

Middle School Parents[®]

November 2008
Vol. 12, No. 3

Yuba County Office of Education

still make the difference!



Use strategies to boost your middle schooler's memory skills

Help your middle schooler remember the things she studies! To boost her memory skills:

- **Be sure she understands** what she's studying. It's tough to memorize something if you don't know what it means in the first place.
- **Set it to music.** Help your middle schooler make up a tune or simple rhyme to remember names, dates or math formulas.
- **Surround her with the material.** Is she studying a certain history topic? Find books, movies and songs about that topic, too.
- **Have her tackle** the tough stuff first. When she's studying at night, remind her to focus on the must-remember topic first. That way, she'll be at her freshest when dealing with the most critical material.

- **Try visualization.** Get your middle schooler to associate the thing she's trying to memorize with a mental image. Have her close her eyes and picture what she is studying. A picture really is worth a thousand words (or facts).
- **Make it personal.** Ask your middle schooler to explain the topic she's studying to you. Just putting it into her own words may help the concepts stick in her mind.
- **Be thorough.** Remind your middle schooler to read through all of her notes when she's studying. Afterward, she can go back and reread the parts she's struggling to recall.

Source: "10 Ways to Build Your Child's Memory,"
OxfordLearning.com, www.oxfordlearning.com/letstalk/howtostudy.

Allow your child to select his own reading material



Jon Scieszka has written many books for kids. He is well known for a silly sense of humor. What is less well known is that

Scieszka, a former teacher, also has a very serious cause. He truly wants boys to read for pleasure. You can see that by going to his website at www.guysread.com.

Scieszka focuses on boys in this effort. But many of his ideas for encouraging reading are not just for boys. They apply to girls as well.

Here are a few tips:

- **Give your child a choice** of what to read.
- **Offer different types of material.** Some kids don't like traditional fiction. Introduce your preteen to nonfiction. Also consider humorous books, comic books and graphic novels.
- **Be a role model.** Children who read for pleasure often have parents who read for pleasure.
- **Give reading material as gifts** during the holiday season.
- **Have a family reading night** one night during the holiday season.
- **Look for an upcoming movie** based on a book. Offer to treat your child to the movie if he reads the book.

Don't let after-school activities interfere with education, family



If your busy preteen's after-school activities are hurting her in-school performance, it's time to free up her calendar.

When kids complain about not having enough time to finish homework, be with the family or to just hang out, they are overscheduled.

To help thin out your preteen's after-school schedule:

- **Take a look at her activities.** If she plays more than one sport, consider enforcing a "one sport per semester" rule.
- **Understand the commitment.** Before signing up for any activity, make sure you know what'll be expected of your preteen. If the drama club requires three

rehearsals each week, that might be too much.

- **Prioritize.** It's great that your preteen loves playing the clarinet as much as she enjoys karate and babysitting. But if they leave her with no time to study, something's got to give. Ask her which activity is her favorite. It'll be hard, but she should consider taking a break from the others.

"Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you."

—H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Talk with your preteen about making important decisions



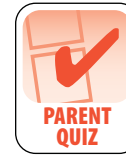
Now that he's a teenager, your eighth grader will be making more decisions on his own. And those decisions can have big

consequences. Although you ultimately can't make his choices for him, there are some important topics to discuss with your eighth grader now so that he'll be able to make smart decisions later. These include:

- **Decisions about school.** How does your eighth grader feel about school? Does he take his work seriously? Or does he slack off and do the bare minimum to get by?
- **Decisions about friends.** What kinds of kids does your child hang out with? Are they good, decent people? Does your preteen feel comfortable inviting friends over to his home? Why or why not?
- **Decisions about you.** Does your eighth grader feel that he can always come to you with problems? In his mind, are you an ally or an enemy?
- **Decisions about drinking and drugs.** Have you given him the facts about drugs, alcohol and smoking? Does he understand what he risks by experimenting with these substances?
- **Decisions about his self-worth.** Does your eighth grader believe that he matters? Does he know that you love him? How much he values himself will have a huge impact on the decisions—big or small—he makes for years to come.

