

# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

November 2009  
Vol. 13, No. 3

Ranger Middle School  
Mike Thompson

*still make the difference!*



## Turn your middle schooler into a responsible, independent person

**Y**our preteen's ever-shifting behavior may make you downright dizzy sometimes. One day, he's mature and dependable. But the next? He's fussing about the house rules like a cranky preschooler. Welcome to adolescence!

These next few years are all about change and growth. And while it would be nice to wave your magic wand and turn your preteen into the independent, responsible adult he'll hopefully grow to be, it doesn't work that way. Like nearly everything else related to parenting, it's a process.

You can turn your preteen into a responsible young person if you:

- **Insist he pitch in** with younger siblings. How about having him handle his little brother's bedtime story tonight?

- **Give him meaningful chores.** Don't assign busywork. Look for tasks that matter.
- **Let him run his own errands.** Who says you're the only one capable of picking out a poster board for that upcoming school project?
- **Allow him to get a part-time job.** Pet sitting or mowing lawns are great ways for preteens to earn money and develop a good work ethic. As long as he keeps his grades up, consider letting him go for it.
- **Rely on him when you need help.** Why clean the gutters or change the oil in the car by yourself? There's a talented preteen nearby!

Source: "Becoming Independent," Parenting Pipeline, North Dakota State University, [www.ext.nodak.edu/extnews/pipeline/6-mar-w.htm](http://www.ext.nodak.edu/extnews/pipeline/6-mar-w.htm).

## Build your child's self-esteem with love, discipline



Self-esteem has been talked about so much that it has almost gotten a bad name. But this quality is important

for all of us—we *all* need to feel that we have value and that we are competent, capable individuals.

Experts agree that parents can build self-esteem in their children with a two-pronged approach. First, never put boundaries on your love for your child. Second, always put boundaries on what your child may do.

For the first:

- **Make it clear** that you love your child as she is.
- **Spend time** with her and enjoy her company.
- **Encourage your child** and take interest in her activities.
- **Respect your child.**

For the second:

- **Be clear** about family rules, including consequences.
- **Be consistent** when enforcing rules.
- **Stand firm.** Do not back down because your child gets angry.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth—Adolescence*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4808-4 (Teachers' College Press, [www.tcpress.com](http://www.tcpress.com) and Center for the Improvement of Child Caring, [www.ciccparenting.org](http://www.ciccparenting.org)).

# Understanding preteen brains helps you respond to your child



Parenting a middle schooler in today's times can be a challenge. Your preteen acts like he knows everything, and at times he seems so grown up.

The important word is "seems." It doesn't matter how "cool" your child acts—it will be years before he thinks like an adult. Keep in mind that:

- **Emotional thinking usually wins** out over rational thinking at this age. That's why middle schoolers may lash out if they think they've been "dissed." Your child is not ready to stop and think: "I'd better cool it, because I might get in trouble." He responds with emotion only.

Have your child practice instant responses, such as shaking his head and walking away. Counting to 10 before blowing his top can work, too. And don't take angry

comments your child may make to you personally.

- **Your child lives in the moment.** He doesn't grasp that his semester grade may drop if he doesn't study tonight for his test. To him, the end of the semester is light-years away. What he does tonight can't possibly affect the end of the semester.

Don't force your middle schooler to make a connection he is not ready to make. Instead, set firm rules about studying and stick to them.

**Source:** Kenneth R. Ginsburg with Martha M. Jablow, *"But I'm Almost 13!" An Action Plan for Raising a Responsible Adolescent*, ISBN: 0-8092-9717-5 (Contemporary Books, www.mcgraw-hill.com).

**"Raising kids is part joy and part guerilla warfare."**

—Ed Asner

# Excessive TV, computer time can worsen eating, sleeping habits



Too much time in front of the TV or computer can affect your child's grades, social life and health.

In separate studies, researchers have found that:

- **High school students** who watched more than five hours of television per day had poor eating habits as young adults.
- **Watching TV** can contribute to obesity. Time spent in front of the TV is time not spent in physical activity. But a study also found that some overweight children ate twice as much after watching TV commercials about food.
- **Middle school students** get less sleep if they have a computer or

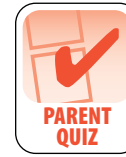
TV in their bedrooms. They go to bed a half hour later than students who do not. But they wake at the same time.

