

Middle School Parents

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Merrimack School District
Title 1 Program

still make the difference!



Support your middle schooler by being an academic coach

An effective coach is someone who guides, encourages and inspires. Thinking of yourself in this role is an effective way to support your middle schooler and promote learning.

To be a positive academic coach:

- **Act as a resource.** Expect your child to complete assignments independently. But be available to offer encouragement, answer questions and suggest places where your child can find additional information, such as a website or a particular reference book.
- **Talk about the things** your child is learning. Grades matter, but they are a product of learning. It is more important to emphasize the *learning process*. This includes hard work,

persistence and making steady progress toward goals.

- **Be willing to say, “I don’t know.”** There will be times when you are not familiar with the material your student is learning. If your child comes to you with a question, it’s OK to say, “I never learned that. Let’s look online or in your book.”
- **Keep in mind** that your child has strengths and weaknesses. Some students never need help in math, but may struggle in language arts. Support and encourage your middle schooler in every class, but do not expect the same performance in every subject.

Source: K.T. Alvy, Ph.D., *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth–Adolescence*, Teachers College Press.

Help your child build a large vocabulary



Building a strong vocabulary is essential for students to be able to comprehend what they read and express themselves effectively.

To encourage vocabulary growth, have your child:

1. **Read every day.** This is the single best way for anyone to improve vocabulary. If your child likes a book by a certain author, find more books by that author. If your child has a special interest, run with it. If it’s airplanes, for example, suggest a biography of a famous aviator. Occasionally, encourage your child to tackle a more challenging book.
2. **Look it up.** A dictionary is a valuable tool for students. Have your child look up new words to learn their definitions.
3. **Practice.** Learning the meaning of a new word is a great start. But that new word will soon be lost if your child doesn’t use it repeatedly. Encourage your child to use new words in conversation.
4. **Speak to adults.** Conversations with adults expose kids to new words. Resist the urge to speak for your child.

A study group can enhance middle schoolers' learning



Does your child enjoy working with classmates? If so, studying with a group may be a worthwhile addition to the work your child does independently.

To form an effective study group, your child should:

- **Choose participants carefully.** Members should be in your child's classes and devoted to doing well in school. Avoid potential conflicts—romantic interests may not be the best choices for a study group. Between four and six students is an effective size.
- **Be clear about the purpose.** Study groups are for improving schoolwork. That can't happen if students are only socializing.

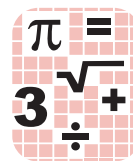
Have group members schedule separate social time every few weeks to reward themselves for their hard work.

- **Set regular meeting times** and adhere to them. If a student needs to miss a session, it should be for a valid reason. Pick a neutral meeting place, such as the library. Or, rotate between homes.

"It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed."

—Napoleon Hill

Strengthen your child's math skills with estimation challenges



Math is a subject that typically depends on precise answers. But the first step to arriving at those answers is often

to look the problem over and make an "educated guess," or an estimate.

You can give your middle schooler lots of opportunities to practice estimating by using scenarios from your daily life. Encourage your child to check the answer by working the problem through, or by comparing the actual answer to the estimate.

Here are estimation challenges to give your child:

- **How many** containers of coffee would we have to buy in a year if Grandpa drinks an average of two cups of coffee each day, and each container of coffee makes 50 cups?

- **How long** will it take us to get to Aunt Maria's house? We're going 27 miles an hour and she lives five miles away.
- **How many** yards would you have to mow to earn \$10,000 if you get \$28 every time?
- **How much** time do you think it will take for you to read that book?
- **How many** bowls of cereal do you think we will be able to pour from this box?
- **How much** will the grocery bill be based on this list?
- **How much** money is there in that change jar?
- **How long** do you think it will take you to finish your assignments?

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math—The Middle School Years*, University of California at Berkeley.

Do you monitor your child's time after school?



Research shows that the hours immediately after school are when children are most likely to get into trouble. It's important

to make home-alone time as safe and structured as possible. Answer yes or no to the questions below to find out how well you are doing:

1. **Do you make sure** your child has an adult contact after school, such as a relative, neighbor or sitter?
2. **Do you keep in touch** by phone when your child is out of school and you are not home?
3. **Do you encourage** your child to be involved in supervised extra-curricular activities after school?
4. **Do you have rules** about who may be in the house when you are not there?
5. **Have you discussed** with your child the dangers that kids can get into after school (such as alcohol and drugs) and how to avoid them?

How well are you doing?

Mostly yes answers mean you are working hard to keep your child safe and productive after school. For no answers, try those suggestions.

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Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.

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Understand the essential role of middle school counselors



School counselors have become key players on the educational team in middle schools, playing a vital role in supporting student well-being and academic success.

Counselors strive to help all students be productive learners. They also assist students and families to:

- **Develop skills** that will help them navigate changing expectations and environments.
- **Set academic goals.**
- **Select courses** that will prepare them for future classes.
- **Get back on track** after facing academic problems.
- **Build social skills.**
- **Solve problems** with friends. This can include mediation

or counseling sessions for an individual student or a small group.