Source: Sean Covey, "The 6 Most Important Decisions Your Teen Will Ever Make," Education.com, www.education.com/magazine/article/Ed_6_Most_Important.

Are you giving your child effective consequences?



Consequences are the cornerstone of discipline and, in fact, of everyday life. Every action (the cause) has a consequence

(the effect). Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to see if you are using consequences effectively:

___ 1. **Do you give consequences** in a timely fashion? A consequence given more than a day later can lose its effectiveness.

___ 2. **Does the consequence fit** the action or missed action? If your child doesn't put clothes away, he gets no clean clothes until they are put away.

___ 3. **Does your child understand** the consequence?

___ 4. **Does your child understand** the difference between consequence and punishment. Consequences are the logical results of his own actions.

___ 5. **Do you let the consequence** speak for itself? Lecturing destroys the power of a consequence.

How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are giving meaningful consequences. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

Middle School
Parents
still make the difference!

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

For subscription information call or write:
The Parent Institute®, 1-800-756-5525,
P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474.
Fax: 1-800-216-3667.

Or visit our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2008 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. *Managing Editor:* Pat Hodgdon. *Editor:* Rebecca Miyares. *Writers:* Maria Koklanaris & Holly Smith. *Illustrator:* Joe Mignella.

Understand what you can expect from your middle schooler



Middle school usually spans three years or fewer, but the growing your child will do in these years is huge. Your child will grow physically. But expect tremendous mental, emotional and social growth as well. Your preteen will probably display:

- **Some degree of self-absorption.** A key job for a child in middle school is to begin to answer the question: “Who am I?” Your child will be thinking about his own identity and how he appears to others. At times he may appear self-centered or even selfish. Try not to let this hurt your feelings. Give him some alone time, but do not allow him to isolate himself from the family.
- **Identification with a peer group.** In middle school, the peer group often sets the tone. New behaviors you see in your child may be copied from peers. Your child may

not seem as affectionate as before. But don't be fooled into thinking this is a time to back away. Your child needs you more than ever. But he needs you as a support and a guide, not a micro-manager.

- **A strong desire for independence,** countered by immature behavior if he doesn't get his way or he's anxious or upset. This is the age when you can expect to hear: “I'm not a child! Stop treating me like one!” Five minutes later, this person who thinks he deserves to be treated like an adult will be having a meltdown that reminds you of his toddler years.

Be mindful of your child's need for more freedom. But make sure he knows that you will link more freedom with more responsibility on his part.

Source: “Developmental Characteristics of Middle Schoolers And Tips for Parents,” Music Department, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, www-camil.music.uiuc.edu/classes/343/where_who/characteristics_adolescents.pdf.

Check out these great learning websites for middle schoolers!



The Internet should be more than a place where your child sends instant messages and logs on to MySpace or Facebook accounts. It is an excellent learning tool. Just stick to a few guidelines:

- **Supervise your child.** Keep the computer in a family area, rather than a bedroom.
- **Know who publishes websites.** Websites that end with *gov* or *edu* are best. If the site ends with *org* or *com*, look it over for quality.
- **Don't rely on wikipedia.org.** It can be a great starting place, but anyone can edit a Wikipedia site. The

links at the bottom of Wikipedia entries are often more reliable than the entry itself.

Some learning sites to check out:

- **www.factmonster.com**—Find information for any school subject.
- **http://bensguide.gpo.gov/6-8/index.html**—Find information about the U.S. government.
- **www.billnye.com**—Search for science information.
- **http://english-zone.com/index.php**—Find help with language arts homework.
- **www.onlinenewspapers.com**—Access newspapers from all over the world.

Q: My seventh grader thinks we're made of money! She gets an allowance, but she always wants extra cash to go shopping, buy snacks, etc. How do I teach her the value of a dollar?

