

Middle School Parents®

January 2017
Vol. 20, No. 5

Essex Regional Educational Services
Commission Title I Program

still make the difference!



Resolve to be your middle schooler's academic coach!

A good coach is someone who guides, encourages and inspires. Thinking of yourself in this role is an effective way to make sure your middle schooler is ready to learn.

To be a positive academic coach for your child:

- **Act** as a resource. Never do your child's homework for her. But be available, whenever you can, to offer encouragement, answer questions and suggest places (such as a website) where your child can go to find the information she needs.
- **Talk** about what your child is learning. Grades are important, but they are a product of learning. It is equally important (many experts say even more so) to emphasize the learning process.

This includes hard work, persistence and making progress.

- **Accept** that you don't know it all. There will be times when you are not familiar with the material your child is learning. If your child comes to you with a question, it's OK to say, "I never learned that. Are there any hints in your textbook?"
- **Understand** that your child has strengths and weaknesses. She may never need help in math, but she may struggle in language arts. Support and encourage your child in every class, but do not expect the same performance in every subject.

Source: K.T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, Teachers College Press.

Share the four steps to perfect paragraphs



If your child dreads writing, he may need practice constructing paragraphs. Once a writer knows how to

build paragraphs, writing a paper isn't quite as overwhelming.

To build a solid paragraph, your child should:

1. **Pick a topic** and write a topic sentence. This sentence states what the paragraph will be about. "Skateboarding is the most challenging sport I have ever tried."
2. **Include details** that support the topic sentence. These details answer the question *why*. "Keeping my balance on a fast-moving wheeled board took me months to learn. I still fall a lot. And even after a year of skateboarding, I still don't feel ready to go down a hill."
3. **Check the paragraph** to make sure each sentence is related to his topic. He should also read it aloud to see if it makes sense.
4. **Proofread the paragraph** for spelling or grammar mistakes. He should also make sure his handwriting is neat and easy to read.

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 your conversations 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 and sports victories, but focus on what's *really* important to you. Talk about his kindness or his sense of responsibility. And if you really want to motivate him, praise his effort. Tell about 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.

“Self-esteem is made up primarily of two things: feeling lovable and feeling capable.”

—Jack Canfield

Talk to your child about the dangers of medication abuse



According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, prescription and over-the-counter

drugs are the most commonly abused substances by children 14 and older—after marijuana and alcohol. That's not surprising, if you consider that most families keep some kind of medication in the home.

The abuse of *any* drug can affect your child's success in school. To protect your child from medication abuse:

- **Keep close track** of your over-the-counter and prescription medications. You may need to lock them up.
- **Warn your child** never to take someone else's medication. Discuss the dangers.
- **Take extra care** if your child takes a medication for ADHD. Many kids are pressured to share or even sell these drugs.
- **Ask your pediatrician** about commonly-abused medications, such as cough syrup.

Source: “Prescription Drugs & Cold Medicines,” National Institute on Drug Abuse, nisdw.com/mid_prescription.

Are you showing your child how to be thorough?



So many poor grades result not from a lack of knowledge, but rather from careless mistakes.

Are you teaching your middle schooler to do careful, accurate work? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ **1. Do you check** your child's planner or assignment notebook to find out what homework she has?
- ___ **2. Do you encourage** your child to pay attention to details such as putting her name and the correct date on papers?
- ___ **3. Do you remind** your child that “neatness counts,” and that sloppy, hard-to-read homework and papers will probably be marked down?
- ___ **4. Do you encourage** your child to always double-check her answers before submitting work?
- ___ **5. Do you look over** your child's finished work with her to ensure it is neat and complete?

How well are you doing?

If most of your answers are *yes*, you are helping your child turn in thorough work. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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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.

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Publisher: L. Andrew McLaughlin.
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.
Illustrator: Joe Mignella.

Help your middle schooler think about the world of physics



Physics may seem like one of the most challenging sciences, but it's also with us all the time in our everyday lives. Help your child stop and notice.

Thinking about science in real-life terms can help her master the subject. The key is to translate the language of physics into the language of the middle schooler. For example:

- **Rest.** This is the state of the book, gum wrapper or item of clothing your child leaves on the counter or the floor. An object is at rest when it is simply lying there and not moving at all.
- **Inertia.** This is your child's state after dropping the item. She knows she should pick up the item and put it away, but doesn't feel like it. Inertia is a fancy term

for resisting a change from one state to another.

- **Force.** This is what you add to the mix. Force makes change happen. When you come along and tell your child she won't be going out this weekend unless everything is picked up and put away, you exert a force on your child. This force overcomes her inertia. She moves and picks up what she left lying around.
- **Mass.** This is one indicator of how hard your child will have to work at cleaning up. Smaller objects (the gum wrapper) that are lighter have less mass and are easier to move. Bigger objects (a stack of books) that are heavier have more mass and are more difficult to move.

