers

A: Congratulations on tackling the issue now instead of waiting until fall. By working on the problem areas while they're still fresh in your child's mind, you may be better able to solve them.

To start, have a talk with your child. Ask him what he thinks his strengths and weaknesses are. Is he a strong reader but a poor note-taker? Find out now.

To boost your child's study habits:

- **Encourage reading.** Does he read for pleasure? Do you? If not, it's time to start. Make a trip to the library every week or two and choose something new to read. Have discussions about what he's reading. Share what you're reading. Make these discussions about reading a habit.
- **Nurture observation skills.** Are you taking a car trip? Ask your child to look for specific signs or landmarks along the way. Have him keep track of the miles you've traveled. Get him to pay attention to details.
- **Have him write.** Is your son a computer whiz, while you dislike all things electronic? Ask him to write you a “Here's what to do if ...” manual that you can use when you're home alone and your computer freezes. It'll build his writing skills and his organizational skills. Better yet, it'll help you. You could also encourage him to keep a summer journal.

It Matters: Summer Learning

Summer contests motivate kids to learn, take risks



There are many opportunities for your middle schooler to keep learning during the summer months.

And without the demands of homework, your child can choose what she'd like to learn more about.

Entering a summer contest can allow your child to spend time focusing on her talents and interests. Contests can have several benefits. They can:

- **Inspire your child to excel.** Whether she enjoys art, writing, photography or science, the idea that she is competing against others may motivate her to produce a "personal best."
- **Boost your child's self-concept.** Even if she doesn't win the contest, she'll have taken a risk and given her 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 help your child find a suitable contest:

- **Check with the school.** Sometimes, companies that sponsor contests for students will send materials and entry forms directly to schools.
- **Head to the public library.** Librarians often know about contests for students.
- **Search online.** Be careful, though. Research any group offering a contest before you allow your child to enter.

Make sure your middle schooler keeps reading over the summer

No more pencils, no more books? No way! According to research, kids risk losing some of their "word smarts" if they don't keep reading over the summer.

To keep your middle schooler reading over summer break:

- **Walk the walk.** Make reading a part of your daily life. Let your middle schooler see you leafing through magazines or choosing a thick novel over a TV show.
- **Read a few young adult books** yourself. By exploring books written for middle-school-aged kids, you may get a better feel for what's going on in his life and what topics might interest him. Ask a librarian for suggestions.
- **Share what you're reading.** Did you just come across an interesting article in the newspaper? Tell your middle schooler about it!



- **Respect that his interests** are changing, and help him find books that reflect those interests.
- **Don't panic.** Adolescence is all about change, so it's normal for your middle schooler to lose interest in reading for a while. Just continue being enthusiastic about books, and chances are his enthusiasm will return.

Encourage activities that lead to meaningful summer learning



Middle schoolers can find themselves with too much time on their hands when school is out. Here are some ideas to keep your child busy and learning:

- **Be a tourist in your town.** Ask your child to research interesting places to visit where you live. Then, make plans to go.
- **Consider whether your child** is ready to earn some money outside the home. If he is, pet care, babysitting or helping a

neighbor with yard work can help him learn responsibility.

- **Start a book club.** Let your child pick a book. Read it together and set a date to talk about it. Suggest that he invite some of his friends.
- **Give your child** a research project. Do you need to find the best price and model of a small appliance? Ask your child to do research on the internet.
- **Help your child learn to cook.** Give him the responsibility of preparing a simple family meal at least once a week.