

Helping Students Learn[®]

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School

Dana Middle School
San Pedro, CA

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TALKING AND LISTENING

Hearing isn't the same as listening

You can *hear* what your child is saying. But are you also *listening*? To show your child respect, show her that you're paying attention to her. And remember that "listening to" isn't the same as "agreeing with." You may completely disagree with what's coming out of your middle schooler's mouth, but you can still show her common courtesy by listening to her point of view.

To be an active listener:

- **Hear your child out** and don't cut her off. Save your comments for discussion after you've listened to her point of view.
- **Ask questions.** "Really? What happened next?"
- **Restate what you heard** and have her confirm that you heard her correctly.
- **Tell her** that although you listened to her point, you still don't agree with her.



Be prepared for your middle schooler to get upset if you disagree with her. That's just part of life with a preteen.

But know, too, that you're doing the right thing by paying attention to what she's saying. You're also giving her the chance to make clear, logical points while speaking. Although she may not appreciate it now, she'll likely see the value in it later—when arguing her point in an essay.

Source: "Parenting Pre-Teens: Listening Is An Active Process," Raisingkids.co.uk, www.raisingkids.co.uk/9_13/pre_http09.asp.

WORKING WITH YOUR SCHOOL

Stay involved in your child's schoolwork

It's important to stay involved in your child's schoolwork in middle school. He may be tackling more difficult subjects, but you still play an important role in his education.

Here are three things you can do:

1. **Ask trigger questions.** "What do your notes say about this?" "Does this look like any of the sample problems you have seen before?" Help your child connect
- new material to things he already knows.
2. **Know what's expected** of your child. Have a general idea of how much time he should be spending on homework. Speak with his teachers if you have a concern.
3. **Share resources.** Encourage your child to use the library. See if an older sibling or neighbor may be able to help him in a subject.

Source: Krzystof Grabarek, "Staying Involved: Approaches to Helping Our Middle School and High School Students Learn," Parent Academic Resources Incorporated, <http://academicresources.org/learning.html#>.

DISCIPLINE

Review your consequences

Maintaining firm, consistent discipline can be tough—especially during middle school. To make sure your approach is logical and fair, ask yourself if your consequences are:

- **Reasonable.** If you say your child is "never going to watch TV again," you're being unrealistic. To be effective, consequences need to make sense.
- **Respectful.** Don't insult—"If you weren't so lazy, I wouldn't have to yell." Focus on the misbehavior—not your child.
- **Related.** Be sure the consequence relates to the crime. If he keeps leaving his bike in the front yard, he can go without his wheels for a week.

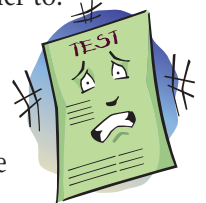
Source: Teri Brown, "The Consequence System," iParenting.com, www.childrentoday.com/articles/discipline/the-consequence-system-1114.

TESTING TIPS

Test stress can be tamed

Help your preteen rein in anxiety before the next big exam. Remind her to:

- **Study** over several days. Avoid cramming.
- **Get** plenty of sleep.
- **Eat** a nutritious breakfast.
- **Think** positively about the test.



BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY

Practice essential life skills

School success is very important, but your middle schooler will also need to learn skills for success in life. Teach your child to:

- **Prepare** a basic meal.
- **Do** the laundry.
- **Stay** on a budget.
- **Use** the phone to make appointments and schedule repairs.



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can families enjoy spring break without spending a lot of money?

Q: Our seventh grader has spent the past few weeks complaining about spending his spring break at home. "It's not a *real* vacation," he moans. How can we make the most of our week off without breaking the bank (or constantly arguing)?

A: While you don't need to compete with the nonstop excitement of Disney World when it comes to spring break, it's still a good idea to plan a few activities to do with your middle schooler. Here are some budget-friendly (and still fun!) ideas:

- **See your hometown with fresh eyes.** Be tourists. Whatever draws tourists to your town, you probably don't spend much time enjoying it. Explore your area's perks together.
- **Host a movie night.** Ask your child to find a friend or two who are also home during spring break. Invite them over for pizza, popcorn and a movie. Better yet, turn it into a sleepover.
- **Make one day "vacation day."** For 24 hours, give your child a break from chores and rules (within reason). Does he want to sleep in, stay up late or eat extra dessert? Let him do it this once. After all, he's on vacation!



PARENT QUIZ

Are you modeling respectful behavior?

Your child learns about respect from watching you. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if your behavior sets the example for your child to learn to respect you, herself, her teachers and others:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>___ 1. Do you treat your child and others with honesty?</p> <p>___ 2. Do you maintain self-control with your child? Do you find other ways to vent your anger rather than on her?</p> <p>___ 3. Are you consistent with your child regarding your household rules, your belief in her education and most of all, your love for her?</p> <p>___ 4. Do you show consideration for the needs and wants of your child and others, even though you might not always get it in return?</p> | <p>___ 5. Do you admit mistakes when you make them?</p> <p>How did you do? <i>Each yes answer means you are illustrating a life of respect for your child. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.</i></p> |
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"If you want to be respected by others the great thing is to respect yourself." —Fyodor Dostoyevsky

MOTIVATING YOUR CHILD

Build for future success

Middle school is a good time to motivate your child to get a head start on the future.

Have your child:

- **Start a journal**—"Me and my future."
- **List strengths** at school and outside it.
- **List** "What I want to learn more about."
- **Update** the journal periodically.

Together, look for things that stay the same—these could be clues to your child's future success.

Source: Mel Levine, M.D., *Ready or Not, Here Life Comes*, ISBN: 0-7432-6225-5 (Simon & Schuster, www.simonsays.com).

MAKING DECISIONS

Guide important decisions

Most middle schoolers prefer to "go with the flow." But sometimes your child needs to make important decisions. Give your child these guidelines:

- **Take** your time.
- **Find** out as much information as you can.
- **Make** a list of "pros" and "cons."
- **Study** your list. Think about the potential consequences of each choice.
- **Make** your choice.

AFTER SCHOOL

Use video games wisely

Video games can be fun and even educational. But some can also expose kids to harmful themes and waste time. Be sure to:

- **Learn** about games before buying them. Explain why certain games are off limits.
- **Keep** TVs and computers where use can be monitored. Play games with your child to see what they're about.
- **Encourage** other activities.



Source: "Managing Video Game Playing," Media Awareness Network, www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/video_games/videogame_play_at_home.cfm.

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