

# Middle School Parents

November 2022  
Vol. 26, No. 3

Wilkes-Barre Area School District  
Title I Federal Programs

*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.

- **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 English, but may struggle in math. 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 bounce back from low grades



It’s natural to be upset if your child brings home a bad grade. But showing your frustration and anger

won’t result in better performance.

A more positive approach is to:

- **Put grades into perspective.** Poor grades can drain students’ confidence. Make sure your child knows that grades are *not* a measure of a student’s worth.
- **Focus on the positive.** Talk about what your child has done well—in an academic subject or an extracurricular activity. Ask, “What are you most proud of?”
- **Look behind the grade.** Low grades indicate a problem. What does your child think the problem is? Sometimes it’s not academic ability, but poor study habits or test anxiety.
- **Set realistic goals** for improvement. Don’t expect all A’s if your child is currently getting all C’s.
- **Contact teachers.** Sometimes, students try their best and still fail. Or they blame teachers for their troubles. Gather more information by asking teachers for their opinion about what’s happening.

# Meaningful responsibilities help middle schoolers thrive



Fulfilling responsibilities at home helps middle schoolers see themselves as capable people. This feeling of confidence serves middle school students 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. Asking children to contribute ideas helps them feel valued and understood.
- **Contributing.** Expect your child to pitch in during family projects and with household chores.

**"If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders."**

—Pauline Phillips  
aka Abigail Van Buren

# Remind your child that there is no such thing as online privacy



Use of social media sites such as TikTok, Snapchat and YouTube is on the rise. Millions of middle school students have created accounts on these social networks to share their thoughts, photos and videos.

However, experts warn parents about the downsides of children using social media. Adolescents often like to take risks and tend to have low impulse control—which is why it's absolutely vital for parents to monitor what their children post.

To help your child make the best choices while on social media:

- **Talk about online "friends."**  
Your child's social media accounts

should be viewed or followed only by people your child allows.

- **Discuss how** nothing can ever be completely removed from the internet. Your child should think carefully before posting anything that would damage a reputation or someone's friendship.
- **Talk about values.** If your child wouldn't do or say something in real life, your child should avoid doing it and saying it online.
- **Stress safety.** Students should never post information that would allow someone to locate them in real life. They should also never arrange to meet anyone they met online.

**Source:** V.L. Dunckley, M.D., "Why Social Media is Not Smart for Middle School Kids," *Psychology Today*.

# Are you helping your child resist peer pressure?



Peer influence is strong in the middle school years. Are you doing all you can to help your child reject negative peer pressure? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- \_\_\_ **1. Have you talked** with your child about doing the *right* thing rather than the *easy* thing?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you suggest** ways to say *no* to risky behavior? Your child could say "I'm not interested" and walk away.
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you talk** to your child about how most middle schoolers feel pressured to fit in, too?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you make** your family rules clear? Do you emphasize that your child can always talk to you when feeling pressured to break a rule?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you encourage** your child to think about consequences? "If you skip school with your friends, what might happen as a result?"

**How well are you doing?**

If most of your answers were *yes*, you are helping your child resist negative peer pressure. For *no* answers, try those ideas.

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Published monthly September through May.  
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Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Start your child thinking about a possible career for the future

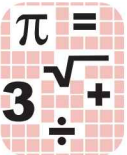


Families want children to grow up and have satisfying work that suits their skills and interests.

To help prepare your middle schooler:

- **Encourage your child to explore interests** through extracurricular activities, such as school clubs and volunteering.
- **Talk with your child** about your own job experiences. Try to arrange a time your child can shadow you (or a friend) at work.
- **Have your child** take self-assessments that will reveal strengths, interests and possible career matches. You can find some online and you can also ask the school counselor.
- **Model positive work habits**, including promptness, respect and responsibility.
- **Check out helpful resources.** Go online to help your child learn about the education requirements, skills needed and salaries of jobs of interest.
- **Research educational options.** Look into different options—like technical schools and two- and four-year colleges. What credentials will your child need to reach a particular career goal?
- **Talk about money.** Calculate the cost of basic living expenses, such as rent, food and clothes. Compare this amount to the average salaries of jobs that interest your child.

