



## Help your middle schooler evaluate online information

**S**tudents (and adults) get much of their news from online sources. But many of those sources present incorrect or one-sided information. It's harder than ever to tell the difference between unbiased information about a product and a website created to advertise that product. And some sites and social media outlets pretend to present news, but are actually trying to promote a particular point of view.

A Stanford study shows that most students can't tell the difference between a news story and an ad. They also don't know how to tell a real news outlet from one that presents a slanted view of an issue.

Talk with your middle schooler about the importance of verifying whether an online source is credible.

Encourage your child to:

- **Follow links.** Does the link lead to a trustworthy news source? Or does it go to a site that offers only one point of view?
- **Read more.** Sometimes an article will take one sentence from another source out of context. Read the original source for clarification.
- **Look for hidden ads.** An article containing the phrase "sponsored content" isn't news. It's an ad.
- **Check the date.** A source from 2010 could contain accurate material about ancient Greece. However, information about today's economy would require a more recent source.

Source: *Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning*, Stanford University History Education Group.

## A positive body image is linked to school success



The middle school years are a time of great change, including physical change. Kids start to look at their

bodies in a new light. Too often, they decide they don't like what they see.

Studies show that body image has a significant impact on academic performance. To help your child develop a healthy body image:

- **Don't criticize your own body.** Your child may decide that body critiquing is normal.
- **Don't criticize your child's appearance.** Never use words like *chubby* or *scrawny*.
- **Provide facts about puberty.** It is not unusual for a child going through puberty to suddenly gain weight. This is part of the change from a child's body to the body of a young adult.
- **Focus on health, not weight.** A nutritious diet should be something the whole family strives for. So should exercise. The point is to be fit, not thin.

If you think your child may have a weight problem, schedule an appointment with a doctor.

Source: A. Paolini, "School Counselors: Promoting Healthy Body Image Amongst Adolescents," *International Journal of School and Cognitive Psychology*, Longdom Publishing.

# Middle school counselors can support students in many ways



School counselors are striving to help all students be productive learners. They are also trained to help students and families with a wide variety of issues. Reach out to a counselor if your child needs help to:

- **Set academic goals** and select appropriate courses.
- **Develop study skills.**
- **Get back on track** after facing academic problems.
- **Strengthen coping skills** for dealing with conflict or with grief.
- **Make plans for high school** and beyond.
- **Solve problems with friends.** This can include mediation

or counseling sessions for your child or a small group.

- **Explore careers options** and receive guidance on educational paths.
- **Connect with community agencies** that help families in times of crisis.
- **Access additional professionals** for academic and personal support.

Source: "The Essential Role of Middle School Counselors," American School Counselor Association.

**"You can do anything as long as you have the passion, the drive, the focus, and the support."**

—Sabrina Bryan

# Family engagement is just as important in middle school



When your child was younger, you may have volunteered in class, hovered during homework time each night and forged close ties with the school. But now that your child is getting older, your approach to school engagement should evolve, too.

Studies show that middle schoolers benefit from families being involved in their schooling. But, during these years, some things parents do at home are twice as effective at supporting their children's schooling as, say, chaperoning a class trip or volunteering in the classroom.

Research shows that three activities are especially effective:

## 1. Communicate expectations.

When students know their families believe in them and expect them

to work hard, they become more motivated.

## 2. Expand on what's being taught.

Talk about what your child is learning. Then, look for related activities. For example, could your child apply math knowledge to find the most economical route to a destination? This demonstrates the importance and relevance of education.

- ## 3. Talk about the future.
- Does your child want to be an architect, a mechanic or a fashion designer? Help your middle schooler investigate the education and training necessary to prepare for careers of interest. Remind your child that, while plans may change, a solid education is the ticket to achieving any goal.

Source: D. Viadero, "Scholars: Parent-School Ties Should Shift in Teen Years," Education Week.

# Do you teach your child to use social media responsibly?



More and more middle schoolers are becoming active on social media platforms such as YouTube, Tik Tok,

Snapchat and Instagram. Answer *yes* or *no* to the questions below to find out if you are reinforcing safe rules for their use:

- \_\_\_ **1. Do you talk** with your child about the dangers of sharing personal information online?
- \_\_\_ **2. Do you emphasize** the importance of being cautious when accepting "follow" requests or engaging with strangers online?
- \_\_\_ **3. Do you discuss** why your child should not post or share inappropriate photos or hurtful comments?
- \_\_\_ **4. Do you limit** when, where and for how long your child can use social media?
- \_\_\_ **5. Do you make it clear** you will monitor online activities to ensure your child's safety?

## How well are you doing?

Mostly *yes* answers mean you are helping your child use social media safely. For each *no* answer, try that idea from the quiz.

**Middle School Parents**  
still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents  
to Help Their Children.

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: [www.parent-institute.com](http://www.parent-institute.com).

Published monthly September through May.  
Copyright © 2023, The Parent Institute,  
a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.,  
an independent, private agency.  
Equal opportunity employer.

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.  
Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.  
Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

# Community service promotes learning and builds skills



Studies show that students who participate in community service projects have better grades and more interest in school than those who don't. Volunteers tend to have positive feelings about themselves and their place in society.

Students who volunteer:

- **Are less likely to take dangerous risks**, such as doing drugs.
- **Have higher self-esteem**, are more responsible and feel more connected to their community.
- **Have stronger social skills**.
- **Are more likely to stay in school**, have regular attendance and perform well.
- **Learn valuable skills**, such as how to interact with different kinds of people, how to solve problems and how to follow through on commitments.

