

Parents®

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Illustrated by Joe Mignella

Parent involvement helps students achieve in school

Do you consider yourself a partner with your child's school? If so, you've taken an important step in helping her succeed. Research shows that children benefit when parents actively support their education.

To nurture the crucial school-home partnership:

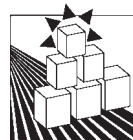
- **Talk to your child** about the things she's learning in school. Pay attention when she tells you things. Take an interest in every part of her day (both inside the classroom and out).
- **Maintain** a learning-friendly home. Monitor how much time your child spends watching television and using the computer. Make sure homework comes first.

- **Read all notices** sent home from school. Have a special folder where your child can put them. Be sure to sign and return forms on time.
- **Check out** the school's website. Many sites post homework assignments, school policies and other information.
- **Encourage reading.** Show your child that literacy isn't something that's "just for school."
- **Keep in touch** with your child's teachers. Even if you cannot volunteer at the school, you can still stay active in your child's education.

Source: Susan J. Paik, "Ten Strategies That Improve Learning," Educational HORIZONS, www.pilambda.org/horizons/v81-2/paik.pdf.

Building Responsibility

Attending school is a major factor in school success



The actor and director Woody Allen once said that a big part of life is "just showing up." You may or may not agree. But there is no question that showing up is a very big part of school. Your child cannot learn if he isn't there. Both you and your child have a responsibility to get him to school.

Studies show that students who attend school regularly:

- **Do better** in reading and math.
- **Are less likely** to drop out. A first step to dropping out is skipping school.
- **Are less likely** to get in trouble outside school. This includes trouble with alcohol or drugs.

Schools where students attend regularly:

- **Are more orderly.** This contributes to a safer school environment.
- **Have teachers** who are more committed to their jobs.
- **Have teachers** who set higher expectations for their students.

Source: "School Attendance," 2005 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook, Kids Count, www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/d.asp?PageID=332&PageName2=2005Factbook&p=&PageName=School+Attendance%281%29%2Epdf.

Encouraging Reading

Reading for pleasure can build reading achievement



Reading for pleasure will help your child build the comprehension and vocabulary skills he'll need to tackle more difficult material. Here's what you can do to promote reading:

- **Continue reading aloud.** Try a short newspaper story about a topic of interest to your child.
- **Build on his interests.** Go to the library together and select a variety of books.
- **Expect some online time** to be reading time. The computer should not be just for emailing your child's friends. Encourage him to find online articles about his interests.

- **Don't worry** if he isn't reading classics. If you feel your child's selections have too much violence or adult content, discuss your concerns with him. Otherwise, be happy he is reading.
- **Write to your child.** Give him short letters, lists of things to do, friendly written reminders, and notes that say, "I love you," or "great job!" This reinforces to your child that reading is a way to receive information and pleasure.

Source: "Read any good books lately? Encouraging the reading habit with middle schoolers," Mohonasen, N.Y. Central School District, www.mohonasen.org/03parents/MSParent/EncouragingReading.htm.



Parent Quiz

Are you helping your child start the day off right?

Take this quiz to see how smoothly your mornings go. Write *yes* if you do something all or most of the time. Write *no* if you do it rarely or never.

- ____ **1. I encourage** my child to put backpacks, schoolwork and important papers in one place before going to bed.
- ____ **2. I have** my child lay out clothes for the next school day.
- ____ **3. I encourage** my child to get a good night's sleep.
- ____ **4. I make** fast, nutritious breakfast foods (such as cereal and fruit) available.
- ____ **5. I encourage** my child to get out the door on time.

How did you do?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child get off to a good start. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions on starting the day more smoothly.

Computers & the Internet

Monitor your middle schooler's computer activity



Computers can be great for helping your child with schoolwork, but caution your child:

- **Not to meet people online.** Some predators ask kids to call them. Then they use "Caller ID" to get the child's phone number.
- **Not to open email** if he doesn't recognize the email address of the sender.
- **To tell you** if he receives any threatening email.

Source: "The Internet," Your Child, University of Michigan Health System, www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/internet.htm.

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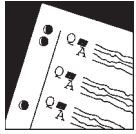
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Questions & Answers

Q: I know it's normal for middle-schoolers to be moody, but my daughter is so sullen and withdrawn that I barely recognize her. How can I get my little girl back?

A: You may not get your "little girl" back. But you can build a wonderful relationship with your young woman. Remember, adolescence is all about change—for both of you. To make this period as smooth as possible, keep in mind that:

- **Your child's moods** are as tough for her as they are for you. Blame it on hormones, school, whatever. One minute, she's fine. The next, she's sobbing. Instead of getting angry with her, try a little empathy.

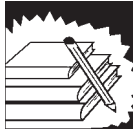
Your child's moods are as tough for her as they are for you.

