

MIDDLE SCHOOL Parents[®]

still make the difference!

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Payson Junior High School
Counseling

Discipline

Encourage Your Child to Reflect on Behavior, Solutions



A middle school child is capable of abstract thinking—the ability to look for deeper meaning. So discipline at this age should involve your child understanding why he did something, what the consequences are, and how he can fix it, if necessary.

Here's how to help your child understand discipline:

- **Talk with your child** about his actions. Stay calm. Getting angry at your child will only make him focus on how “mean” you are, not what he did. Help him identify what caused him to act as he did. Ask him to name some other ways he could have handled the situation.
- **Discuss what happened** as a result of the behavior. Were someone's feelings hurt? Was someone disappointed? Help your child see his behavior through the eyes of others.
- **Figure out ways** to improve the situation. Sometimes, “I'm sorry” is enough. Other times, your child may need to take more action. For example, say he borrowed his brother's bike, then left it in the rain to rust. He may need to earn enough money to pay for a new one.

Source: Michele Borba, Ed.D, *Building Moral Intelligence*, 2002 (Jossey-Bass, 989 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94103-1741, 1-800-956-7739), ISBN: 0-7879-6226-0, paperback, 316 pp., \$16.95.



Illustration by Joe Mignella

Knowing the Scientific Method Helps Children With Projects

The scientific method will probably be used by your child throughout her school career. Here's how to use this process of conducting experiments and drawing conclusions:

- **Ask a scientific question.** For example, “Will there be any difference in the growth of a cactus plant that is watered once a week for a month as opposed to one that is not watered at all for a month?”
- **Form an educated guess.** This is called the *hypothesis*. For example, “Cactus plants do fine in the desert for weeks without water. So watering once a week won't make much difference.”

- **Do the experiment.** For this example, your child would plant two cactus plants in the same conditions. One would receive water every week for a month and the other would not.
- **Write down your data.** Record how the cactus plants are doing each week, and again at the end of the experiment.
- **See if you were right.** Was your hypothesis correct? What conclusion can you draw about how much water a cactus plant needs?

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, 2002 (Kaplan Publishing, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 100 Front St., Riverside, NJ 08075, 1-800-323-7445), ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8, paperback, 176 pp., \$10.

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children

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Building Math Skills

You Can Help Your Middle Schooler Succeed in Math

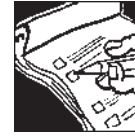


Even if you can, it's not a good idea to try to "reteach" your child what he doesn't get in math class. Your method might conflict with the method taught in school and add to his confusion and frustration.

There are things you can do, though, to help your child do better in math:

- **Encourage mastery** of basic math facts. Mastery means your child can add, subtract, divide or multiply numbers to 10 in three seconds. Try flash cards for review.
- **Encourage your child** to do more problems than the teacher assigns.
- **Encourage doing** everyday math. Ask your child to help you figure a 15 percent tip at the restaurant. Or calculate the cost of gasoline for a trip.

- **Ask questions** to help your child solve the problem. "Where do you think you could start?" "What is the problem asking you to do?" "Would drawing a picture or diagram help?"
- **Suggest your child** start every assignment by reviewing the textbook or worksheet examples. He can redo the examples before starting the assignment.
- **Check your child's** understanding of math vocabulary. Can he define new terms? Can he use models and simple problems to show you he understands how the term is used?
- **Show a little sympathy** when your child shouts, "I just don't get this!" Say, "It looks like a tough one."
- **Ask your child's teacher** if he needs extra help.



Parent Quiz

Are You Encouraging Your Child to Concentrate?

Take this quiz to see if you encourage your child to concentrate.

Give yourself five points for something you do often, zero points for something you never do—or any score in between.

- ___ **1. I help my child** find a study spot free from distractions.
- ___ **2. I urge my child** to get a full night's sleep and eat a healthy breakfast before school.
- ___ **3. I use my child's** learning style to help her learn, such as making visual aids if she is a visual learner.
- ___ **4. I remind my child** to take a break every 20 or 30 minutes.
- ___ **5. I suggest that my child** end the day by reviewing work.