Questions & Answers

A: There's no avoiding it: Our society runs on money, and so do our children. Research from the New York University Child Study Center shows that kids aged 12 to 19 spend over \$170 billion of their own and/or their parents' money each year.

The good news is that you can help your child learn to manage money responsibly. Here's how:

- **Explain needs versus wants.** Tell your child the difference between things you *must* have and those you'd *like* to have. “It would be fun to redecorate your bedroom, but the oven just conked out. We need to fix that instead.” Show her that even adults have to make difficult choices about where and how to spend money.
- **Help her become ad savvy.** Commercials are flashy for a reason: They want kids to buy their products. So help your child understand that advertisers are purposely trying to lure her in. Help her avoid falling for their gimmicks.
- **Teach her to budget.** Give your child a set amount for new clothes. If she'd like to buy the latest fashion, have her search online or in catalogs for the best price. She may learn to be thriftier with her money when she realizes that she can have four shirts for the same price as those designer jeans.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Discipline

Be calm, firm when your child is dishonest



Nearly every child will have an episode of dishonesty. For most kids, it is telling a lie.

Handling this can be tricky. You must let

your child know that honesty is of great importance. At the same time, you don't want to crush your child over this, because doing so can backfire. You want her to be more willing to come to you with the truth, not less.

To promote honesty:

- **Model the behavior you want.** If your child catches you in lies, she probably won't listen when you talk about the importance of truth.
- **Be clear without yelling.** Say, "Katie, I know telling the truth can be difficult. But lying is unacceptable. I am sad when you lie because it makes me feel I can't trust you."
- **Never brand your child as a liar.** Children need parents' encouragement to motivate them to improve. Calling your child names makes her feel you have decided she is a lost cause.
- **Get to the bottom of it.** Children usually have a reason for lying. Something may be bothering your child. On the other hand, if your child lies to cover up other misbehavior, you may need to monitor her more closely until she can be more honest and responsible.

Source: Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, *Talking to Tweens*, ISBN: 0-7382-1019-6 (Lifelong Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 1-800-343-4499, www.perseusbooksgroup.com).

Appeal to your child's sense of fairness with a behavior contract

Middle school students usually have a strong sense of fairness. They can become quite indignant if they feel someone is being shortchanged. That makes a behavior contract a great discipline tool at this age. And it's not just their behavior—it's yours, too.

The contract is a way to negotiate. It's a meeting of the minds to make sure that everyone involved gets at least part of what they want. Here's how it works:

- **Each of you write down** what you expect from the other. Be specific. Not, "Kevin will help around the house." But, "Kevin will make his bed every morning. He will unload the dishwasher every evening. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, he will take the trash can to the curb."
- **Compare lists and trade.** "Kevin pledges to do all these chores without fail, and I pledge to allow



him an extra 15 minutes on the computer each day."

- **Write it out.** Written agreements are far more likely to be carried out than verbal agreements are.
- **Make any necessary changes.** If the contract works and sticking to it becomes second nature, try a verbal agreement next time.

Source: Kerby T. Alvy, *The Positive Parent: Raising Healthy, Happy and Successful Children, Birth-Adolescence*, ISBN: 978-0-8077-4808-4 (Teachers College Press, 1-800-575-6566, www.teacherscollegepress.com).

Remember to be respectful when disciplining your preteen



How can discipline teach your preteen to respect you? By showing her that you take things like house rules seriously, and that you're committed to enforcing those rules.

Of course, respect is a two-way street, so be respectful to your preteen when disciplining her:

- **Be fair.** Don't expect her to be perfect or never to mess up. Everyone makes mistakes.

- **Be reasonable.** Resist the urge to threaten her with an outrageous punishment (such as grounding her for a year). To avoid giving an unreasonable consequence, don't say anything in the "heat of the moment."
- **Be consistent.** Once you make the rules, stick to them. If it isn't okay for your preteen to break curfew tonight, it shouldn't be okay tomorrow or next weekend either.