



This five-step process helps middle schoolers solve problems

When your middle schooler faces a challenge, it can be tempting to step in and provide the solution. A more effective approach is to equip your child with the skills to solve problems independently. This not only builds confidence but also prepares your middle schooler for future challenges.

Share this five-step method to help your child think problems through:

1. **Define the problem.** The first step is to get a clear picture of what's going on. Encourage your child to state the problem without getting sidetracked by emotions.
2. **Brainstorm solutions.** Once the problem is defined, have your child list possible solutions. Don't let your child get bogged down in analyzing

them yet. Remind your child there are often more than two options.

3. **Evaluate the options.** Now that there are several potential solutions, your child needs to weigh the pros and cons of each. Which solution seems especially strong?
4. **Make a plan of action.** Your child should choose the "best" solution and create a plan to carry it out. Let your child follow the plan independently, but offer support and guidance when necessary.
5. **Reassess the situation.** How is the plan working? Is it helping your child solve the problem or reach the goal? If yes, wonderful! If not, suggest that your child go back to the "evaluating" step and try another solution.

Try strategies that improve overall wellness



Many families are busy and stressed—which can have a negative impact on children's health and

grades. While it's nearly impossible to lead a stress-free life these days, you can work to make your home a haven away from the daily grind.

To improve your family's overall wellness:

- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories on a regular basis.
- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach family members to take deep breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music whenever they are feeling stressed.
- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report at least one good thing (no matter how small) that happened that day. Try to do this during a family meal.
- **Have everyone pitch in.** Chores go so much more quickly when everyone works together. Have a family chore time and then reward yourselves by doing something fun as a family.

Be absolute when speaking to your child about alcohol & drugs



As your child gets older, you may find that some topics—curfew, free time and chores—are open for negotiation. Safety

issues, however, should not be up for discussion. These include vaping, alcohol use and drug abuse.

Follow these guidelines:

- **Be explicit**, but give reasons. “Underage drinking, illicit drug use and vaping are all unacceptable. They are harmful to your health. You are never allowed to participate in these behaviors.”
- **Do not expect your child** to experiment with drugs or alcohol. Yes, many young people do. But plenty of others do not! It is not a rite of passage. One experiment can harm your child. Say, “I expect you not to take that risk.”

- **Restrict contact** with friends who drink or use drugs. If you know a friend of your child’s drinks or uses drugs, don’t allow your middle schooler to socialize with this person outside of school without supervision. Establish clear consequences for breaking this rule. Always make sure your child understands that the reason for this rule is their health. Experts agree that teens who spend time with others who use drugs or alcohol are more likely to use them themselves.

“By the time they’re in 12th grade, 36.8% of teens have tried illicit drugs.”

—National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics

Encourage your child to use a journal to plan for the future



It’s not realistic to expect middle schoolers to know what they want to do for the rest of their lives. But it is appropriate for them

to pay attention to what they like and what they don’t, what they are good at and what they struggle with. Noticing and thinking about these things now gives your child a head start on preparing for the future.

One effective way for middle schoolers to get to know themselves better is to keep a journal. They can write about what they think as well as what they do.

Suggest that your child to use the journal to think through answers to questions such as:

- *What are my strengths in school?*
- *What are my weaknesses in school?*
- *What do I love doing outside school?*

- *What am I good at doing outside school?*
- *What do I like to learn about or would I like to learn more about?*
- *What is something new I want to try this year?*
- *What is important to me right now?*
- *What is a goal I am working toward right now?*
- *Do I prefer to work with others or alone?*
- *Am I happier when I am indoors or outdoors?*
- *What have I done in my life that I am most proud of?*

Encourage your child to update the journal regularly. The answers are likely to change—and that’s OK. Help your child think more about the things that stay the same. These trends could provide clues to future success.

Are you staying involved in your child’s life?



Some middle schoolers seem to close more than their bedroom doors. They also shut families out of important parts

of their lives. Here’s a quiz that will help you open those doors—and keep communication flowing. See how many questions you can answer:

1. **Can you name the students** who eat lunch with your child? Write one name: _____.
2. **Do you sometimes listen** to your child’s music? Name a favorite song or group: _____.
3. **Do you know the names** of your child’s teachers? Name a favorite teacher: _____.
4. **Do you know** who your child texts regularly? Name two friends: _____ and _____.
5. **Do you discuss** world events that may be worrying your child? Name one of your child’s current concerns: _____.

How well are you doing?

Share your answers with your child and talk about them. Then, see if your child can answer some similar questions about you.

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Take opportunities to reinforce learning outside the classroom



The more you can connect what your middle schooler is learning in school to the world beyond school, the more you nurture a desire to learn.

To support learning at home:

- **Have your child teach you** a thing or two. Find out what your child is studying at school, and ask for an explanation. When students “retell” the things they are learning, they reinforce those things in their own minds.
- **Demonstrate its value.** If your middle schooler just finished tackling fractions in math, head to the kitchen. Show your child the real-life usefulness of fractions. “This recipe calls for half a cup of milk, but we only have a 1/3-cup measurer. How can we figure out the right amount?”
- **Expose your child to new things.** Every meaningful experience your child has—from grocery shopping to a museum visit—has an impact on learning. On your next outing, challenge your child to connect the experience to something learned in school.
- **Put knowledge into action.** Let your child use skills to help you. For example, the next time you make a wrong turn somewhere, have your child look at a navigation app to get you back on track.
- **Encourage your child to use logic.** Are you working on a puzzle or riddle? Ask your child to help out.

