

MIDDLE SCHOOL Parents[®]

still make the difference!

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Payson Junior High School
Counseling

Coping With Middle Schoolers Eliminate Clashes When Your Child is Frustrated By Math



Are you fighting with your child over math? Do his math papers keep getting "lost" or come home marked "incomplete"? Or worse, has he stopped trying to do math?

During middle school, students are introduced to more abstract math concepts. If they've missed basic concepts along the way, they can't keep up in class.

When this happens, they get anxious and defensive. Their lack of confidence grows and can cripple them in school and in life.

This is when parents must step in. Taking these steps can help:

- **Really listen to your child.** Express some sympathy when he complains, "I don't get it!" Say it's tough. Then ask questions to find out what part is confusing.
- **Get familiar** with the math concepts your child is learning. Look through his math text.
- **Don't try to reteach** your child. Your approach might conflict with the teacher's.
- **Make the teacher an ally.** Ask how she views your child's progress. Are his difficulties common for his grade? What special help can you, she and the school provide?

Source: Jennifer Jacobson, *How Is My Sixth Grader Doing in School?* 2000 (Fireside, a division of Simon & Schuster, 100 Front Street, Riverside, NJ 08075, 1-800-323-7445), ISBN: 0-684-84715-9, paperback, 226 pp., \$12.



Illustration by Joe Mignella

Success Can Be an Effective Motivator for Middle Schoolers

Successful students remember how good it feels when they achieve a goal. And they want to repeat the experience.

Here are some ideas that can help your child achieve success:

- **Capitalize** on your child's interests. If you want her to do more reading, bring home reading material about things she really likes.
- **Tell your child** often how much you love her and are proud of her. Tell her you *know* she can do well.
- **Help your child** set small, reachable goals. For example, "This week I will learn the science concept on page 134." Help her write down what she needs to do to reach that goal. For example, "I will study 20 minutes each night."

- **Notice your child's efforts.** Focusing only on results can discourage your child. And it can reinforce the incorrect notion that success somehow magically happens. Remind her that Mark Twain said, "Only in the dictionary does *success* appear before *work*."
- **Ask your child** what you can do to help her advance. Can you discuss a book with her? Help her set up a science experiment? Take her to an exhibit or performance?

Source: Holly Holland, "Serving Students in the Middle," *Middle Ground*, April 2000, National Middle School Association, 4151 Executive Pkwy., Suite 300, Westerville, OH, 43081, 1-800-528-6672.

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children

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Peer Pressure

Speak Your Mind If Your Child Forms a Harmful Friendship



Has your child developed a friendship that worries you? Here are some tips for handling this delicate situation:

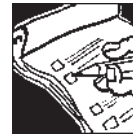
- **Think about** why you don't approve of your child's friend. Is it based on something specific? For example, do you smell smoke on your child's clothes and breath when he comes home from seeing this friend?
- **Plan your response.** Often, the best course is to say nothing. Trust your child, and give the friend a chance. But speak honestly to your child if you have a specific reason for disapproving of the friendship. "Every time you see Joe, you come home smelling like cigarette smoke. I am very concerned about that."

- **Tell your child** where you stand. "I do not allow you to smoke." And help him resist negative behavior. For example, he could practice different ways of saying "No, thanks."

- **Keep an eye on things.** Many middle school friendships are brief, and problems simply disappear. But take action if the friendship lasts and you see your child headed into harm's way.

Steer him toward school or community activities that will allow him to meet more people. If the friendship continues, monitor their activities closely.

Source: C. Drew Edwards, *How to Handle A Hard-to-Handle Kid*, 1999, (Free Spirit Publishing, Inc., 217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299, 1-800-735-7323), ISBN: 1-57542-046-5, paperback, 220 pp., \$15.95.



Parent Quiz

Are You Nurturing Your Child's Reading Skills?

Reading is a fundamental skill. Take this quiz to see if you are encouraging your child to improve her reading. Give yourself five points for something you do often, zero points for something you never do—or any score in between.

- ___ **1. I visit the library** with my child.
- ___ **2. I still read aloud** to my child even though she can read.
- ___ **3. I mention things** that I have read and found interesting.
- ___ **4. I spend** at least 30 minutes a day reading and encourage my child to join me.
- ___ **5. I offer incentives** for my child to read—such as renting a movie after my child reads a book.

How did you score?

