

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Oxford Middle School

*still make the difference!*



## Dropout prevention begins with middle school habits

**M**any students who drop out of school between ninth and twelfth grade started down that path in sixth, seventh or eighth grade. Studies show that, without intervention, sixth graders are 75 percent more likely to drop out of school if they:

- Miss class 20 percent or more of the time.
- Fail language arts or math.
- Earn poor grades in a core course due to behavior issues.

The good news is that families can steer middle schoolers down the right path. Here's how:

- **Expect your kids** to attend school every single day. They should miss school only if they are quarantined or ill, or there is a family emergency.

- **Talk to your children** about school and what they are learning each day. Tell them that education is important to your family and you expect them to work hard and do their best.
- **Let your children know** that you believe in them—and that you know they can be successful.
- **Encourage your kids** to become involved in extracurricular activities. Students with ties to school beyond academics are more likely to stay in school.
- **Work with teachers.** Remind your children that you all are on the same team and want the best for them.

Source: A. O'Brien, "Middle School Moment," *Frontline*, WGBH Educational Foundation.

## Ask questions that will make your child think



Middle schoolers need critical thinking skills to do research, to make decisions and to solve problems. As your

child progresses through school, his teachers will expect higher-level thinking. Instead of just giving an answer, your child will need to give examples to support it.

Help your child develop more mature thinking skills by asking him questions such as:

- **"Why are your favorites your favorites?"** Whether it's a singer or a character in a book, explore the appeal with your child. It's not enough for him to say he likes them. Ask him to tell you some characteristics that make him like them.
- **"How can we save money as a family?"** Review a family expense, such as the electric or water bill, and challenge your child to find ways to save money. If he does, ask him what he thinks the family should do with the savings—and why.
- **"Can you think of a volunteer opportunity for our family?"** Ask your child to do some and give information that supports his choice.

# Follow a game plan to help kids limit recreational screen time



It's no surprise that recreational screen time skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, studies

show that excessive screen time is linked to greater stress and poorer mental health.

Experts urge parents to help middle schoolers limit their recreational screen time. Here are four ways:

1. **Encourage your child** to spend one week writing down the amount of time she spends each day on recreational screen time. Challenge her to reduce that time the following week
2. **Create a tech curfew.** Your child should have at least 30 minutes of "unplugged" time to wind down before bedtime.

3. **Establish digital-free zones** and times. For example, the dinner table should be a place where everyone leaves their screen devices behind.
4. **Don't use screen time** as a reward or punishment. It'll make it seem even more important to your child.

**Source:** J. Nagata, MD, MSc, "Screen Time Use Among US Adolescents During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *JAMA Pediatrics*.

**"Put down the phone, turn off the laptop, and do something—anything—that does not involve a screen."**

—Jean Twenge,  
*Psychology Professor*

# Open communication plays a critical role in school safety



Schools today take many steps to keep students safe. But they can't do it alone—they need parents' help.

One of the most effective ways you can contribute to a safe school environment is to talk together every day about what's going on at school and in your child's life.

Have an open discussion about:

- **The school discipline policy.** Talk about the reasons for certain rules. Review the consequences for breaking the rules.
- **The school's safety** and security procedures. If you don't know what they are, find out.
- **Personal safety issues**, such as ways to keep safe when traveling to and from school.

- **Your own family values**, rules and expectations for your child.
  - **The impact of violence** in the media—TV, books, video games, music and movies.
  - **Strategies for solving problems** peacefully and diffusing tense situations.
  - **Concerns about friends** or classmates who may be dangerous to themselves or others.
  - **Social media** and the need to use it responsibly.
  - **The importance of telling** a teacher or other adult if your child sees something that doesn't seem right.
- And remember: If *you* hear something that concerns you, inform the school immediately. Schools are safest when parents, students and educators work together.

# Are you showing your child how to be respectful?



One of the best ways parents can teach their kids respectful behavior toward others is to model it. Are you setting an example of respect? Take this quiz to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Do you obey laws** meant to protect people, such as obeying the speed limit? Do you speak about the importance of doing so?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Do you speak respectfully** of teachers and all they do to help children learn?
- \_\_\_ 3. **Do you set an example** of courtesy? Do you accept people's right to beliefs different from your own?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Do you make it a family rule** to treat others as you would like to be treated?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you demonstrate** moral reasoning? Let your child see you wrestle with such questions as, "What is the right thing to do?" "How would I want to be treated in this situation?"

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are modeling respect and social awareness for your child. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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# Taking notes helps students remember what they learn



Experts agree that taking notes can benefit students in many ways. Students might forget what the teacher says

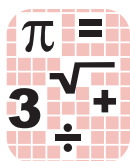
in class, but they will remember if they have a written record. Reviewing class notes is also a great way to study for tests.

To get the most from note-taking, your child should:

- **Think about what is important** and write it down. Rather than writing down every word the teacher says, your student should listen for names, dates, times of events and other key facts. And if the teacher writes something on the board, your child should definitely include it in her notes.

