

Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



February 2012

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District
School Board

Love, guidance inspire excellence

Love is in the air in February. But what is parental love when it comes to young adolescents? It isn't giving kids everything they want. It's taking time to be involved in their lives. Kids who feel "connected" to their families have higher self-esteem. They do more positive activities. And they excel in school.

When asked in a survey, students said they'd like their parents to:

- **Really** listen when they have something to say.
- **Stop** comparing them to siblings or peers.
- **Be** good role models.
- **Spend** more time together just having fun as a family.
- **Avoid** lecturing about every mistake.
- **Treat** them with respect.
- **Encourage** them to do well in school and elsewhere.
- **Set** reasonable rules and limits.
- **Notice** when they do things right.
- **Take** an interest in their schoolwork.
- **Meet** their teachers and learn about their classes.



The list may be long, but it's also straightforward. Just be there for your child and show him how much he means to you. That, as much as anything, may put him on the road to success in school—and in life.

Source: A.W. Jackson and others, *Making the Most of Middle School*, Teachers College Press.



Speak carefully when disciplining

Your middle schooler is at a stage where she is more likely to push back at discipline methods. Discipline is still essential, but you need to approach it more carefully. The original point of the discipline can quickly become lost if your child uses the opportunity to pick a fight.

Here are a few techniques to help you keep the upper hand while still treating your child with respect:

- **Lower your voice.** Practice using your calmest and most controlled manner with your child. It shows that you are the adult.
- **Start sentences with "I"** rather than "you." Say: "I am sick with worry when you come in past your curfew." Not: "You came in late again!"
- **Use fewer words.** Adolescents and teens usually tune out at the first sign of a parental lecture.
- **State the obvious.** Describe your child's behavior without passing judgment. Say: "The dog looks pretty hungry." Not: "You forgot to feed the dog again. Can't you remember anything?"

Source: P.L. Benson and others, *What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future*, Free Spirit Publishing.

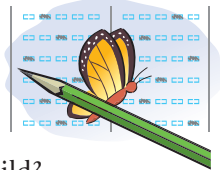
Share your reading choices

What books did you enjoy when you were in middle school? Consider re-reading them with your child. Read separately or take turns reading aloud. Either way, discuss the book. But realize that your child's reactions may be different from yours! It's an opportunity to get to know your child better—while also improving her reading skills.

Prepare for spring testing

Spring is coming, bringing nicer weather, —and often standardized tests. To help your middle schooler do well on tests:

- **Do your homework.** Find out as much as you can about standardized tests ahead of time. What will the results mean for your child?
- **Suggest** he use test-taking strategies on homework. For instance, students are often told to skip questions they don't know and come back to them later. Have him try that when working on homework.



A Valentine's Day family tradition can start this year

Family traditions are fun. But are they important? Yes, according to recent research. Families with more traditions also had more trust and loyalty. So celebrate Valentine's Day with a family tradition.

You might:

- **Make** ice cream sundaes together.
- **Write** nice notes to each other.
- **Watch** a film—or old family movies!



Source: "Fact Sheet: Family Traditions," The Ohio State University Extension, <http://ohioline.osu.edu/flm00/fs12.html>.

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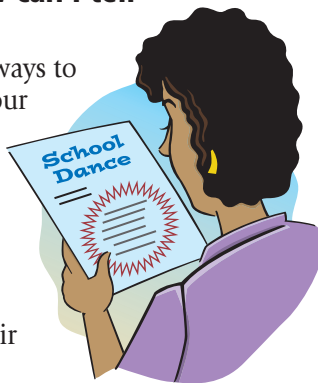


How can parents determine if events are 'right' for kids?

Q: My daughter really wants to attend an upcoming dance, but I'm not so sure if I should let her go. How can I tell if she's ready for this sort of activity?

A: There's no simple answer, but there are some ways to determine whether a certain activity is okay for your daughter. Before saying *yes* or *no*:

- **Learn the details.** Did your daughter bring home information about the activity? Read it over. If you still have concerns, speak to someone in charge of planning the event. And if you know parents with older children who may have attended in the past, ask for their input, too.
- **Talk to your daughter.** Why does she want to attend the event? With whom is she planning to go? If you're not sure she can safely attend, offer to host an alternate event at your home.
- **Take a look at your daughter's level of maturity.** Is she usually responsible and level-headed? Does she follow directions and use common sense? Then it may be fine for her to experience an "older" activity, especially one that is well-chaperoned.
- **Find out if you can chaperone.** This may be an ideal solution. After all, your daughter will get to attend, and you'll be able to monitor things for yourself.



Are you encouraging responsibility?

Responsibility is one of the most important qualities for success in school. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're fostering this quality in your child:

- ___ **1. Do you emphasize** the importance of being reliable and dependable?
- ___ **2. Do you hold** your child accountable for his actions? Example: If he borrows an item and loses it, it is his responsibility to earn the money to replace it.
- ___ **3. Do you discuss** with your child the importance of thinking about consequences before acting?
- ___ **4. Do you work** with your child on developing greater self-control as he grows older?

- ___ **5. Do you encourage** your child to do volunteer work?

How did you do? Each yes answer means you are striving to raise a responsible child. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.

"We have not passed that line between childhood and adulthood until we have stopped saying 'It got lost,' and start saying 'I lost it.'"

—Sidney J. Harris

Make sure your child isn't becoming overscheduled

Middle schoolers are busy with clubs, sports and homework. But is your child getting the sleep he needs to fuel his hectic schedule? Find out how much time your child spends:

- **On homework.**
- **At after-school activities.**
- **With his friends and family.**

If activities outweigh family and free time, consider dropping an activity.

Love can prevent drug use

At this age, your child may be tempted to try alcohol or drugs (including tobacco). You likely will not be there when this happens. But your child carries your love and support with her. And that can make a big difference in what she decides to do at that moment. If your child knows how much you love her, she is less likely to disappoint you by drinking or abusing drugs.

Source: R. Taswell, editor, *Parenting at the Speed of Teens: Positive Tips on Everyday Issues*, Search Institute.

Know what to do if your child forgets assignments

Middle schoolers can be forgetful—even about homework. To help:

- **Make** sure your child has an organized system. He should use an assignment sheet and folders, for example.
- **Develop** a homework routine. The assignment sheet should be checked before leaving school. If he leaves his homework in his locker, he will still have to spend the time reading.
- **Notice** when your child acts responsibly. Tell him how proud you are.



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