

Helping Students Learn[®]

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board



December 2012

Preparing early for high school can help your child right now

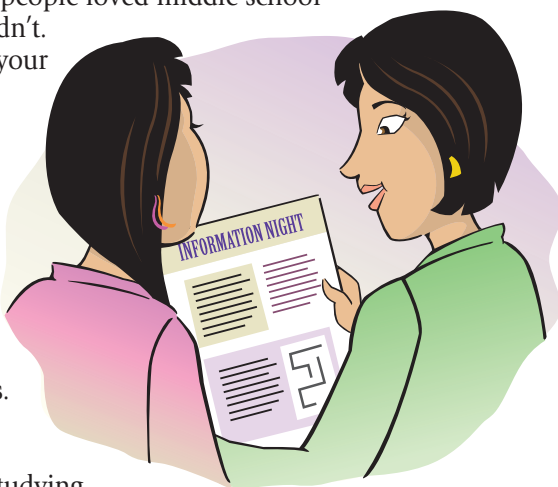
No matter what grade your middle schooler is in, it's never too early to start thinking about her transition to high school. Middle school is an important step along the way to high school and a time to develop life-long learning and social skills. To help make the most of these years:

- **Be enthusiastic.** Some people loved middle school and high school; some didn't. Keep in mind that this is your child's turn to have these new experiences. Always be sure to offer positive comments.

- **Emphasize building strong study habits.**

Your child will likely get more homework each year that she is in school until she graduates. Help her build the necessary study skills by establishing regular times for studying and encouraging her to use organization tools such as planners and calendars.

- **Offer reassurance.** Middle schoolers need to know that you are there when they need you, both now and in the future. Your child is becoming more independent. But one thing will not change: the importance of your involvement in her education.



Find practical ways to boost math skills

To help your child be successful in math, it's important for you to be supportive and positive about the subject. Sometimes it helps to practice realistic scenarios where he may use math in his future. Look for ways to help him practice:

- **Arithmetic.** Have your child add up your grocery bill to make sure it's correct. When one of you is doing a household chore, ask him to estimate what time the task will be finished if a 10-minute break is included.
- **Measuring.** Let your child handle measurements around the house—measuring ingredients for cooking, calculating the amount

of soil you need for planting, etc. Have him estimate before he measures. Then compare.

- **Statistics.** Does your child have a favorite sports team? Have him track the team's wins and losses. Encourage him to find graphs in the newspaper and interpret them.

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math: The Middle School Years*, Lawrence Hall of Science.

Continue to make your child's attendance a priority

Your child can't learn if he's not in class. If attendance starts to slip:

- **Have him prep at night** for fewer "loose ends" in the morning.
- **Talk to his teacher.** Is something going on in the classroom that makes him want to miss class, such as bullying?
- **Be clear:** Casually missing school is not an option.

Writing a research paper

Many middle school students find writing research papers daunting. You can help by offering your child this guidance:

- **Get organized.** Write due dates and tasks on a calendar: week one, gather sources; week two, write rough draft, etc.
- **Read through** the teacher's guidelines and gather reliable sources.
- **Put information** in your own words. Never cut and paste from the Internet.



Source: K. Hayden, "Successful Middle School Research Paper Tips," Suite 101, http://middle-school-lesson-plans.suite101.com/article.cfm/tips_for_successful_middle_school_research_paper.

Daydreams explore ideas

Is your child's head "in the clouds" more than ever? That's normal for middle schoolers—and this time alone with their thoughts is also healthy. When kids daydream, they build important thinking skills by imagining different situations and how they might handle them. This makes it easier to face actual challenges.



Source: A. Fries, "The Power of Daydreaming: How Daydreaming Helps Children Process Information and Explore Ideas," *Psychology Today*, www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-power-daydreaming/200910/how-daydreaming-helps-children-process-information-and-explore-ideas.

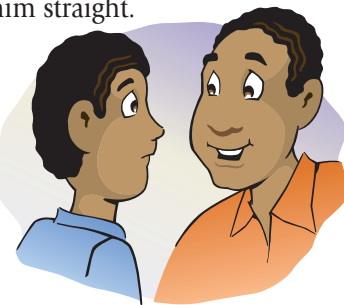


How can middle schoolers be more open with parents?

Q: My child used to talk to me about everything, but now he's become a stone wall! I know he still has feelings. How can I get him to share them with me again?

A: First, don't take it personally. At this age, boys often struggle to communicate. Still, there are things you can do to encourage your son to open up:

- **Assure your child** that feelings aren't bad. He may believe that "real men" don't get emotional, but you can set him straight. "Being a man doesn't mean being strong all the time. Real men get upset. They even cry, and that's okay."
- **Read between the lines.** If your child is acting especially uncommunicative or angry, he may be going through a rough patch and trying to mask the pain. Look for clues as to what may be going on. If you're at a loss, speak to his teachers or counselor.
- **Talk for him.** If you know your child is upset about something specific but won't talk about it, bring up the subject anyway. "I was thinking back to when I was in middle school. I was so frustrated when I didn't make the basketball team. I was sure I'd never make another team, but I did."



Source: Dr. N.I. Bernstein, *How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can't*, Workman Publishing.



Are you promoting helping others?

Many middle school students are required to perform community service at some point. December, which many see as a season of giving, is a great time to help others. Take this quiz to see if you are encouraging your child. Answer *yes* for something you do often and *no* for something you rarely do:

1. **Do you talk** with your child about the need to help others in your community?
2. **Do you suggest** ways your child can get involved, like volunteering through a community center?
3. **Do you support** your child in her efforts, like giving her a ride to volunteer?
4. **Do you encourage** your child to volunteer for causes she finds meaningful?
5. **Do you find** ways to volunteer with your child, such as helping sort canned goods at a local food bank?

How did you score? Mostly yes answers mean you are supporting your child as she volunteers. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"In spite of the six thousand manuals on child-raising in the book-stores, child-raising is still a dark continent, and no one really knows anything. You just need a lot of love and luck—and, of course, courage." —Bill Cosby

It's time for a mid-year homework assessment

Winter break is approaching. This is a good time to look back on the first half of the school year to see what worked and what didn't. Homework is a key area to assess. Here are some points to check:

- **Time management.** Has your child been spending the proper amount of time on homework? Check with his teachers.
- **Study environment.** Does your child have a quiet, well-stocked place for homework?
- **Organization skills.** Is your child using a daily planner? Does he have project due dates written on a calendar?
- **Family support.** Continue to tell your child that his schoolwork is a high priority. Encourage him to feel proud of his strong effort.

Source: "Building Good Homework Habits," Math & Reading Help, http://mathandreadinghelp.org/articles/Building_Good_Homework_Habits.html.

Keep your child active

As children develop into adolescents, they often become less active. If your child has gotten out of shape, suggest an activity in which it's normal to be a novice, like karate. This can prevent your child from being embarrassed if he lacks advanced skills.

Don't neglect reading over winter break!

Winter break shouldn't mean a break from reading. If your child enjoys:



- **Movies,** have her watch a movie based on a book—but after reading the book!
- **Gadgets,** encourage her to read the instruction manual and put one together.
- **Sports,** get her to read about an athlete.

Be sure to schedule family visits to the library during the break from school!

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