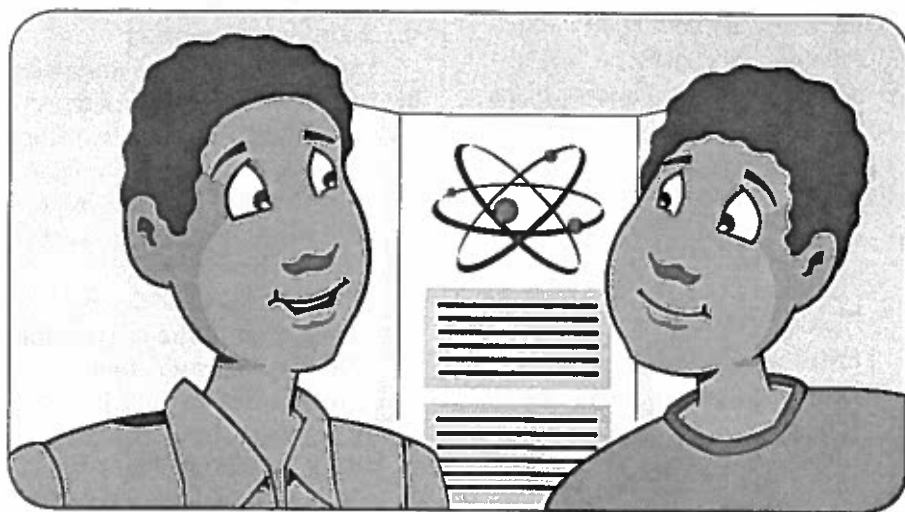


# Middle School Parents<sup>®</sup>

*still make the difference!*



## Give your middle schooler's critical thinking skills a boost

**A**s your child progresses through school, his teachers will expect higher-level thinking. Instead of just giving an answer, he will need to give examples to support it.

You can help your child practice this type of critical thinking if you:

- **Slow down.** Don't rush through every conversation with your child. Instead, take time to really discuss various topics—from the upcoming science fair to the weather. The more you explore things in depth, the more opportunities you'll be giving him to think.
- **Don't swoop in.** When your middle schooler is struggling with a decision, don't be quick to answer it for him. Instead, give him a chance to mull it over on his own. If he asks, "Which sport

should I try out for?" get him to think it over carefully: "Which one do I most enjoy? Is one more challenging than another?"

- **Ask him to support his decision.** When your child reaches a decision about something, have him put his thought process into words. "I'm excited that you picked basketball. Tell me why you chose that sport." By explaining how he made the decision, he'll be clarifying it in his own head.
- **Withhold judgment.** You may not agree with your child's way of thinking on every topic, but but you should still respect it.

Source: A.J. LeStorti, "Developing Thinking in the Gifted," The Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education, [niswc.com/mid\\_thinkskills](http://niswc.com/mid_thinkskills).

## Share effective note-taking tips with your child



Taking class notes is an important skill for middle school success—and it's one your child will use

even more in high school.

Share these note-taking tips with your child:

- **Don't write down every word.** Encourage your child to come up with her own system of shortening words, using symbols for key words, and highlighting phrases the teacher emphasizes.
- **Edit notes after class.** While the information is still fresh in your child's mind, she should read over her notes and expand on them where necessary. She can even try to write a short summary of the most important points covered in that day's class. If she is unsure of something she wrote down, she should ask her teacher for clarification.
- **Study notes.** Studying her notes each day will help your child gain a true understanding of the material so she is prepared for the next class or test.

Source: J.R. Ban, *Parents Assuring Student Success*, National Educational Service.

## A peaceful home environment promotes academic success



Your middle schooler faces academic and social pressures, and you and other family members also have responsibilities that can create stress. Unfortunately, all of this stress can have a negative impact on your child's grades.

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

To help your entire family feel mentally and emotionally well:

- **Encourage laughter.** Laughter should be a part of each day. Have everyone share favorite funny shows, movies, jokes and stories.
- **Share stress-relief strategies.** Teach your child to take deep

breaths, go for a walk or turn on some relaxing music whenever he feels stressed.

- **Remember the big three:** good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise. These are the keys to wellness.
- **Share good things.** Every day, have each family member report at least one good thing (no matter how small) that happened. Try to do this during a family meal.
- **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.

Source: A. Marks, M.D. and B. Rothbart, M.S.W., *Healthy Teens, Body and Soul: A Parent's Complete Guide*, Fireside.

## Four strategies can reduce your middle schooler's test anxiety



Does your middle schooler's stomach do flip-flops the night before a huge test? Does yours? Relax!

Although you can't take the test for your child, there are lots of ways you can help her get ready.

To help your child prepare:

1. **Chat with her.** Ask your middle schooler why she's so nervous about the test. Is the material too hard? Does she not understand it? Sometimes just getting her concerns off her chest can make the test less scary.
2. **Help her make a study schedule.** If the test is next week, encourage her to set aside study time on each of the days leading up to it. This may keep her from cramming the night before.

3. **Create a comfy study spot.** Carve out a quiet, well-lit place at home where your middle schooler can study. Make sure she has all the supplies she needs—including a healthy snack—when she sits down to hit the books.
4. **Remind her of her strengths.** "I know you're worried about the big science test, but remember how well you did on the last one?" Focus on the positives.

Later, when your child receives her test grade, talk about it. If she did well, celebrate her success. If she didn't, calmly go over what went wrong and talk about how she can improve next time.

Source: "Helping Your Child with Test-Taking: Helping Your Child Succeed in School," U.S. Department of Education, [nswc.com/mid\\_testanxiety](http://nswc.com/mid_testanxiety).

**Q:** I caught my daughter copying all the answers from her friend's homework. She said it was no big deal. What should I do?

### Questions & Answers

**A:** Unfortunately, middle school is a time when many students turn to cheating. At this age, students are highly aware of how they compare to their peers and they may view cheating as a way to keep up.

In one study, conducted by the Josephson Institute of Ethics, 90% of middle schoolers admitted to copying a friend's homework and 75% admitted to cheating on tests.

Cheating is very serious. But you can keep your daughter from turning one mistake into a more severe problem. Here's how:

- **Send a clear message to your child that cheating is wrong.** It's dishonest and it robs her of learning the skills and information she'll need for success in life.
- **Talk to your daughter and ask her why she cheated.** Is she afraid of disappointing you or getting punished for less-than-perfect grades?
- **Don't put too much emphasis on grades.** Instead, stress the importance of effort. Let your child know that mistakes are learning opportunities and you will love her no matter what.
- **Help your daughter develop her study habits—so she can make better grades on her own.**
- **Find help if your child has fallen behind.** Her teacher may know a student who would be willing to tutor your child a few hours a week.
- **Arrange for you and your child to meet with her teacher and counselor.**