

Partner with Your Child's School

Middle schoolers may be more independent than they were in elementary school, but that doesn't mean they don't need their parents. Being a part of your youngster's schooling will show her you care and help her succeed. Use these tips to stay involved in her learning—and in the loop with her school.



Keep in touch

The key to creating a good partnership with your child's school is communicating with the principal, teachers, counselors, and other staff. Try these ideas:



- Meet teachers at open house or orientation. Then, stay connected by saying hello at school events, volunteering when possible, and responding promptly to notes and emails.
- Contact staff members before small issues grow into large ones. If your middle grader is struggling with a subject or seems overly frustrated, call the teacher. Ask what you can do to help, and look for solutions together.
- Treat school staff with the same respect you give coworkers and friends. A friendly smile and a calm tone get conversations off on the right foot.
- Let teachers know when your tween is excited about school. *Example:* Send an email saying, "Maddie really enjoyed the speaker on the United Nations. She told us all about him at dinner!" Also, thank teachers for ways they help your child.

Attend conferences

Parent-teacher conferences change in middle school. You may meet with several teachers or with a lead teacher who represents your child's teaching team. What hasn't changed, though, is the importance of attending. These suggestions will help you make the most of your conferences.

Before the conference...

List questions to take along. For instance, you might ask: "What should my child know or be able to do by the end of the year?" "How does he get along with peers and staff members?" "Do you have any concerns about him?" "Where is he doing well?"

Also, share your middle grader's strengths, weaknesses, hobbies, and interests. If the teacher knows he loves baseball, she might suggest a math project using baseball statistics. Consider telling teachers about personal news that affects your child (divorce, a parent who is deployed in the military).



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At the conference...

Listen carefully. Take notes to share with your tween or follow up on later. When it's your turn to talk, mention your most important concerns first, in case time runs out. If you need more time, ask the teacher to schedule another meeting or a phone call. Also, find out the best way to reach her (email, phone, note).

After the conference...

Talk to your middle schooler about what his teacher said. Be sure to include compliments as well as areas to improve. If your tween was at the conference, you can review the points covered. Then, let him know what you and the teacher expect of him (keep track of assignments, arrive at class on time).

Tips for supporting learning

Give your middle grader's learning a boost with these strategies to support him at home.



Ask about classes

Have your tween walk you through steps in a science experiment, notes from a geography lecture, or a summary of a book he's reading in

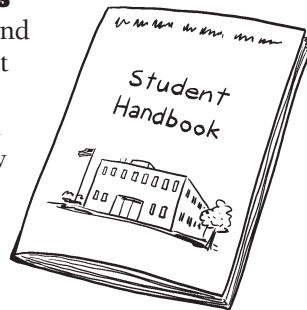
English class. Your interest will show him that his schooling matters to you, and going over the information will reinforce what he is learning.

Stay in the know

Take advantage of ways your school keeps parents informed. With your child, look at her school calendar and write important dates on your own calendar (standardized tests, school pictures). Read school newsletters and websites, and sign up for email lists. If your school offers an online grade service, check your youngster's grades often.

Read your school's policies

Your child needs to respect and follow school rules. The student handbook includes everything you need to know about school policies and procedures. Review the handbook with your middle schooler at the start of the year, and keep it on hand for reference.



Find help

Ask the school counselor about resources like learning labs or peer-to-peer tutoring. Also, teachers may be available before or after school to answer students' questions. And counselors can screen or refer students for depression or

anxiety and direct your family to contacts for housing or food assistance if needed.

Think through classes

Talk to your tween about what courses she would like to take. At this age, she'll have a choice of several electives. Classes like computers and graphic design teach important skills for the workplace. Middle-school foreign-language courses and more advanced math and science classes can lead to college-prep courses in high school.



Make use of special services

If your child has a learning disability or is an English-language learner, stay in touch with the resource teacher. Attend annual meetings if he has an IEP (Individual Education Program). Make sure your tween understands and uses the services available to him like extended time for tests, preferential seating, or extra copies of textbooks.

Stick with it

When you start and finish challenging tasks (cleaning out the attic, finishing a big report at work), you demonstrate hard work and dedication. Point out to your middle grader how good it feels to complete a job that seemed tough at the start. Your example can influence your child's attitude toward her own projects.

Emphasize sleep

Almost two-thirds of school-age children in the United States say they feel tired during the school day. Lack of sleep can cause them to function as much as two grade levels lower. Your tween should wake up refreshed and alert. If that's not happening, try moving his bedtime back 15 minutes at a time until you find one that works.

Middle Years