How did you score?

A score of 20 points or above means you are strongly promoting good concentration habits for your child. Fifteen to 19 is average. Below 15? Use the quiz for some suggestions on how to help your child improve concentration.

Building Self-Esteem

Positive Thoughts Help Children Who Are Discouraged



Middle schoolers often think, "I'm not good enough at . . ." Changing such negative self-talk to positive will boost confidence and school grades. The next time your child feels discouraged, have her ask herself these questions:

- What are my thoughts about this situation?
- Which of these are negative?
- What are some positive thoughts I could have?
- How do these thoughts make me feel differently?

MIDDLE SCHOOL **Parents** *still make the difference!*

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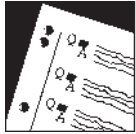
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Have an Idea to Share?

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: My son struggles with reading assignments. I know this is hurting his grades. How can I help him learn to read better?

A: You're right to be concerned. Not only do poor reading skills affect learning outcomes, students who don't read well can develop undesirable coping mechanisms—like leaning on others for help or acting out in school.

"The more your son reads, the easier reading will get."

First, contact your son's teachers. Find out if he has any specific reading problems—like comprehension, memory retention or a language barrier. If so, create a plan that specifies what you and the teacher will do to help your son. Decide if tutoring help is needed.

Also be sure to:

- **Help fit reading** into your son's schedule. Limit TV viewing, video games, etc. The more your son reads, the easier reading will get.
- **Make reading fun again.** If your son saw the movie, *Holes*, have him read the book. If he's interested in baseball, suggest he read a sports biography.
- **Give reading freedom.** As long as reading materials aren't harmful, let your son read what he likes.
- **Make reading aloud** a part of family life. Share a newspaper article or a passage from a book.
- **Encourage your son to read** with a purpose—to answer a question, to remember facts or to grasp main ideas.
- **Ask your son's opinions** about what he's read.

—Luann Fulbright,
The Parent Institute

Substance Abuse

Help Your Child Find the Right Words to Avoid Using Alcohol



Kids who drink often first try alcohol in middle school. In one national study, 25 percent of eighth-graders admitted they had been drunk.

This early drinking increases the chances of adult alcoholism. It damages students' young brains. It interferes with their social development and learning. It can even lead to risky and violent behavior.

The good news is—talking to kids about alcohol and other drugs pays off. It's been shown to lower students' risk of use by 37 percent.

With middle schoolers, it's important to stress the risks of drinking. You must make your values and rules about drinking clear.

It's just as critical to help your child find the right words to refuse

alcohol when other kids pressure her to drink.

Make sure your child knows it's okay to use you as an excuse not to drink. There's no embarrassment in saying, "I can't drink. If my parents find out, I'll be grounded for weeks."

Also help your child come up with her own reasons for not drinking. These should be consistent with her personality. For example:

- **An athlete** might say she can't drink because it will ruin her game.
- **A musician** can say it will affect her performance. Or she'll be kicked out of the band if caught.

Source: Laurel Graeber, "Stop Preteen Drinking Before It Starts," *Parents*, January 2000, G+J USA Publishing, 375 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, 1-800-777-0222.

Community Service

Research Shows That Service-Learning Benefits Students



Many schools stress community service in some way. Do you support service-learning at your child's school? Research shows that service-learning:

- **Gives students a sense** of responsibility.
- **Teaches children** to get along better with others.
- **Reduces risky behaviors** such as trying drugs and alcohol.
- **Helps students form bonds** with adults.
- **Helps students appreciate** cultural differences.
- **Makes students aware** of needs in their communities.
- **Helps students understand** how their government works.
- **Makes students believe** they make the world a better place.

- **Is linked with higher grades** and better study habits.
- **Is linked with higher school** attendance.

