

Middle School Parents[®]

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Rolla Public Schools

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Help your middle schooler start the school year off right

Many students faced pandemic-related learning challenges last school year. Now it's a new academic year and an opportunity for your child to have a fresh start. Encourage her to establish some goals related to:

- **Schoolwork.** Help her designate a work area free from distractions and set a regular time for studying. Give your child tools to help her stay organized, such as folders, binder dividers and a calendar.
- **Projects.** If your child typically puts off long-term assignments until the last moment, get her to turn over a new leaf. The next time a project or research paper looms, help her break it into small parts and write down deadlines for each step. That way she can tackle one bit at a time.
- **Writing.** If your child groans when she has to write something for school, challenge her to strengthen her writing skills. Writing in a journal for a few minutes every day can help her do just that.
- **Reading.** If your child doesn't spend time reading for pleasure, help her set reading goals. Start small. Perhaps she can read for 15 minutes every night before going to bed.
- **Extracurricular activities.** If your child is so excited about having after-school options, she may want to sign up for every activity that comes her way. Remind her that school comes first. No activity—no matter how much she enjoys it—should be allowed to interfere with academics.

Missing school affects more than grades



Missing too much school hurts middle schoolers' academic performance. Studies show that kids who are

frequently absent are likelier than their peers to:

- **Repeat a grade.**
- **Get expelled.**
- **Drop out of school.**

So don't let your child convince you that missing class is "no big deal." Attendance is vital—and it's his responsibility. After all, it's his future that's on the line!

Whether school attends school in person, remotely or a mix of the two, make sure he attends every class every day. Here's how:

- **Be firm.** Every vague complaint shouldn't be a ticket to a day off. Follow the school's health protocols for suspected illnesses.
- **Be understanding.** Acknowledge that school is not always fun. Your middle schooler may appreciate your honesty.
- **Be proactive.** If your child is clearly avoiding school, find out why. Start by talking to his school counselor.

Source: P.W. Jordan and R. Miller, *Who's In: Chronic Absenteeism under the Every Student Succeeds Act*, FutureEd.

Help your middle schooler start thinking about the future



College is years away, but that doesn't mean your child shouldn't start thinking about it and making plans for it now.

Studies show that college graduates are more likely than non-graduates to:

- **Live healthier, longer lives.**
- **Stay employed.**
- **Enjoy their jobs.**
- **Change jobs more easily.**
- **Earn significantly higher salaries.**

To help your child begin focusing on higher education:

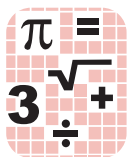
- **Talk about his interests.** What does your child like to do? What are his passions? Whether it's graphic design or physical fitness, there's surely a college program geared toward it. He won't be enrolling anytime soon, but it's OK to "plant the seed" and get him thinking about how he can continue doing what he loves at the university level someday.

- **Encourage him to set goals.** How does your child see himself in 10 years? As a college graduate? A successful executive? Ask him what he envisions and how he plans to get there. Specifically, talk about what he can do now (such as studying harder or taking tougher classes) to help him reach his goals.
- **Widen his horizons.** There are too many careers to count, and odds are your child hasn't heard of many of them. So go online and research various professions. Get him excited about the different options available to him!

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

—Eleanor Roosevelt

Three steps can help your child read academic material



Not all reading is the same. There are many different kinds of reading material, and people also read in different

ways depending on what they want to accomplish.

When middle school students read academic material, they are *reading to learn*. Their goal is to understand and retain what they read.

Here are three steps your child should take while reading a school assignment:

1. **Do a "quick read."** This is also called skimming or scanning the

text. Your child should pay special attention to pictures, headlines and text in boldface and italics. These can give him an idea of what the material is about.

2. **Read deeply.** To make this step most effective, your child should take notes while he reads. He should also write down any words or concepts he doesn't understand.
3. **Read it more than once.** For new or difficult material, your child should go back over it—even after reading deeply. Reading it through once again will improve his comprehension and retention.

Are you instilling kindness in your middle schooler?



Students should be responsible and caring members of the school community. Are you encouraging your middle

schooler to be kind? Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out:

- ___ 1. **Do you model** kindness for your child by treating her and others with kindness and respect?
- ___ 2. **Do you teach** your child to be kind on social media? Remind her that it's never OK to post mean or hurtful comments online.
- ___ 3. **Do you promote** empathy by saying things like "Remember how you felt when you didn't get invited to Maggie's party?"
- ___ 4. **Do you praise** your child when you see her being kind to others?
- ___ 5. **Do you encourage** your child to befriend a wide variety of students, not just those in her "group"—even if the kids in her group don't welcome them as easily?

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers mean you are promoting kindness in your middle schooler. For each *no* answer, try that idea.

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Survive middle school with tips from a school counselor



When it comes to the tools she'll need to succeed academically, your child will need more than just pencils

and paper. Be sure to send her to class with proper "middle-school survival skills," too!

These skills are crucial because excelling in middle school involves more than academics. Your child will have the best chance of thriving if she:

- **Is emotionally healthy.** Adolescents are notoriously filled with self-doubt. And that can make them more likely to give in to peer pressure or attempt to "fit in" at all costs. So help keep your child emotionally strong. Spend time with her. Encourage healthy

friendships and then get to know those friends. Take an interest in the things that interest your child. And if you see her losing her way, seek professional help.