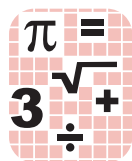
- **Meet interesting people**, such as the heads of agencies or businesses. These contacts can be references for students in the future.

Encourage your child to get involved and reap the benefits of volunteering. Your middle schooler could:

- **Raise awareness for a cause** on social media.
- **Organize a drive** to clean up an outdoor site, such as a local park or playground.
- **Research organizations** to start a community garden.
- **Organize a book drive** and distribute gently used books to local food banks.
- **Collect items for organizations** to distribute to low-income families.
- **Help a new mom** or an elderly neighbor with housework.

Source: "Civic Engagement: Benefits for Youth," Youth.gov.

# Everyday activities can help your child practice math skills



Research shows that the attitude you display about math can affect your child's success with it.

To support your middle schooler, have a positive attitude and look for ways to use math skills every day. Here are a few ideas:

- **For arithmetic**, have your child look at a grocery receipt and add up how much you spent on vegetables. If you pick up dinner, ask your child to calculate the tip.
- **For measurement**, let your child handle any household measurements you need. This might include calculating the area of a room, doubling a recipe, finding out the height of your plants—anything to help your child

feel more competent and comfortable with measurement.

- **For statistics**, encourage your child to read graphs and interpret them. You can find many examples in news articles.
- **For estimation**, have your child help you plan a car trip. Can your child estimate the amount of fuel you'll need or the time you will arrive based on miles per hour and distance traveled? When one of you is doing a job, such as sweeping a room, ask your child to estimate how long it will take. Afterward, compare your child's answer with the actual amount of time it took.

Source: V. Thompson and K. Mayfield-Ingram, *Family Math: The Middle School Years*, Lawrence Hall of Science, University of California at Berkeley.

**Q:** School has been in session for several months, and I feel like I'm not in the loop about things like homework and upcoming tests. How can I stay informed about what my child is doing academically without seeming nosy?

## Questions & Answers

**A:** Remember, it's your right to know how your child is doing in school, so you're not being nosy. You're being an engaged parent!

To stay informed:

- **Talk to your child.** Ask for an update on classes. The more you know about them, the more comfortable you'll feel discussing them. If your child doesn't want to talk about school every day, set aside 15 minutes for a weekly chat. It will give your student a chance to give you an update. And if there's a problem brewing, your child will have a built-in opportunity to tell you about it.
- **Read everything** the school sends home. Check the school's online communication platforms and visit the website. Follow the school and district on social media. These are the most effective ways to stay informed about changes to school policies, etc.
- **Touch base** with your child's teachers. If you haven't had an opportunity to meet them in person, send a note to each and introduce yourself. Include your phone number and email address, and ask them for their contact information.
- **Attend remote and in-person** school events and workshops when you can. It's the perfect way to connect with school staff and other parents—and to find out what's going on at school!



# It Matters: Reading Skills

## Share reading strategies with your child



Middle school students need to know how to read for meaning. They also need to be able to identify the main idea and draw inferences (read between the lines). Studies show that about one in four middle schoolers can't do these things.

To strengthen reading skills, encourage your middle school student to:

- **Ask questions.** Good readers are curious. Before reading an assignment, your child should look it over and review the images and words in bold type. What questions do they raise? While reading, your child should jot down any additional questions that come to mind. After reading, your child should be able to answer those questions.
- **Learn new words.** Your child should write down any unfamiliar words along with their meanings.
- **Find the main idea.** While reading, your child should be able to identify the main idea. What supporting details does the author give to back it up?
- **Work on fluency.** Middle schoolers should be able to read 100-160 words per minute, depending on the difficulty of the text. Look for short articles that will interest your child and time reading. Then, challenge your child to read at a faster pace and still grasp the main idea.

Source: A.G. Boardman, *Effective Instruction for Adolescent Struggling Readers*, Florida Center for Reading Research.

## Three adjustments can keep your middle schooler reading

The elementary school years are in the rearview mirror, and high school looms ahead (maybe even next fall). Keep your middle schooler's progression toward young adulthood in mind as you recommend reading material.

To encourage reading that feeds your child's maturing understanding of the world:

1. **Read news articles everyday.** Tap into your middle schooler's more sophisticated ability to comprehend and care about current events by sharing at least one news article of interest with your child. Challenge your student to share an article each day with you as well.
2. **Start a parent-child book club.** Ask your child to pick a book for the two of you to read and discuss. This demonstrates that you think



reading is important—and that you value your child's ideas.

3. **Find books about kids** your child's age who are making a difference. Middle schoolers are beginning to think about their place in the world and the difference they can make.

## 'Brain movies' improve your child's reading comprehension



Many middle schoolers have a tough time focusing on the words they read. Creating a "brain movie" can help students remember more of the material. To show your child how to make a brain movie:

1. **Choose a poem or story** that is filled with sensory-rich language. Try the poem "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere" by Longfellow.
2. **Find images online** that set the scene and show them to your child. (The Old North Church still stands in Boston.)

3. **Read the passage aloud.** While you're reading, ask your middle schooler to imagine what it would look like as a movie.

4. **Ask your child to draw** a picture or two of a favorite scene. Then, suggest this same approach for assigned reading. Help your child imagine the scene before reading about George Washington. How cold was it at Valley Forge?

Making mental images will help your child pay attention to details and remember more of the reading.

Source: D. Wilson and M. Conyers, "Brain Movies: When Readers Can Picture It, They Understand It," Edutopia.