Source: D. and C. Johnson, *Homework Heroes, Grades 6-8: It's a Bird. It's a Plane. It's Done!* Simon & Schuster.

Encourage your child to make connections with classmates



There will probably never be a time in your child's life when people his own age are as important to him as they are now.

And that's OK. Forming friendships with other kids at school can help your child feel more connected to school. So encourage him to:

- **Introduce himself** to new students or any student who seems friendly. A smile is usually a good sign that a child is open to a new friendship.
- **Look for classmates** who have interests matching his. Help him check out a variety of clubs and extracurricular activities. These can be a haven for kids who need help making friends. It may be hard for your child to spot a child of similar interests as he walks through the halls, but if he meets a student in the chess club, it's a safe bet that child likes playing chess, too.
- **Build on friendships** that have potential. It's important to have people to talk to at school. But the strongest friendships also involve spending time together outside the school building. If your child has been eating lunch and walking to class with the same three boys for the last month, encourage him to ask them over to your home to hang out. Or offer to drive them to the movies.

Q: The first half of the school year didn't go so well for my seventh grader. His grades were lower than we both would've liked. How can I make sure he does better during the second half?

Questions & Answers

A: Encourage your son to look at the new calendar year as a starting over point. To help him make a fresh start, adopt—or recommit—to positive school habits. Here's how:

- **Schedule homework time.** Has your child been slacking off on finishing assignments? Insist on a regular homework time. If he's freshest right after school, then make that his work time. But if he does better with a little downtime first, give him an hour before having him crack open the books.
- **Enforce bedtime.** If your child always stays up for "just one more TV show," there's a good chance he's not getting enough sleep. Research shows that sleepy kids don't perform as well in school, so insist that your child hit the sack at a reasonable hour.
- **Monitor his progress.** Don't wait until your child fails a quiz or brings home a note to discover he's struggling in class. Instead, touch base regularly with his teachers.
- **Set goals.** You can't expect your child to turn his year around overnight. But you can help him set reasonable, attainable goals. For instance, if he earned all C's last grading period, see if he can bring at least some of his grades up to B's.

It Matters: Reading

Find the value in different types of reading material



Is your child a reader? Some kids don't read many novels, but that doesn't mean they are not readers. Avoid

labeling your middle schooler a nonreader—if you say it, your child is likely to believe it.

Nearly every kind of reading has value that you may not have considered. Recognize it. Encourage it. Praise your child for reading.

If your child reads:

- **Magazines**, she has learned the value of reading for pleasure and interest. As long as the material is age-appropriate, this is a constructive activity for your child.
- **Sports scores**, she has learned to read for information. And she has learned that the internet and newspapers are valuable resources. Ask her questions that require her to do a bit of research.
- **Nonfiction books**, she is building fluency, comprehension and vocabulary skills. Consider giving her a biography of a person she admires.
- **Instruction manuals** or how-to books, she has learned that reading can teach her a practical skill. Help her look for books about skills she wants to learn.
- **Text messages**, she has learned to use reading and writing to communicate. But if texts are the *only* things she reads—it's time to set limits and introduce some variety!

Source: D. Booth, *Reading Doesn't Matter Anymore ... Shattering the Myths of Literacy*, Stenhouse Publishers.

Three strategies can boost your child's reading comprehension

In middle school, much of your child's academic success will involve reading comprehension. Comprehension is much more than being able to recognize the words in a passage. It means that you understand the *meaning* of the passage as a whole.

To strengthen reading comprehension, encourage your middle schooler to:

1. **Make connections.** When your child reads something that reminds him of something he has seen or done, the reading material has meaning and it will make him think. Help your child look for books or articles that refer to his favorite things, places or memories.
2. **Read often.** The more your child reads, the easier it will become for him. And the easier reading becomes, the more energy and



interest he'll have left over to focus on the meaning of what he reads.

3. **Think about what he reads.**

Ask him questions, such as: *Who is the main character? What kind of personality does he have? Does he remind you of anyone you know? How do you think the book will end?*

Your middle schooler can still benefit from read-aloud time



Middle schoolers are too old to be read to, right? Absolutely not. Most young middle schoolers are still better at *listening* than they are at *reading*. When you read aloud to your child, you can expose her to new concepts, ideas and vocabulary.

The key is to keep it short and to the point. Here are some ideas:

- **Share what you are reading.** Read aloud a small part of something you are reading. Watch for

signs of interest in your child. If they appear, read a little longer.

- **Select a book to read together.** Choose a genre that neither of you is familiar with. Consider science fiction, historical fiction or a biography and read for a few minutes each evening.
- **Review the news.** Choose a news article to read aloud to your child at breakfast. Have her do the same for you after dinner.

Source: H. Korbey, "Why Reading Aloud to Older Children Is Valuable," MindShift, nswc.com/mid_aloud.