To avoid these poor outcomes for your child:

- **Set a strict limit** on total screen time. No more than one to two hours per day.
- **Keep TVs and computers** in family areas, not bedrooms.
- **Require that schoolwork**, chores and exercise come before any screen time takes place.

**Sources:** "Children with TVs or Computers in Their Room Sleep Less," Science News, "Too Much TV Linked to Future Fast-Food Intake," "TV Food Advertisements Increase Obese Children's Appetite by 134 Percent," Science Daily, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/09/080902102536.htm.

# Are you stressing the importance of academic honesty?



Research from the Center for Academic Integrity shows that a whopping 75 percent of high school students admit to cheat-

ing. Are you addressing this with your child *before* high school?

Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

\_\_\_ 1. **Do you set a good example** for your child by not cheating in your own life?

\_\_\_ 2. **Have you spoken** with your child about her school's honor code and the importance of following it?

\_\_\_ 3. **Have you discussed** types of cheating? Copying from a student, getting exam questions early and sending a text message with answers are all forms of cheating.

\_\_\_ 4. **Have you told** your child that copying passages from the Internet and passing them off as her own work is cheating?

\_\_\_ 5. **Have you talked about** the consequences of cheating?

**How well are you doing?**

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are showing your child how important it is not to cheat. For *no* answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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*Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children.* ISSN: 1523-1283

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.  
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit: www.parent-institute.com.

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# Spend meaningful time talking with your middle schooler



One of the best ways to spend time with your preteen is also one of the easiest: It's talking.

According to research, adolescent girls rate chatting as the thing they most enjoy doing with their moms.

Unfortunately, girls often get frustrated during conversations because they believe their moms:

- Ask too many questions.
- Are too quick to judge.
- Just “don't get it.”
- Say the wrong thing.

Complaints aside, preteen girls want—and need—to have meaningful talks with their moms. To get the

most from the time you spend chatting with your preteen:

- **Listen.** You may have a hundred things to do, but if your preteen wants to talk, be there for her.
- **Don't shut her down.** Avoid phrases like, “You don't mean that,” or, “You can't really feel that way.” They're big roadblocks to conversation and may make your preteen less likely to open up.
- **Accept her viewpoint.** Hearing out your preteen isn't the same as agreeing with her. It's a way to show you respect her opinions.

Source: Terri Apter, *You Don't Really Know Me: Why Mothers and Daughters Fight and How Both Can Win*, ISBN: 0-393-32710-8 (W.W. Norton, www.wwnorton.com).

# Focus on *goals* instead of *grades* to improve academic success



Think helping your middle schooler with homework is the ticket to his future success? Think again. Studies

show that the best way to help your child succeed may be to remind him that working hard today has a payoff tomorrow.

In other words, make him see that doing well in school is about more than getting good grades. It's about reaching his goals someday.

Why does linking school success to goals matter? Possibly because the teen years are when kids begin growing into the adults they'll one day be. And even though they're breaking away from their parents, they take Mom and Dad's guidance seriously.

In fact, “lack of guidance” is cited as the main reason capable kids don't go onto college.

After reviewing data from 50,000 students over a 26-year period,

researchers also found that, by middle school:

- **Kids begin losing interest** in grades. For many preteens, hanging out with friends and having fun mean more than making the honor roll.
- **It's tough for parents** to build relationships with teachers. Since kids have several teachers every day, it can be hard for parents to get to know them all.
- **Parent involvement matters.** But stressing the long-term benefits of doing well matters even more.
- **Helping with homework** produces mixed results. Some kids enjoy the aid; others see it as meddling. Still others find it confusing. This is because parents may explain things differently than a teacher does.

Source: “Tying Education To Future Goals May Boost Grades More Than Helping With Homework,” ScienceDaily, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/05/090519134711.htm.

**Q:** We're heading into the holidays, but my eighth grader isn't exactly gung-ho about all the looming “family time.” I really want to spend time with him. Should I make him join us for all of our holiday activities?