Have a discussion with your middle schooler about bullying



Experts say that middle school is the prime time for bullying. Studies show that nasty behavior can even boost kids’ popularity.

The bullies of today aren’t just your typical schoolyard bullies. They also include the:

- **Verbally abusive bully** who calls people names and spreads rumors.
- **Social bully** who gets others to exclude or reject someone.
- **Cyberbully** who posts cruel or embarrassing comments and photos on social media or in group chats.

Talk to your middle schooler about the importance of taking a stand against all forms of bullying.

If your child is being bullied:

- **Discuss it gently.** Your child may be scared or embarrassed. Make it clear that what is happening is not your child’s fault.

- **Be supportive.** Assure your child that you will help resolve the problem.
- **Ask for help.** A teacher or guidance counselor might have a solution you haven’t thought of.

If your child is the one bullying:

- **Say that you will not tolerate** bullying behavior.
- **Ask what your child** was trying to accomplish. How might your child meet that goal in the future without hurting people?
- **Help your child figure out** how to make amends to the person.

If your child witnesses bullying:

- **Role-play ways to react.** Your child could say, “That’s not OK,” or walk away with the person being targeted.
- **Tell your child to report** it to school staff or you immediately.

Source: *Bullying: Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program* Resource Kit, The Parent Institute.

Q: The first half of the school year didn’t go so well for my seventh grader. Grades were lower than we both would’ve liked. How can I make sure my child does better during the second half?

Questions & Answers

A: Together, talk about how the new calendar year is a starting over point. To help your child make a fresh start, adopt—or recommit to—positive school habits. Here’s how:

- **Set goals.** You can’t expect your middle schooler to turn the school year around overnight. But you can help your student set reasonable, attainable goals. For instance, if your child earned all C’s last grading period, the goal might be to bring at least some of the grades up to B’s.
- **Schedule study time.** Has your child been slacking off on finishing assignments? Insist on a regular work time. If your child is freshest right after school, then make that study time. But if your child does better with a little downtime first, consider an hour break before cracking open the books.
- **Enforce bedtime.** Does your child always stay up for “just one more episode”? If so, there’s a chance your student is not getting enough sleep. Studies show that sleepy students don’t perform as well in school, so insist that your child head to bed (without digital devices) at a reasonable hour.
- **Monitor progress.** Don’t wait until your child fails a quiz to discover there’s a problem. Instead, review schoolwork and touch base with teachers.

It Matters: Effective Discipline

Three strategies can eliminate rude back talk



Parenting a middle schooler can feel like walking on eggshells. Some days, it seems like no matter what

you say, you'll be met with a rude or sarcastic comeback. It's completely normal to feel angry or frustrated, but try to avoid getting swept up in the emotion. Instead, consider this approach:

1. **Use "I-messages."** Anything that begins "you always" or "you never" or even just "you" may sound like an accusation to your child. And nothing will gear a middle schooler up for a fight faster than that.

Instead, put the emphasis on *your* feelings. Say, "I get frustrated when the recycling piles up," instead of, "You never take the recycling to the curb!"

2. **Become a broken record.** Don't get into a debate about *why* your middle schooler can't go to a concert without an adult. Instead, repeat yourself. "The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts." If your child continues to complain, respond again, "The rule in our house is no unchaperoned concerts."

3. **Say something nice,** then walk away. There are times when you just won't be able to get any further with your child. Try, "I know you're upset, and that makes me sad for you. But you're being so rude to me that I can't talk to you right now. I'll be happy to discuss things when we are both calm."

Positive discipline encourages appropriate behavior

Establishing effective discipline for a middle schooler can be tough, but experts agree that a positive, proactive approach is key. By focusing on what to do, rather than what not to do, you can create a more supportive environment for your child.

Here are some positive ways to approach discipline:

- **Be clear and specific.** Avoid using vague language like, "Try to finish your chores today." Instead, say, "Finish your chores today." When you need to correct behavior, offer specific guidance. For example, "It is your responsibility to remember your chores."
- **Focus on desired behavior.** Talk about the actions you want to see. Say "Speak in a respectful tone," instead of "How many times have I told you not to use that tone?"
- **State expectations directly.** Threats like "Do your homework



now or you don't get dessert" give your child the option to choose a punishment over a desired action. Instead, clearly state the required action without the threat. "You need to finish your homework before dinner." This leaves no room for negotiation and emphasizes the expectation.

Establish family rules that promote respectful behavior



The way children interact with their family members lays the groundwork for how they act toward others.

By establishing rules for acceptable behavior, you'll be creating a more peaceful, respectful climate at home—and at school.

Encourage family members to:

- **Ask before taking** or borrowing someone else's property.
- **Share.** A box of cereal is for everyone in the family.

- **Accept** that no one always gets their own way. Family members have to take turns.
- **Use a polite tone** when speaking.
- **Think of others.** Ask about their day. Offer support or praise when appropriate.

Don't tolerate behavior such as:

- **Physical violence** in any form.
- **Screaming** and yelling.
- **Insulting** other family members.
- **Stealing** from family members.
- **Treating** family property with disrespect.