Twenty points or more means you are strongly emphasizing the importance of reading. Fifteen to 19 is average. Below 15? Check the quiz for some suggestions to get both you and your child reading more.

Setting Expectations

Expect Your Child To Solve Problems



Preteens are impulsive. They can have a hard time staying on task and completing schoolwork.

They need prodding often. But be careful not to over control. Too much control can make your child dependent on you.

Expect your child to work independently. See if he can find his own solutions before helping.

Source: Lawrence J. Greene, *Roadblocks to Learning*, 2002 (Warner Books, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, 1-800-759-0190), ISBN: 0-446-67901-1, paperback, 480 pp., \$15.95.



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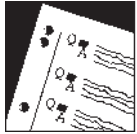
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Have an Idea to Share?

Do you have an idea for parents that should be in this newsletter? The editors of *Parents Still make the difference!* Middle School Edition are looking for practical ideas about how parents can help their children.

Parents Still make the difference! pays \$25 for each original idea published, and you will receive credit in the article. Please send ideas written in English.

Send ideas to *Parents Still make the difference!* Editorial Dept., P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474. Materials sent cannot be returned. You can also submit your idea online at www.parent-institute.com/ideas/pmd/.



Questions & Answers

Q: Since my son started middle school, I've had to push him to do his homework and chores. How can I get him to do things on his own?

A: Kids often experience a shift in motivation in middle school. They encounter other things to be motivated about. They spend more effort and energy on talking to friends and figuring out what's "in." They get interested in the opposite sex, playing sports or computer games. Many experience emotional highs and lows. This can take away their self-confidence and drive.

Sometimes you may need to remind your son to do a task, but your goal is to develop his self-motivation. To do that:

- **Encourage studying** with a friend. Preteens are very social. Together, they have more fun and are more motivated to study.
- **Remember** that self-motivation springs from emotional strengths such as will power. Encourage your son to make pledges to himself. "I will do the dishes without being reminded."
- **Establish a system** that rewards self-motivation. Let your son earn points when he initiates work, when he relies less on your prodding, or when he requests help only after trying first on his own.
- **Avoid fixing** your son's problems for him.
- **Encourage** community service. Kids who think they can make a difference have a greater sense of personal power.
- **Be motivated yourself.** Show an interest in learning and doing new things.
- **Provide** some "cool tools" for school. Having neat notebooks and organizers can make schoolwork more interesting.

—Luann Fulbright,
The Parent Institute

Developing Thinking Skills

Develop Your Child's Thinking Skills With Family Conversations



As your child progresses through school, her teachers will expect higher-level thinking. Instead of just giving an answer, she will need to give examples to support it.

You can help your child practice this type of critical thinking through conversations at home:

- **Encourage your child to give** detailed answers. "Why?" is not enough. It's too easy for her to answer, "Because." Instead, try saying, "Tell me about something that happened to you recently that makes you feel that way."
- **Encourage your child** to draw on all the resources she can to support her answer. "Have you read anything that shaped your opinion on this? Have you seen anything about it on TV? Have your friends shared information with you?"

Help your child evaluate her sources:

- **Ask her** if she is sure the program was fair, if her opinion has been shaped by TV. Could it have been tilted to give more weight to one point of view?
 - **Ask her** why she thinks her friends think the way they do if she's basing her opinion on what they said. Would she have formed the same opinion if she had never talked to them?
- Encourage her to explain her thought process:
- **Which piece** of information helped her most when forming her opinion or deciding on an answer?
 - **Which ideas** did she discard?
 - **Can she think** of anything that might happen in the future to change her mind?

Source: Louanne Johnson, *School Is Not a Four-Letter Word*, 1998 (Hyperion, 77 West 66th St., 11th Floor, New York, NY 10023, 1-800-759-0190), ISBN: 0-7868-8312-X, paperback, 272 pp., \$12.95.

Dealing With the Tough Issues

Communication & Supervision Help Deter Early Sexual Activity



Preteens think a lot about their bodies. Boy-girl fever hits at this age. Now is the time to take special steps to keep preteens from becoming sexually active.

Help your child understand that premature sexual relationships can be devastating. Students not only risk pregnancy and disease, they can suffer emotionally. Plus, their grades can suffer.

To help your child avoid risky behavior:

- **Watch TV with your child.** Note the sexual messages being

communicated. See what your child thinks about these. Make your own values very clear.