## Questions & Answers

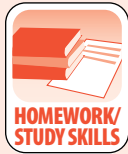
**A:** It's tempting to insist that your middle schooler join you for everything, but resist the urge. It's important to respect the fact that your child is growing up. So try to be flexible. Rather than demand that your child spend every moment with the family this holiday season:

- **Prioritize.** If there's a big event everyone must attend, so be it. Let your child know you understand he wants to spend time with his friends. But skipping Thanksgiving at Grandma's isn't an option. On the other hand, must he participate in your annual holiday-shopping marathon?
- **Embrace new traditions.** Accept that some “little kid” activities may need to be retired now that your child is older. But rather than abandon them completely, tweak them. For instance, did he used to love decorating the table with leaves and pinecones? Now that he's older and more capable, give him a hot-glue gun and let him craft an autumn display.
- **Don't get upset.** Try not to take it personally when your child balks at holiday activities. It's all part of growing up. And remember: He may roll his eyes at these things now. But, chances are, he'll enjoy them with his own kids someday!

—Maria Bonaquist,  
The Parent Institute

# It Matters: Homework

## Offer guidelines for your child's research papers



Accessing volumes of information today is as simple as the click of a mouse. This certainly helps when doing research. But it can also present challenges and problems.

Share these tips to help your child wade through, and find, relevant information for research:

- **Have a specific topic.** Writing a paper on "World War II" can be overwhelming. Focus on just one battle or event in the war.
- **Have a number of sources in mind.** Usually between five and 10 sources work well for a middle school project. But check with the teacher to be sure.
- **Use the Internet with caution.** Wikipedia articles can be edited by anyone. Stick to sources ending in *gov* or *edu*. Sources ending in *org* can be helpful, too. But keep in mind that the groups behind these sites are often advocating for certain causes. Try <http://scholar.google.com>. This version of Google brings up only scholarly articles and books.
- **Go to the library!** Full versions of articles and books may not be available online. But the library may have them. Talk to your school or community librarian.
- **Document everything.** Have a bibliography noting all source material. Never copy anything directly from a source. All work should be in your own words.

Source: Ron Fry, *How to Study*, ISBN: 1-56414-229-9 (Career Press, [www.careerpress.com](http://www.careerpress.com)).

## Make long-term projects more manageable with planning

**D**on't let long-term assignments derail your preteen's school success! To help her do well on everything from science projects to English essays, remind her to:

- **Map out the dates.** Using a kitchen calendar, have your pre-teen write down the important dates surrounding her project. It'll make it that much harder for deadlines to "sneak up" on her.
- **Make big tasks littler.** Teach your preteen to break large projects into small parts. For example, handing in a five-page paper might seem scary. But "creating an outline," "writing a rough



draft" and "turning in the final copy" sound more doable.

- **Check in with you.** Don't hover, but do ask your preteen to show you her progress. If you spot trouble, you can nudge her back on track before it's too late.

## Master skills, strategies to make study time more productive



In middle school, your child must increase his skill level to work independently and well.

Consider sharing and practicing ideas like these:

- **Answer six key questions.** Advise your child to always find out: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how*. This will lead to a basic understanding of many reading assignments. It will also help him write an outline.
- **Know vocabulary.** Your child will struggle with an assignment if he doesn't understand the language in it. Encourage him to use the dictionary or talk to the teacher for clarification.
- **Grasp important information.** Many assignments will require

your child's understanding of the difference between central ideas and details. Practice this with your child, saying something like this: "Jim dropped tears on his blue shirt as he walked up to the house." What is more important, the fact that Jim had a blue shirt or that he was crying?

- **Compare and contrast.** Can your child tell how things are alike and how they are different from one another? This skill will help your child with several subjects, particularly English and history. Ask your child, "How are a bulldog and a poodle alike? How are they different?"

Source: Drew and Cynthia Johnson, *Homework Heroes*, ISBN: 0-7432-2259-8 (Kaplan Publishing, [http://store.kaptest.com/kappub\\_home.jhtml](http://store.kaptest.com/kappub_home.jhtml)).