- **Review and rewrite her notes** when she gets home. Notes taken in a hurry are sometimes sloppy. Rewriting them ensures your child will be able to read them when she studies later. It also helps the information stick in her mind. Your child might even want to type her notes and print them out.
- **Enlist a friend.** If a classmate also takes notes, your child can compare the notes. Maybe her friend picked up something she missed.
- **Stay organized.** Encourage your child to use a binder that has different sections, labeled with the name of each class. She can date her notes and file them in the appropriate section.

# Give students a system to help them succeed on math tests



Math tests can be difficult to prepare for. After all, there aren't any dates to remember or essays to write. To boost your

middle schooler's performance, share these math test strategies.

Before the test, students should:

- **Practice.** They can redo homework problems or problems from quizzes. They should focus on the problems they had trouble understanding or got wrong, and work on them until they are confident they can solve them.
- **Create a "formula sheet."** Students should write down all the formulas they need to know. Then, they can create flash cards to help memorize each formula.

During the test, students should:

- **Write down formulas** when they get the test so they don't forget them.
- **Read directions carefully** and show their work to make sure they get every point possible.
- **Use estimation.** If one step in the problem says to subtract 32 from 109, estimating indicates the answer should be around 80. Comparing answers to estimates lets students know when they should try again.
- **Take their time.** Students shouldn't feel pressured by how quickly others finish.
- **Go back,** check work and rework any problems they were uncertain about.
- **Look for careless errors.** Are all of the decimal points in the right place? If the answer includes a graph, are the axes labeled?

**Q:** My son does OK in school, but he's not working up to his potential. When I ask him why, he replies, "School's really not that important." Where is he getting this message?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, your child is probably getting this message from several different places—and in very subtle ways. Although popular culture gives lip service to the notion that school matters, middle schoolers often absorb the opposite message. Here's why:

- **The media highlights** unique success stories. Stories of self-made millionaires and gifted athletes abound. And often, the clincher is that some of these people abandoned school. So you can see why your child might think, "Well, if he became rich and successful without studying hard, then I can, too." This is why it's vital to remind him that these people are *extreme* exceptions to the rule.
  - **Many popular shows** and movies celebrate ignorance. The most popular characters are often not-so-bright jokesters. But if your child believes intentional ignorance is his ticket to a bright future, he's in for a rude awakening.
  - **Parents are busy.** Do you ever complain about your child's school projects? Are you too busy to look over his homework? The message your child is getting may not be the one you intend to send.
- Show your child that school is a priority by asking about it every day. Let him know that his best chance for a happy and successful life is to take school seriously and always do his best.

# It Matters: Social Emotional Learning

## Family meetings teach leadership and cooperation



To be successful in school and the workplace, children need to know how to communicate, listen,

cooperate and solve problems with others. Family meetings are one effective way to help kids learn these skills—while make family life run more smoothly.

For productive meetings:

- **Establish a schedule.** Meet at the same time every week and keep meetings brief.
- **Plan an agenda.** During the week, let family members jot down issues they'd like to address.
- **Set ground rules.** Remove any distractions and have everyone turn off their devices.

During your meeting:

1. **Highlight** family members' accomplishments and positive news. Share compliments.
2. **Encourage participation.** Give each family member a chance to talk uninterrupted. Ask one person to take notes.
3. **Brainstorm solutions** for any family concerns. Consider everyone's ideas.
4. **Discuss expectations** and set weekly goals.
5. **Coordinate schedules.** Review your family calendar and discuss who is doing what this week.
6. **End with a quick team-building** activity. Play a game, or make up a story or sing a song.

After a few meetings, let family members take turns being the meeting leader.

## Offer your child strategies to build time management skills

**S**elf-management skills help students take responsibility for learning. They also lead to:

- **Better grades.**
- **Higher test scores.**
- **Increased likelihood of graduation.**
- **Stronger interpersonal skills.**
- **Higher self-esteem.**
- **Reduced chance of risky behavior.**

Managing time is an example of one self-management skill that can be challenging for middle schoolers.

To make it easier:

- **Encourage your child** to make daily checklists of tasks he must complete.
- **Teach your child** to use small amounts of spare time. He could study flash cards on the way to an appointment or review a few math problems in the car.
- **Show your child** how to break down large assignments into



smaller parts and schedule due dates for each part.

- **Look for time wasters.** In many homes, digital devices are terrible time thieves. By limiting recreational screen time, your child will have hours free for productive activities.

## Promote self-reflection by encouraging journal writing



Awareness of their emotions, thoughts and behaviors can help students make better decisions in

school and in all areas of their lives. This awareness can also improve their mental health.

Writing in a journal is one effective way for middle schoolers to express their feelings and process their emotions. Encourage your child to write or draw in a journal for a few minutes every day.

If she can't think of something to write about, offer these prompts:

- *What's the most fun thing you did today?*
- *What did you learn that was new?*
- *Did anything make you angry? Sad?*
- *What do you like to do when you feel this way?*
- *If you had the power to help anyone in the world, who would you help, and why?*
- *List four true sentences that start with "I will always remember..."*