

Middle School Parents[®]

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Merrimack School District
Title 1 Program

still make the difference!



Enhance learning by helping your child develop six traits

No two children are alike, but successful students share certain traits. To develop these qualities, encourage your middle schooler to be:

1. **Curious.** Curious students won't accept "just because" as an answer. They want to know things. To promote curiosity, expose your child to new ideas and experiences.
2. **Persistent.** Successful students keep trying until they master tough material. They set goals and work diligently to reach them. Acknowledge your child's effort with schoolwork and studying, rather than focusing solely on the resulting grade.
3. **Organized.** Even academic stars will struggle in school if they can't find things. Make sure your child has the tools to organize schoolwork and manage time, such as calendars, sticky notes and file folders.
4. **Resilient.** Everyone fails sometimes, but successful students don't let failure derail them. Encourage your child to take responsibility for actions and create a plan for improvement.
5. **Open-minded.** Remind your child to listen to the opinions of others and engage in constructive conversations with classmates—even during disagreements.
6. **Confident.** When students know the adults in their lives love them and believe in them, the sky is the limit!

Ask questions that promote deeper thinking



Middle schoolers need analytical thinking skills to do research, to make decisions and to solve problems.

As your child progresses through school, 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 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. Ask about the specific characteristics and reasons that make your child like them.
- **"How can we save money as a family?"** Review a family expense, such as the electric or water bill, and challenge your middle schooler to find ways to save money. If successful, what does your child think 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 research and present information that supports the choice.

Middle schoolers need adult guidance about social media use



According to Common Sense Media, middle schoolers spend more than five hours on screen media entertainment

every day. And a significant portion of that time is spent on social media.

Middle schoolers need guidance and support as they learn to navigate the world of social media. To help your child:

- **Learn about online activity.**
Ask how often your child checks social media accounts. Which ones does your child use the most? Download these apps yourself to understand how they work. Also, check if your child has separate accounts—one they show you and another for friends.
- **Set standards for online behavior.**
Your child shouldn't post anything on social media that wouldn't be suitable for you or anyone else to read. Remind your child that nothing online ever goes away,

so careful thought should be given before posting anything.

- **Encourage your child to limit followers.** Kids want to be popular, so they sometimes add followers at random. To protect privacy, your child's social media accounts should be set to private.
- **Build in digital downtime.** Be a role model yourself—put the phone away at meal time. After dinner, go for a walk or read a book.

Source: A. Wichard-Edds, "5 Ways Parents Can Help Kids Balance Social Media with the Real World," *The Washington Post*.

"The mental health crisis among young people is an emergency—and social media has emerged as an important contributor."

— Dr. Vivek Murthy M.D.,
Surgeon General

Three steps can help your child read academic material



Not all reading is the same. There are many different kinds of reading material, and people also read in different

ways depending on what they want to accomplish.

When middle school students read academic material, they are *reading to learn*. Their goal is to understand and retain what they read.

Review three steps with your child that students should take while reading a school assignment:

1. **Do a "quick read."** This is also called skimming or scanning the

text. Your child should pay special attention to pictures, headlines and text in boldface and italics.

2. **Read deeply and take notes.**
Suggest also writing down words or concepts your child doesn't understand to look up or ask the teacher about later.
3. **Summarize and ask questions.**
Your child should be able to write a summary of the material and answer basic questions about it. If there aren't questions at the end of the text, your child can make some up and answer them to strengthen comprehension and understanding.

Are you boosting your child's concentration?



Helping your child develop strong focus and concentration skills supports both academic success and

overall well-being. Are you helping your child stay focused? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

___1. **Do you encourage** your child to engage in enjoyable focus-building activities? For some kids, this might be reading; for others, it could be sports or chess club.

___2. **Do you set limits** on recreational screen time? Extended time in front of a TV, computer or digital device can reduce concentration.

___3. **Do you encourage** your child to finish tasks and then offer praise?

___4. **Do you discourage** multitasking? It's difficult to concentrate on school-work if your child is also watching TV and texting friends.

___5. **Do you minimize** interruptions when your child is working hard?

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child stay focused on tasks. Mostly *no* answers? Try the suggestions in this quiz.

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Practical Ideas for Parents
to Help Their Children.

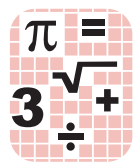
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Ask questions when your child gets stuck on math problems



Middle school math can be challenging for students and families alike! If your child gets stuck on a math assignment, it's helpful to think of yourself as a *guide* rather than as a teacher. You don't need to have the answers to demonstrate how to tackle assignments effectively.

To help your child figure things out, ask:

- **What specific problem** are you working on? This will help your child focus on one task at a time, rather than become intimidated by an entire sheet of equations.
- **What do the instructions say?** Have your child read the directions out loud to you. Sometimes students

miss key words the first time they read them.

- **Are there parts** of the instructions you don't understand? Suggest that your child check in the textbook or ask a classmate for clarification.
 - **Are there things** you've learned before that may help you here?
- If your child is still hopelessly stuck (and you are, too), suggest looking for help online. If the teacher has a website, look there first. Your child can also search sites like YouTube and find instructional math videos to watch.

If your child still isn't able to figure it out, that's OK. Your child can turn the incomplete assignment in and then ask the teacher for help.

Q: My seventh grader is clearly upset about something, but refuses to tell me about it. How can I encourage my child to open up without seeming pushy?

