

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

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Oxford Middle School

*still make the difference!*



## Preparation is key for test success in middle school

**M**any middle school students suffer from test anxiety. They seem to come unglued at the thought of facing a test—whether big or small. Fortunately, the cure for most text anxiety is simple: Preparation.

When teachers announce an upcoming test, encourage your child to:

- **Find out** as much as possible in advance. What's the purpose of this test? What does a high score—or a low one—mean for your child? Is the test multiple-choice? True or false? The more students know what to expect, the more relaxed and confident they may feel on test day.
- **Ask the teacher** about the best ways to prepare. Are there practice tests

your child can take? Websites to visit? Would reviewing certain textbook chapters help?

- **Remain calm.** Review the studying and prep work your child has already done. Then provide perspective: One test grade won't change your student's entire future.
- **Focus on physical well-being.** Insist that your child get plenty of sleep the night before test day. Offer a healthy breakfast in the morning, and remind your child to dress comfortably in layers.

*Source: J.S. Schumm, Ph.D., *How to Help Your Child with Homework: The Complete Guide to Encouraging Good Study Habits and Ending the Homework Wars*, Free Spirit Publishing.*

## Create a written discipline plan to curb arguments



Some middle school students are respectful and cooperative, while others seem to resist rules and enjoy arguing over every point.

A written discipline plan can help you improve behavior and limit misunderstandings. It reminds your child of your expectations and the consequences of not following the rules. The plan also eliminates the need to argue because you can point to it to remind your child exactly what you both agreed to.

To create an effective plan:

- **Keep it simple.** Too many rules will overwhelm both of you. Think of the top five issues that are most important to you. Post the rules and consequences for those.
- **Involve your child.** A child who needs a written discipline plan is also a child who does not like to give up control. Ask for input about rules and consequences—but remember that you have the final say.
- **Monitor progress.** When you notice that your child is able to stay consistently within boundaries, it's time to review and possibly revise the plan.

# Families can guard against the abuse of prescription drugs



The fastest-growing drug problem in the United States is prescription drug abuse.

Unfortunately, these drugs are usually easy for middle schoolers to get their hands on—and they're often "free."

To prevent prescription drug abuse:

- **Talk to your child** about the dangers of taking medicine prescribed for someone else.
- **Be aware** of the prescriptions you keep in your home. Know which medications family members take and monitor their use closely.
- **Consider keeping** prescription drugs in a locked cabinet.
- **Take special care** if someone in your family takes medicine for pain or for ADHD. These are

the most popular drugs for kids to sell or abuse.

- **Dispose** of expired or unused medications. Call your health care provider or search online to find a collection site near you. Also keep track of your child's use of over-the-counter medicines. Cough and cold medicines are commonly abused by middle schoolers.

Source: "Rise in Prescription Drug Misuse and Abuse Impacting Teens," Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

**"Among people aged 12 or older in 2020, 9.3 million people misused prescription pain relievers."**

—2020 National Survey of Drug Use and Health

# Five strategies for improving communication with your child



Remember that chatty elementary schooler you used to know? Well, that child has turned into a guarded preteen.

Suddenly, talking with your middle schooler feels like navigating a minefield. Ask one wrong question, and your child may explode or clam up.

To ensure you are keeping the lines of communication open:

1. **Keep your questions brief.** To stay on top of what's happening in school, avoid *yes-no* questions. Instead, ask open-ended ones: "What are you studying in science this week?"
2. **Be available.** Your child probably opens up occasionally. When that happens, it's crucial that you be

there to pay attention—and to *really* listen.

3. **Don't be condescending.** Even if your middle schooler's problems seem minor to you, they are *major* to your child. Belittle them, and your child will be even less likely to share next time.
4. **Offer alternatives.** Encourage your child to talk to another trusted adult if you aren't available. Whether it's a teacher, a relative or a friend's parent, your child needs to talk about school and life with someone you both trust.
5. **Never give up.** These temperamental years won't last forever, so hang in there. Stay optimistic, and keep being the reliable presence your child depends on.

# Are you helping your child handle academic issues?



For many students, there is one class that is a real challenge. Perhaps the teacher isn't their favorite. Perhaps the subject

is more complex. Whatever the issue, their grades begin to suffer.

If your middle schooler is struggling in a class, are you taking effective steps? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ 1. **Have you talked** with your child about the class? What does your child think the problem is?
- \_\_\_ 2. **Have you encouraged** your child to spend time studying for this class every day? Minds are like muscles that get stronger with practice.
- \_\_\_ 3. **Have you encouraged** your child to talk with the teacher to develop a plan for improvement?
- \_\_\_ 4. **Have you helped** your child explore resources, such as tutoring?
- \_\_\_ 5. **Do you celebrate** every sign of your child's progress?