- **Strengthen coping skills.** This includes skills for dealing with bullies or with grief.
- **Make plans for high school** and beyond.
- **Explore and plan** for different careers.
- **Connect with community agencies** in times of crisis.
- **Locate additional professionals** for academic and personal support.

When reaching out to a counselor, remember that they often work with many families. Patience is key as you await a response.

Source: "The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association.

Five strategies can reduce your middle schooler's test anxiety



Does your child's stomach do flip-flops the night before a huge test? Does yours? Take a deep breath. Although you can't

take the test for your child, there are lots of ways you can offer support.

When your middle schooler has an upcoming test:

1. **Sit down and talk.** Ask why your child is so nervous about the test. Is the material too hard? Does your child not understand it? Sometimes just sharing concerns can make a test seem less scary.
2. **Encourage your child** to find out what format the test will be. Essay? Multiple choice? True or false? Knowing the format will help your child prepare effectively.
3. **Help your child** make a study schedule. If the test is next week,

your middle schooler should set aside study time on each of the days leading up to it. This reduces the need to cram the night before.

4. **Create a comfy study spot.** Help your child find a quiet well-lit place to study. When it's time to hit the books, make sure your child has needed supplies—including water and a healthy snack.
5. **Talk about your child's strengths.** "I know you're worried about the big science test, but remember how well you did on the last one?" Focus on the positives.

Later, when your middle schooler receives the test grade, talk about it. Celebrate success and calmly go over anything that went wrong. Talk about what your child can do to improve next time.

Q: I caught my child copying all the answers from a friend's homework. My child said it was no big deal and that other students do it all the time. What should I do?

Questions & Answers

A: Unfortunately, middle school is a time when many students turn to cheating. At this age, students are highly aware of how they compare with their peers and they may view cheating as a way to keep up.

In a study conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, 90% of middle schoolers admitted to copying a friend's homework and 75% admitted to cheating on tests.

Cheating is very serious. But you can keep your child from turning one mistake into a more severe problem. Here's how:

- **Send a clear message** that cheating is wrong. It's dishonest and it robs your child of learning the skills and information needed for success in life.
- **Ask why your child cheated.** Many students are worried about disappointing their families or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades.
- **Don't put too much emphasis** on grades. Instead, stress the importance of learning and putting forth your best effort. Let your child know that mistakes are learning opportunities and don't affect your love.
- **Help your child** strengthen study habits. These help students earn better grades on their own.
- **Find help** if your child has fallen behind. The teacher may know a student who would be willing to tutor a few hours a week.

It Matters: Responsibility

Responsibility helps middle schoolers thrive



Helping your middle schooler learn to be a responsible student is a big step toward academic success. When

kids learn responsibility, they understand how to make smart choices, manage their time and feel good about themselves. To help your child build this important quality:

- **Talk about it.** Middle schoolers are responsible for their attitudes and the decisions they make. If things are going wrong, talk about how your child's choices might have contributed to the situation. Your child may be surprised to find out that even little things, like choice of words, tone of voice or body language, influence the way things will turn out.
- **Enforce it.** Insist that your child take responsibility for personal actions. That means allowing your middle schooler to experience the consequences of those actions. For example, don't take forgotten assignments or lunch to school over and over again.
- **Advocate for it.** Tell your child that you value responsible traits like self-control and persistence. When your child demonstrates those qualities, point them out and offer praise.
- **Model it.** Let your child see you taking responsibility for your mistakes. "I left my gardening tools out in the rain, and now they are rusted. I should have been more responsible." Your admission will teach your child more than an hour of lecturing would.

Give your middle schooler meaningful responsibilities

Fulfilling responsibilities at home helps middle schoolers see themselves as capable people. This feeling of confidence serves them well in school and in life.

Some children are ready for certain tasks before others are. Take your child's development into account, then consider giving responsibility for:

- **Scheduling.** Have your child make hair appointments, RSVP to social events and keep track of extracurricular activities. Encourage your child to mark them on the family calendar and then coordinate transportation to and from activities with you.
- **Budgeting.** Middle schoolers can manage some expenses. If your child wants to buy something, make a plan. Ask, "How much will you have to save? What jobs can you do to reach your goal?"
- **Solving problems.** Ask your child to participate in discussions about



issues that affect family life. You'll still make the final decisions, but ask for your child's opinion and consider it. Having their ideas listened to helps children feel valued and understood.

- **Contributing.** Expect your child to pitch in during family projects and with household chores.

Ask your child to be responsible for reducing phone use



When kids spend an excessive amount of time on their phones, they miss out on more valuable activities. It's important for middle schoolers to be responsible for how they spend their time. To reduce recreational screen use, encourage your child to:

1. **Spend one day tracking** how much time is spent looking at the phone.
2. **Reduce that time the next day.** Help your child come up with

ideas like turning off notifications or only checking the phone at certain times.

3. **Set screen-free times** when all devices should be put away—such as during family meals, study time and bedtime.

When middle schoolers learn to manage their time better, they are often amazed by how much more they can get done in a day!

Source: *The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021*, Common Sense Media Inc.