- **Some withdrawal is normal.** Pulling away allows your child to stand back and see where she fits into the world (not just into the family).
- **It's important to accept her** for who she is now. Find new activities to explore together. Is she into music? Browse the CD aisle with her. Does she like movies? Rent a video to watch together and discuss.
- **Some changes aren't normal.** Has your child withdrawn completely from family and friends? Have her grades dropped? If so, she may have a serious problem like depression. Talk to her guidance counselor or pediatrician about what to do.

—Holly Smith
The Parent Institute

Homework

Homework reinforces learning, allows parent-child interaction



Your child may gripe when it's time for homework, but insist that he complete his assignments anyway. Studies show that homework increases children's achievement in school. It also improves critical thinking skills.

Beyond that, homework:

- **Helps your child** get in the habit of studying at home. This may keep him from thinking that reading and math are only done at school.
- **Gives parents** a regular opportunity to see what their child is learning in class.
- **Lets a child absorb** new concepts or ideas in a less rushed setting. Classrooms can be loud, busy places. When a child works at home, he has a chance to learn the material in a calmer environment.

- **Promotes** your child's independent learning.
- **Acts as a focal point** for parent-child interaction. Supervising your child's homework gives you an excellent opportunity to offer input and support.
- **Increases learning time** during a child's day.
- **Gives teachers** a chance to monitor a child's progress. If there are problems, they may show up in daily assignments before they impact big tests. Remember, although it's your job to make sure your child completes homework, it isn't your job to *do* the homework for him!

Source: Sam Redding, "Parents and Learning," International Bureau of Education, UNESCO, www.ibe.unesco.org/International/Publications/EducationalPractices/EducationalPracticesSeriesPdf/prac02e.pdf.

Wellness

Daily exercise keeps your child fit & healthy for school



Not every child wants to, or should, play on a sports team. Some children may not have the right skills. For others, team sports are not a good "fit" with their personalities. Still others would simply rather do other things.

That doesn't mean your child is destined to be a couch potato. While you should never insist on team sports, do expect your child to get some physical activity each day. It stimulates the brain and keeps children healthy.

Encourage your child to:

- Go for a daily walk, run or bike ride.
- Swim at a school pool or recreation center.
- Try different kinds of skating.
- Go hiking in the park (with a parent or buddy).
- Try different kinds of dancing.
- Try martial arts.

Be a good model by getting some exercise yourself!

Source: Nemours Foundation, "A Parent's Guide to Fitness for Kids Who Hate Sports," KidsHealth, http://kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/fitness/hate_sports.html.

Discipline

Respect for others is best learned at home from you



Students can't do their best learning in an environment of misbehavior and disrespect. As a parent, it's your job to teach your child respect and cooperation at home.

Here's how:

- **Insist that your child** follow school rules. Rules are necessary to keep all students and staff safe and comfortable at school.
- **Model respectful** and polite behavior. Now that your child is in middle school, you may not think she cares about what you do. But she still looks up to you. Use kind words and thoughtful actions. Then your child will likely use them at school, and beyond.
- **Remain calm** if a problem should arise. Sometimes, children do get in trouble at school. Parents tend to have one of two quick reactions: They get very angry with their child, or they immediately decide the problem lies with the school.

Resist both of these reactions. Wait instead for a quieter moment. Then get both sides of the story. Encourage your child to meet with her teachers to find a solution that works for everyone.

Source: "Discipline doesn't have to mean 'Bad,'" Kansas National Education Association, www.knea.org/parent_tips/discipline.htm.



"When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically."

—National Education Association

Spending Time Together

Volunteering together builds communication & memories

Looking for something to do with your child that's fun and meaningful? Volunteer in the community. To broaden your horizons, choose a task that's new for both of you.

For example:

- **If you're bookish** and reserved, get your hands dirty. Spruce up an elderly neighbor's house. Clean up a park or stream. Walk dogs at the animal shelter.
- **If you're outdoorsy** and active, find something more low-key. Stock shelves for the library's annual book sale. Answer phones at the food bank. Stuff envelopes for an area charity.

By doing something out of the ordinary, you and your child may discover talents or interests you



Illustrated by Joe Mignella

didn't know you had. Better yet, you're building bonds of communication by sharing in an activity that's meaningful to both of you.

Transitions

Reduce anxiety during the first days of middle school



Making the adjustment to middle school can be a challenge. Many middle schools are large. They are filled with students and teachers your child may not know. There are many new rules and procedures to learn. To help your child, focus on these areas:

- **Learning.** The material will be more difficult and there will be more of it. Emphasize that you do not expect perfection. Expect that your child will make many mistakes as she adjusts. Let her know you will help her find assistance if she is really struggling.

- **Anxiety.** Even a little thing like finding and opening a locker can cause stress during the first days of middle school. Tell your child to come to you with any worries she has.
- **Organization.** Encourage your child to use a variety of ways to stay organized. These include assignment notebooks, calendars and lists. Have her write down all her assignments and check them off when finished.

Source: "Supporting Students in Their Transition to Middle School," National Middle School Association and National Association of Elementary School Principals, www.nmsa.org/news/transition.html.