- **Understands her changing body.** Never underestimate the impact physical changes can have on your child. A poor self-image can quickly translate into poor grades. Body image is that important to preteens. So talk to your child about the physical changes she'll likely experience during the middle school years. If she knows they're normal, she may feel less abnormal when they happen.

Source: C. Francis, "Surviving Middle School: Tips for Parents from a Middle School Counselor," American School Counselor Association.

Simple activities can reinforce your child's academic skills



Learning doesn't happen *only* during school. You can reinforce your middle schooler's academic skills any time! Here's how:

- **Have conversations** with your child about everything. Ask her what she thinks about certain topics—and really listen to what she has to say.
- **Ask about** what your child is doing in her classes. Find out about her perspective on school.
- **Have your child teach you.** Find out what she is studying and ask her to explain it to you. By "retelling" the things she's learning, she reinforces those things in her own mind.
- **Help your child engage** in critical thinking. Discuss the similarities and differences between her classes. Ask for her advice when you are facing a problem at work.
- **Give your child** meaningful responsibilities. If you have a pet, ask her to help with its care. Teach her how to prepare simple meals, do laundry and other chores to help the family.
- **Respect your child's ability.** Let her use her knowledge and skills to help you. The next time your phone starts giving you trouble, hand it to her and see if she can figure out a solution.
- **Expose your child to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from a walk around the neighborhood to a trip to a store—has an impact on her learning. On your next outing, ask her how what she sees relates to what she is learning in school.

Q: My son wakes up exhausted every morning, even though his bedtime hasn't changed. I don't think he's getting enough sleep, and I'm worried it will affect his schoolwork. What can I do?

Questions & Answers

A: A few minutes of lost shut-eye today, a few minutes tomorrow—those minutes add up. Pretty soon, your middle schooler is cranky, overtired and struggling in school.

To make sure he gets enough sleep each night:

- **Review your child's bedtime.** Middle schoolers need between eight and 10 hours of sleep each night to function their best in class.
- **Have him "unplug"** one hour before bed. That means no TV, cell phone, video games or computer in the hour leading up to lights-out. Instead, read, or play a board game together. This will help him ease into "sleep mode." And don't let him keep a phone in his room at night!
- **Avoid caffeine.** Consuming caffeine up to six hours before bedtime can disrupt your child's sleep. So make sure your child stays away from coffee, cola and tea. Watch out for orange soda, too—it may also contain the stimulant.
- **Beware of long naps.** Too much sleep during the day can make it harder to fall asleep at night. If your middle schooler needs to take a nap, have him keep it under 60 minutes.
- **Take time to talk.** Something may be troubling your child. He may be lying awake worrying. Remember, he's not too old for you to have a quiet talk with him before lights-out.

It Matters: Building Responsibility

Middle schoolers take charge of their learning



Middle school marks an important new phase in your child's education. From this point on, she

will be expected to take increased responsibility for her own learning. Instead of being teacher-led, learning in the secondary years becomes student-led.

To support your child, encourage her to:

- **Stand up for herself** and her education. She should think about what she needs to be successful and ask for it. Encourage her to get to know her teachers so she feels comfortable approaching them.
- **Participate in class.** Your child should ask questions and give opinions in class.
- **Get help at the first sign** of a problem. She should find out when her teachers are available for extra help.
- **Work to get along** with her teachers and classmates. Everyone learns better in a pleasant environment.
- **Take challenging classes.** Your child shouldn't just coast along. If her classes are easy for her, she may not be in the right classes. Encourage her to talk to her school counselor about her options.
- **Think about her learning.** Instead of just memorizing information, your child should ask herself, "How does this topic relate to something I have learned or experienced before?"

Share these tools to help your student stay organized

Responsibility for staying on top of several classes as well as extracurricular activities is a big challenge in middle school.

To make organization easier for your child, have him use these tools:

- **To-do lists.** Have your child write down everything he needs to complete for the following day, week, month, etc.
- **A planner.** Your child should write all assignment due dates and test dates in a planner so he can see all of his assignments in one place.
- **Sticky notes.** If your child remembers something he needs to do while he is studying, he can write it down and keep working.
- **Schedules.** Show your child how to make and follow a schedule every day. Here's a sample schedule:



3:00 Classes are over
3:15 Snack and relaxation
3:30 Schoolwork
5:00 Change for soccer practice
5:30 Leave for soccer practice

Four ways to help your child become more responsible



When you instill a sense of responsibility in your child, you help her in the classroom and in life. To nurture her

sense of responsibility:

1. **Help your child manage money.** Encourage her to keep track of the money she receives, earns and spends. Show her how to create a savings goal. Managing her own money may help your child develop more respect for it.
 2. **Include your child** when you're paying bills or working on your budget. Don't share every financial detail, but let her see what budgeting
- looks like. "I'd love to order pizza tonight, but it'll have to wait. It's not in our budget this week."
3. **Revamp her chore list.** Are you still doing your child's laundry? Do you still make her lunch for her? If so, pass the torch. Don't overload her with hours of new tasks, but work toward giving her meaningful responsibilities.
 4. **Let her experience consequences.** When your child makes a mistake, don't swoop in to save her (unless she's in true danger). If you always shield her from the negative outcomes of her actions, she'll never learn from her mistakes.