Questions & Answers

A: Adolescents and teens are notoriously tight-lipped when it comes to sharing problems with their families. But you *must* keep trying to find out what is bothering your middle schooler.

Although it's very likely the "something" that's troubling your child is relatively minor, it's important to address it. This is especially true if the issue drags on for days or weeks.

To encourage your middle schooler to share what's happening without feeling pressured in the process:

- **Say you are concerned.** "I feel like there's something you're not telling me. I want you to know I care about you and I'm here for you no matter what. You can talk to me about absolutely anything. Part of my job to help you figure things out."
- **Be clear** about your expectations. "I respect your privacy and the fact that you want to handle things on your own, but I need you to tell me what's wrong. You can have a little more time to think it over by yourself, but then let's figure this out together after dinner tonight."
- **Call in reinforcements.** If your child still refuses to talk, go to a teacher, pediatrician, school counselor, coach or other trusted figure. Work together to discover and help your child manage whatever is going on.

Simple activities can reinforce your child's academic skills



Learning doesn't happen *only* during school. You can reinforce your middle schooler's academic skills any time! Here's how:

- **Have conversations** with your child about everything. Ask what your child thinks about certain topics—and really listen to the answers.
- **Ask about** what your middle schooler is learning in classes. What does your child find most interesting in each class?
- **Ask your child to explain** a new concept or idea to you. When students retell the things they learn, they reinforce those things in their own minds.
- **Help your child** engage in analytical thinking. Discuss the similarities and differences between classes.

Ask for advice when you are facing a problem at work.

- **Give your child** meaningful responsibilities. If you have a pet, ask your child to help with its care. Demonstrate how to prepare simple meals, do laundry and other chores to help the family.
- **Respect your child's ability.** Let your child use newly acquired knowledge and skills to help you. The next time your phone starts giving you trouble, see if your child can figure out a solution.
- **Expose your child to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from a walk around the neighborhood to a trip to a store—has an impact on learning. On your next outing, ask how what your child sees relates to what they are learning in school.

It Matters: Building Responsibility

Middle schoolers have a bigger role in learning



Middle school marks an important new phase in education. From this point on, students will be

expected to take more responsibility for their own learning. Instead of being teacher-led, learning in the secondary years becomes student-led.

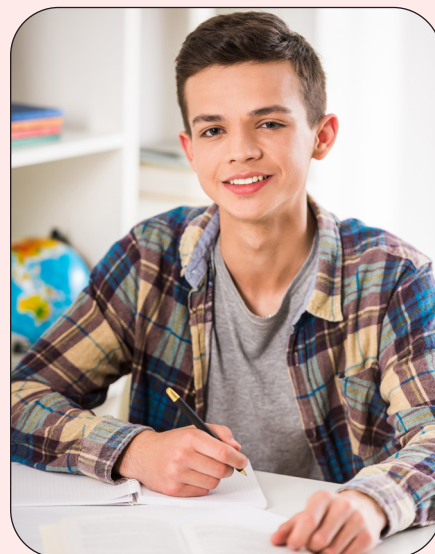
To foster increased responsibility for learning, encourage your middle schooler to:

- **Be assertive.** Ask your child “What do you think you need to be successful this school year?” Then, encourage your child to ask for it. Suggest your child get to know teachers so approaching them will feel more comfortable.
- **Participate in class.** Your child should ask questions and give opinions during class discussions.
- **Get help at the first sign** of a problem. Your middle schooler should find out when teachers are available for extra help.
- **Work to get along** with teachers and classmates. Everyone learns better in a pleasant environment.
- **Take challenging classes.** Your middle schooler shouldn’t just coast along. If classes seem easy, your child may not be in the right classes. Suggest talking to the school counselor about options.
- **Think about learning.** Instead of just memorizing information, your child should ask, “How does this topic relate to something I have learned or experienced before?”

Share these tools to help your student stay organized

Managing multiple classes and extracurricular activities can be a significant challenge in middle school. To help your child stay organized, recommend using these tools:

- **To-do lists.** Have your child write down everything that must be completed the following day, week, month, etc.
- **A planner.** Your child should write all assignments, due dates and test dates in a planner so everything is visible in one place.
- **Sticky notes.** Your child can use these to jot down unrelated thoughts that come to mind during a study session, and put them aside. That way, they won’t be forgotten and your child can get back to studying.
- **Daily schedules.** Show your child how to make and follow a schedule every day. Here’s a sample:



3:00 Arrive home from school
3:15 Snack and relaxation
3:30 Schoolwork
5:00 Change for soccer practice
5:30 Leave for soccer practice

Simple strategies boost your child’s sense of responsibility



Fostering a sense of responsibility in children benefits them both in the classroom and in life. To cultivate

this sense of responsibility:

- **Include your child** when you pay bills or work on your budget. Don’t share every financial detail, but demonstrate what budgeting looks like. “I’d love to order pizza, but it’s not in our budget this week.”
- **Adjust the chore list.** Are you still doing your child’s laundry or making school lunches? If so, pass the torch. Don’t overload your child,

but assign a few new self-care responsibilities that fit age and maturity.

- **Allow your child** to experience consequences. Don’t run to the rescue when your child makes a mistake (unless there is true danger). Shielding kids from the negative outcomes of their actions denies them the opportunity to learn from their mistakes.
- **Help your child** manage money by tracking all personal money received, earned and spent. This responsibility instills a respect for money.