- **Don't allow** one-on-one dating. Preteens aren't mature enough to handle situations that can arise.
- **Encourage involvement** in Scouts or other groups engaged in positive activities.
- **Know what your child** is doing at all times. Make sure you or another adult is there to monitor kids' activities.

Source: Susan Panzarine, "What Can I Do to Lessen the Chance That My Teen Will Have Sex at an Early Age?" www.parent-teen.com/sex/preventearlysex.html.

Solving School Problems

Parents' Support For Teachers Sets A Good Example



When parents and teachers work together, students reap the benefits. Here are some tips for working with your child's teachers:

- **Be positive.** Expect that your child's teachers know what they're doing and can help your child. Your good attitude may rub off on your child.
- **Get involved.** Build relationships with educators by participating in school activities. Learn about why the school works the way it does.
- **Be patient.** If your child doesn't like a teacher, don't request a classroom change too quickly. Your child may be learning in class, even if she doesn't care for a teacher's personality.
- **Don't compete.** Some parents feel jealous when kids strongly admire teachers. This is normal. But don't let it hurt your support for teachers.
- **Work as a team.** Teachers are your partners in education. Talk about how you can work together to help your child.
- **Resolve problems quickly.** Talk to the teacher right away about major concerns. This keeps them from growing and becoming more difficult to handle.

Source: Dr. Kyle Pruett, "Tips for Avoiding Parent-Teacher Conflicts," Family Education Network, America Online, <http://www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,1-2093,00.html>.

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“Lectures often confuse our kids, but the example we set is crystal clear.”

—Zig Ziglar,
Raising Positive Kids in a Negative World

Homework

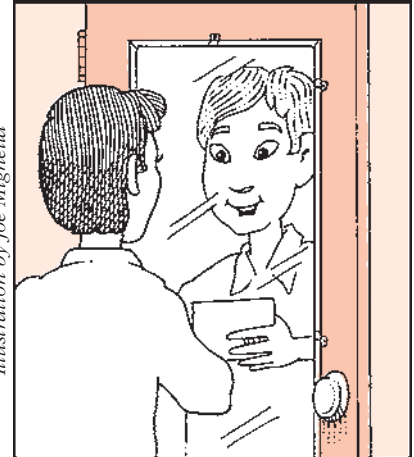
Preparation Helps Children Reduce Presentation Anxiety

Class presentations make students the center of attention, and force them to think on their feet. For many middle schoolers, this is a terrifying experience.

You can help your child develop the confidence to stand up in front of his peers.

Once your child has a topic, you can:

- **Suggest he make cue cards.** He should outline the points he will make. Then he should write each point or idea on a separate index card to use when he speaks.
- **Help him think of visual aids.** What could he put on a poster, chart or handout to enhance or illustrate main points? What might he demonstrate?
- **Suggest he practice** his presentation in front of a full-length mirror.
- **Invite him to practice** in front of you. Gently coach him on speaking slowly and clearly. Remind him to stand up straight, make eye contact, and be enthusiastic. Note if he's using



distracting “filler” words like *uh*, *umm* and *you know*.

- **Ask questions** you think students might ask about his presentation.
- **Congratulate** your child on his efforts to create a successful class presentation.

Source: Kathie Weir, *A Parent's Guide to School Projects*, 2002 (Parent's Guide Press, P.O. Box 461730, Los Angeles, CA 90046, 1-800-549-6646), ISBN: 1-931199-08-6, paperback, 229 pp., \$17.95.

When You Need Help

Set Limits, Use Consequences For a Balanced Parenting Style



Do you wonder if you are too too harsh or too lenient with your child?

The best approach is to aim for the “middle ground” in parenting. Here are some features of a balanced parenting style:

- **Set limits.** But give your child choices within those limits. “You can't spend over \$50 on new shoes but get a pair you like.”
- **Use consequences** as much as possible. For example, say your

child didn't finish her homework because she watched too much TV. The consequence is that she may no longer watch TV before doing homework.

- **Expect your child** to use respectful language and a respectful tone of voice.

Source: Jody Johnston Pawel, *The Parent's Toolbox: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family*, 2000 (Ambris Publishing, P.O. Box 343 Springboro, OH 45066, 513/748-4541) ISBN: 1-929643-34-9, paperback, 438 pp., \$24.95.