# 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 child 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 Dad 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 Grandma's house? We're going

27 miles an hour and she lives five miles away.

- **How many** people are sitting in the first three rows of the movie theater?
- **How many** yards would you have to rake to earn \$10,000 if you get \$18 every time you rake a yard?
- **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.

**Q:** With schoolwork, friends and sports competing for my child's time, he is constantly going, going, going! He doesn't complain, but I worry that he's under too much pressure and stress. What can I do?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** First, remember that a little stress is normal (and usually harmless). To figure out whether your middle schooler's stress is too much, ask yourself:

- **Is my child always tired or irritable?**
- **Does my child have trouble sleeping or concentrating?**
- **Does my child seem unhappy?**
- **Is my child becoming angry or self-critical?**

If you answered *yes* to each question, then your child may indeed be under too much pressure.

To reduce your child's stress:

- **Acknowledge the problem.** Don't pretend there's no reason for your child to feel stressed. Instead, say something like, “I understand how hard you work to do well in all of your classes. It's really challenging to balance everything, isn't it?”
- **Set reasonable goals.** Is your child striving to be a straight-A student, a star soccer player and everyone's best friend? Encourage him to tone down his expectations. Remind your child that he can't be all things to all people.
- **Be there for your child.** Let him know that he can come to you when he feels overwhelmed or unable to cope.
- **Scale back the schedule.** Your child may not be able to limit school-related responsibilities, but he can rein in extracurricular and social activities.

# It Matters: Building Character

## Community service teaches valuable skills



Community service helps middle schoolers develop empathy—the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. It also helps them gain ideals—and the sense that they can and should help achieve them.

On a practical level, volunteering can help your child learn new skills and discover new talents. It can offer opportunities to try out new experiences for short periods of time to see how they go.

Another big plus: Community service can have health and academic benefits for your child. Studies show that children who volunteer are less likely to take health risks, such as smoking. One study even showed that students who perform community service do better on some tests.

To encourage involvement offer suggestions. Your child could:

- **Organize a group** to clean up a local park or plant trees.
- **Read to preschoolers** or senior citizens in person or virtually.
- **Collect items** to include in care packages for deployed troops.
- **Mow a lawn** or walk a dog for an elderly neighbor.
- **Make cards** for nursing home residents.
- **Organize donations** of reading materials to homeless shelters.
- **Be a volunteer coach** for a youth recreational league.

Source: J. Bandy, "What is Service Learning or Community Engagement?" Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching.

## Let your middle schooler know the benefits of being honest

**B**eing honest is the foundation of good character. It is also vital for your child's academic success.

Your middle schooler won't learn math by copying a friend's answers. And your child won't become a better writer by having a friend write that English paper.

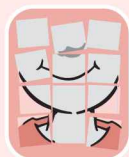
Practice honesty with your child and stress its importance. Share these four benefits:

1. **Honest people have self-respect.**  
They know who they are and they never have to worry about being caught in a lie.
2. **Honest people are respected** by others because they can be counted on.
3. **Honesty keeps people out of trouble.**
4. **Honesty leads to more freedom.**  
When you know you can trust



your child, you are more likely to grant additional privileges. Teachers also tend to give more freedom to students they trust.

## Show your child how to become a person of character



Children may be born with certain personality traits, but middle schoolers' characters are works in progress.

In other words, the kind of person your child will eventually become is still being shaped.

To reinforce good character:

- **Be a strong role model.** Make sure your behavior demonstrates the values you're promoting.
- **Talk about responsibility.** Give your child low-key prompts, such as: "I won't worry about reminding

you to finish your schoolwork. I know you're responsible enough to do it on your own."

- **Promote a positive attitude.** Show your teen how to look on the bright side of disappointing situations.
- **Expect respect.** Encourage your child to use manners, show up on time and listen to other's ideas and opinions.
- **Notice positive behavior.** When you see your child demonstrating good character, talk about it and offer praise!