

# Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



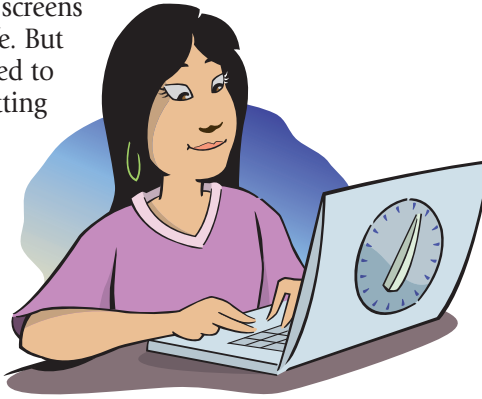
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Pinellas Park Middle School  
Robyn R. Witcher, Principal

## Monitor your child's screen time

From TV sets to computer monitors, screens are part of your middle schooler's life. But that doesn't mean she should be glued to one all day long. Make a point of getting her on the path to a healthful, active life. Here's how:

- **Set limits.** Decide on a reasonable amount of daily screen time— say, two hours— and stick with it.
- **Remove the TV** and computer from your child's bedroom. Kids with TVs in their rooms watch an extra 90 minutes of television every day. Keep the computer in a common area so you can monitor your child's online activities.
- **Explain to your middle schooler** why you're limiting her screen time. Tell her it's important to get exercise and fresh air instead of sitting in front of the TV or computer.
- **Walk the walk.** If you don't want your middle schooler to be a couch potato, don't be one yourself. Drop the clicker and grab a tennis racket or baseball glove.
- **Offer alternatives.** Go biking or shoot hoops together.
- **Don't use screen time as a reward** or punishment. It will make the TV and computer seem even more important to your middle schooler.



Source: "Helpful Ways to Reduce Screen Time," National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, [www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/screen-time.htm](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/live-it/screen-time.htm).



## Conference preparation pays off

Parent-teacher conferences are often brief in middle school. But they're still extremely important. To get the most from parent-teacher conferences:

- **Write down questions.** Is there something in particular you need to discuss with a teacher? Jot it down ahead of time.
- **Be on time.** Showing up late may delay other conferences.
- **Stay focused.** Don't spend too much time chatting about things that have nothing to do with school.
- **Listen** to what the teacher has to say. Her insight matters.
- **Keep your emotions in check.** Remember: You and the teacher are partners in your middle schooler's education.
- **Take notes.** Don't assume you'll remember everything once you leave the conference.

Source: P. Gisler, Ed.S., and M. Eberts, Ed.S., "Ten Tips for a Successful Parent-Teacher Conference," Family Education Network, <http://school.familyeducation.com/parents-and-school/parent-teacher-conferences/38585.html?detoured=1>.

## Discuss strategies for tests

Share these test-taking strategies with your middle schooler:

- **Start studying** the day the test is announced.
- **Think like a teacher.** What are the most important pieces of information?
- **Make up** a practice test.
- **Save the last day** of studying for review—not cramming.

Source: William R. Luckie and Wood Smethurst, *Study Power*, ISBN: 1-57129-046-x, Brookline Books.

## Meet your child's counselor

Guidance counselors are a key part of the educational team in middle schools. They can help with:

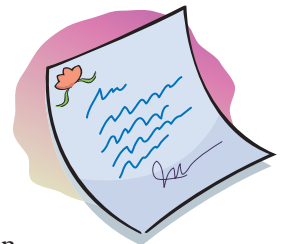
- **Academics.**
- **Social issues.**
- **Coping skills.**
- **Emotional support.**
- **Making plans** for high school and beyond.



Source: American School Counselor Association, "Why Middle School Counselors," [www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=231](http://www.schoolcounselor.org/content.asp?contentid=231).

## Old-fashioned letters encourage kids to write

Want to get your middle schooler writing? Ask a faraway relative to be your child's pen pal. Have your child send a letter every month. Insist that he make it a "real" letter—on paper, in an envelope, with a stamp (no email!). He may think it's "lame," but he may get a kick out of it, too. And he'll be building his writing skills while forging a stronger family relationship.





## How can parents decrease stress for middle schoolers?

**Q:** My eighth grader is constantly on the go! With schoolwork, friends and sports competing for his time, I worry that he's too stressed. What can I do?

**A:** To figure out whether your child's stress is too much, ask:

- **Is he always tired** or irritable?
- **Does he have trouble** sleeping or concentrating?
- **Does he seem unhappy?**

If the answers are *yes*, then your child may indeed be overly stressed. To help get his stress level back under control:

- **Don't pretend there's no reason** for him to feel stressed. "I understand how hard you work to do well in all your classes. It's really tough, isn't it?"
- **Help him set reasonable goals.** Is he striving to be a straight-A student, a star swimmer and everyone's best friend? Encourage him to check his expectations.
- **Let him know** that he can always come to you when he feels overwhelmed or unable to cope.
- **Scale back his schedule.** Go over your child's calendar together. You may not be able to limit his school-related responsibilities, but you can rein in his extracurricular activities, if needed.



Source: "Helping Teens Handle Stress," ParentingTeens.com, [www.parentingteens.com/index/Teen+Health/Helping+Teens+Handle+Stress](http://www.parentingteens.com/index/Teen+Health/Helping+Teens+Handle+Stress).

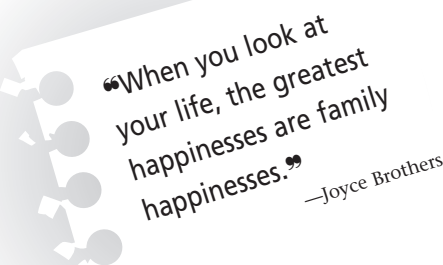


## Are you spending enough time together?

Middle school children still need their parents—a lot—but show it in different ways than they used to. Answer the following questions *yes* or *no* to see if you're adapting the ways you spend time with your middle schooler:

1. **Do you invite** your child to do something that interests her?
2. **Do you look** for opportunities when your child can have your undivided attention?
3. **Do you allow** your child to invite friends to some family activities?
4. **Do you make** an effort to share at least one meal a day with your child?
5. **Do you try** to be happy for your child when she has experiences that boost her independence?

**How did you do?** Each yes answer means you are adapting to and accepting your child's changing needs for time spent together. For each no answer, try that idea from the quiz.



## Encourage volunteering

The middle school years offer a great opportunity to foster citizenship and service. Here are a few ideas:

- **Contact a homeless shelter.** Your child could conduct a neighborhood drive to make lunches for residents.
- **Help the environment.** Your child could volunteer to pick up trash at a local park or school field.
- **Share opinions.** Suggest your child write to the editor of your local paper.

Source: Barbara A. Lewis, *Being Your Best*, ISBN: 1-57542-063-5, Free Spirit Publishing.

## Avoid 'brushing off' your middle schooler's problems

Middle schoolers' problems may seem small to adults. But to your child, her troubles are real and important. Here are tips for talking with your child:

- **Don't say,** "You'll get over it."
- **Ask** how you can help.
- **Remind** her you're there for her.

## Look for chances to learn

Learning happens everywhere—not just in the classroom! To reinforce your child's learning outside the classroom:

- **Show him the real-life importance** of what he's learned. "This recipe calls for half a cup of milk, but we only have a 1/4-cup measure. How can we figure out the right amount?"



- **Respect his ability.** The next time you make a wrong turn, hand him the map and see if he can figure out a solution. If you're stuck on a tough crossword, ask him to chime in. You may be pleasantly surprised!

### Helping Students Learn<sup>®</sup>

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