Source: Shelley H. Billig, "The Impacts of Service-Learning On Youth, Schools and Communities: Research on K-12 School-Based Service-Learning, 1990-1999," Learning In Deed, www.learningindeed.org/research/slresearch/slrsrchsy.html.

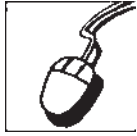
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Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than our progress in education. The human mind is our fundamental resource.

—John F. Kennedy

Computers & the Internet

Don't Let Video & Computer Games Harm Your Child



Video and computer games have become a favorite pastime of many middle school

ers. They make kids feel comfortable with technology. And they can help develop skills in reading, math and problem-solving.

But game playing can be addictive. Time spent playing keeps kids from doing schoolwork and interacting with others. It keeps them from being physically active. Plus, kids can be exposed to violence, sexism and stereotyping.

According to the National Institute on Media and the Family, teens who play mostly violent games don't do as well in school as those who don't play violent games. They're more likely to have arguments with teachers. They get into more fights.

To minimize the harmful effects of video game playing:

- **Limit the time** your child spends playing.
- **Insist that homework** and chores come first.
- **Remove the controllers** to the games if your child breaks your rules.
- **Talk with your child** about violent content. Explain why you find it offensive.
- **Help your child evaluate** games before they're purchased. Read the packaging. Check out ratings on the Web.
- **Monitor game playing.** Try to have the computer or video game console in a common area in your home.
- **Encourage reading,** board games and other activities.
- **Play the games** with your child.

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

Spending Time Together

Discover Ways to Make History Come Alive for Your Child

Middle school students often learn about the history of their country. They study the constitution. They learn about democratic principles.

You can support your child's learning and have lots of fun together. Do these things:

- **Research your own family history.** When did your family members come to America?
- **Make your home democratic.** For example, vote on what the family should do together next weekend.
- **Get to know the history** of your city or town. Look in the newspaper for history talks and walks. View reenactments. Visit local museums and historic sites.
- **Study images and words** on coins. Examine dollar bills.
- **Read about current issues** and events in the news. Relate them to events in the past.

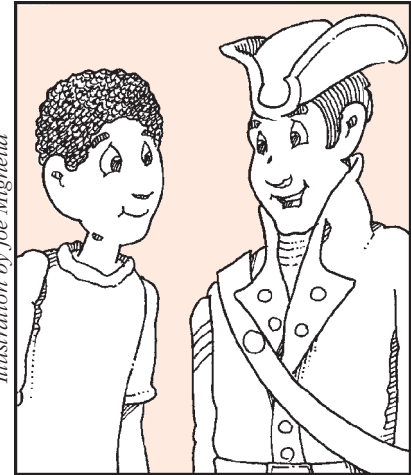


Illustration by Joe Mignella

- **View films on topics** your child is studying in history class.
- **Check out history sites** on the Internet.

Source: Elizabeth Chesla, *A Parent's Guide to 8th Grade*, 2001 (Learning Express, 900 Broadway, Suite 604, New York, NY, 1-888-551-5627), ISBN: 1-57685-382-9, paperback, 176 pp., \$14.95.

Building Responsibility

Learning How to Make Good Choices Teaches Responsibility



A person becomes responsible when she learns to decide for herself what's right.

Help your child learn the steps to making good choices. Encourage these behaviors:

- **Think it through.** Good decisions require planning. Teach your child to think, "What would happen if . . . ?"
- **Follow the rules.** Rules at home, school and in the community are usually made with everyone's best interest in mind. It is difficult to break these rules and still make a good choice.

- **Keep your promises.** When you tell someone you will follow through on something, do it. You can break a promise if you made a bad choice earlier—one that could be harmful.
- **Stay positive.** We can't control bad thoughts that pop into our heads. But we can prevent ourselves from dwelling on them. And we can prevent ourselves from acting on them.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, 2000 (Free Spirit Publishing, 217 Fifth Avenue North, Suite 200, Minneapolis, MN 55401-1299, 1-800-735-7323), ISBN: 1-57542-063-5, paperback, 165 pp., \$14.95.