**How well are you doing?**

More *yes* answers mean you are helping your middle schooler overcome struggles. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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# Celebrate Earth Day with fun online learning activities



Earth Day is April 22. Help your child find eco-friendly ways to celebrate the planet by logging onto:

- **Recycle City**, [www3.epa.gov/recyclecity](http://www3.epa.gov/recyclecity). Students can explore Recycle City and learn how doing simple things at home and in their neighborhood can help them reduce waste, use less energy and save money. Students will also find games, activities and resources all about the benefits of recycling.
- **Biomes of the World**, [www.teachersfirst.com/lessons/biomes](http://www.teachersfirst.com/lessons/biomes). This site offers an online research project that will interest seriously studious kids. Using its outline and resources, students can discover how ecosystems depend on one another. Students will also find suggestions for cool ways to present the data they gather. (Keep that in mind during science-fair season!)
- **Yellowstone National Park**, [www.nps.gov/yell/learn/kidsyouth/index.htm#onthisPage-7](http://www.nps.gov/yell/learn/kidsyouth/index.htm#onthisPage-7). Students can use an interactive map to learn more about the park and investigate its ecology, history and ongoing preservation efforts.
- **WaterSense for Kids**, [www.epa.gov/watersense/watersense-kids](http://www.epa.gov/watersense/watersense-kids). Students will find out how much water a typical family in the U.S. uses every day and learn effective ways to reduce water usage.
- **Energy Kids**, [www.eia.gov/kids/games-and-activities](http://www.eia.gov/kids/games-and-activities). This site is filled with energy-related riddles, games, puzzles, experiments and more. Students will learn about energy sources and ways to conserve energy.

# Create a plan if your child will be home alone after school



You may feel your middle schooler is mature and capable. However, if your student comes home to an empty

house every day after school, it's necessary to take precautions.

To make sure your child is safe and productive during after-school alone time:

- **Prepare for emergencies.** Before leaving your child alone, outline exactly what to do in the event of a fire, severe weather or other urgent situation.
- **Post a list** of important phone numbers. Include the numbers for your work, nearby neighbors and emergency services.
- **Write down the rules.** Whether it's "no friends at the house" or "no cooking" while home alone, make your expectations crystal clear.
- **Require regular check-ins.** Expect a call or text as soon as your child arrives home.
- **Agree on a routine.** If the bus drops your child off at 4:00 p.m. and you get home at 6:00 p.m., suggest ways to constructively fill those hours. "Take 30 minutes to relax, and then tackle your homework."
- **Create a Plan B.** Keys get lost. Doors can jam. Make sure your child has a back-up plan for getting into the house.

**Q:** My children just don't get along. They fight constantly and I always get caught in the middle. How can I teach them to treat each other respectfully and resolve their conflicts peacefully?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** You aren't alone! Even the friendliest of siblings have times when they don't get along—and many parents feel like they have to be referees.

Instead of getting in the middle of every squabble, teach your kids some basic strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully and respectfully. These strategies will also help them when they face conflicts at school.

Teach your kids to:

- **Talk about problems** before they become conflicts. When little things are ignored, they tend to grow into big disputes.
- **Use "I-messages."** Encourage your children to talk about their feelings, not the other person's mistakes. Instead of, "YOU always steal my clothes," try, "I feel angry when you take something without asking to borrow it first."
- **Avoid the "blame game."** If there's a problem, it probably doesn't matter whose fault it is. Help your kids spend their time fixing the problem, not placing the blame.
- **Listen.** Your children will never see another person's point of view if they don't listen to what that person has to say.
- **Cooperate and compromise.** If two people have a conflict, they each have a problem. To solve it, they'll probably both have to make some changes.



# It Matters: Reading

## Add a bit of variety to your child's reading



Experts agree that reading is the foundation of learning. But it doesn't have to involve heavy, dusty volumes perched on tall shelves! Times have changed, and there are now more ways to expose your child to the benefits and satisfaction of reading.

To encourage your middle schooler to read more, “think outside the book.” Nudge him toward:

- **Audiobooks.** These recordings of books are great resources—especially if your child struggles with fluency. Listening to stories read aloud is a proven way to build reading skills. Audiobooks offer many of the same benefits as print versions—exposure to story structure, compelling plots and new vocabulary words. For an added boost, encourage your child to read along in the print version while listening to the audiobook.

As with traditional books, you can check out audiobooks from the library. You can also download free titles from websites like [www.loyalbooks.com](http://www.loyalbooks.com).

- **E-books.** Your child can read digital versions of books on a computer or a handheld device. While some e-books contain strictly text, others include graphics, videos and links. But be careful: Too many bells and whistles can distract readers. E-books are available at the public library and online at websites such as [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com).

## Help your child gain a deeper understanding while reading

As students begin to read more complex material in school, they will need to really think about what they're reading. Encourage your middle schooler to focus on:

- **The author's purpose.** Why did the author write this? Was it to inform the reader? To entertain? To influence thinking?
- **The main idea and details.** What is the author's basic message? What elements does the author include that support and strengthens this message?
- **Figurative language.** “The ocean sang to me,” doesn't mean the ocean really *sang*. It means that the ocean was appealing.
- **The sequence of events.** What happened first in the story? What happened next? What was the result?



- **Relationships** between things that happened in the story and its outcome.
- **The characters' feelings.** What decisions did they make as a result of those feelings?

## Join your middle schooler to encourage pleasure reading



Many things compete for middle schoolers' time—friends, activities, social media, etc.

However, reading for pleasure is one of the best things your child can do to ensure school success.

To instill a joy of reading:

- **Read the same book.** Ask the librarian to suggest some popular books for middle schoolers. Pick one and check out two copies. Set up a “mini book club” just for you and your child. Offer a special

outing or privilege for finishing the book. Remember, finishing includes discussing it together.

- **Read at the same time.** Your child is less likely to get distracted if you are both doing the same thing. Pick a time each day when you both can sit down for at least 20 minutes and read.
- **Look for movies** that are based on books. Interest in a movie can make your child more willing to read the book that prompted it. Plan to read the book and see the movie together.