

Parent Involvement, Middle School Style

Did you know that when you're involved in your child's schooling, he's likely to earn higher grades and behave better in class? Participating can be as simple as talking with your youngster about his day or attending school events. Here are easy ways to take an active role in your middle schooler's education—starting today.

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Support for learning

Talk to your tween about what he is learning in school. Then, look for ways to show interest. For example, ask him to explain how to do algebra equations. If he's studying ancient civilizations, keep an eye out for local museum exhibits on Egyptian pharaohs or the Mayans. When he does a chemistry unit in science, let him experiment at home with ingredients like vinegar, baking soda, oil, salt, and lemon juice. Or if he's in band or chorus, offer to listen to him rehearse. Your support will encourage him to do his best.

School events

Going to school events and parent meetings lets your child know you care about her school life. Try to attend plays, games, art exhibits, and other after-school events regularly. You might also work the ticket booth at a game or help with an in-school event like International Day. *Note:* Even if your middle grader acts embarrassed or prefers to sit with friends, she will appreciate your participation. Research shows that kids like having their parents around even if they say they don't.



Everyday tips

Here are eight practical ideas for staying involved in your middle grader's education.

1. Talk with your child about what she did in school each day.
2. Get to know all of your tween's teachers. Attend back-to-school nights, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences.
3. Ask to see graded tests and assignments. Praise good grades, recognize progress, and discuss ways to improve.
4. Check daily to see that your youngster finishes her homework and projects.
5. Contact teachers with questions or concerns. Call with good news, too (*example:* your child enjoyed a particular unit).
6. Offer to volunteer. You could lend a hand in the library or school office, chaperone field trips, or make phone calls from home.
7. Encourage your middle schooler to read frequently. Take her to the library, and keep a variety of books, newspapers, and magazines in your house and car.
8. Review report cards carefully. Help your child set goals for the next marking period.



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Relationships with teachers

Stay in touch with your youngster's teachers throughout the school year. First, find out how to contact them. Do they prefer phone calls, written notes, or emails? Also, keep them informed about events in your child's life. Changes like divorce, death, a parent's military deployment, or a new sibling can affect your tween's schoolwork.

Parent experts

Share a special talent with one of your middle schooler's classes. The students will enjoy learning something new, and the teacher will appreciate your participation. For example, if you like photography, you could bring your photos to her art class and explain your techniques. Or if you work in the financial field, show a math class how to create a family budget. *Tip:* Encourage other parents to share their talents, too. Your child may feel more comfortable having you visit if she sees her friends' parents there as well.



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Inbox and outbox

Place two trays or shallow boxes by the front door or in your kitchen. Let your youngster label them "In" and "Out." Begin a daily routine for him to go through his backpack when he gets home and put permission slips, school notices, and graded schoolwork in the inbox. Then, read the papers, fill out forms, and go over quizzes and papers with your middle grader. Talk about upcoming events, such as a fund-raiser or class trip. Finally, put anything that needs to go back to school in the outbox, and he can return it to his backpack. This system will create a stress-free way to stay in touch with what's happening at school and take care of paperwork efficiently.



Foreign language help

If you speak a language other than English, consider offering to help students and parents who also speak the language. Your tween will be proud to know you are helping out like this. You might meet monthly with a few students to read a book together or help them study—just hearing an adult speak their native language can make students feel more at home. Or you could volunteer to call parents and invite them to upcoming school events. You may even be able to translate at school events.

Parent-teacher conferences

Try these strategies for getting the most out of your next parent-teacher conference.

Before the conference

- Look over your child's recent work to review his grades and note any concerns.
- Ask your youngster about school. What are his favorite subjects? What is he having trouble with? How does he get along with teachers?
- List your middle grader's strengths and weaknesses. Note things that will help teachers know your child better, such as his hobbies or any stress he is under.
- Jot down questions you want to ask. If your tween will attend the conference, he should write questions, too.

At the conference

- Make a positive impression. Walk in with a smile, and be on time. *Tip:* Arrange child care for younger children so you can focus on the conference.



- Listen carefully to what the teachers tell you. If you don't understand something, ask them to explain.
- Ask the questions you have prepared. Also, share information about your middle grader—ways he seems to learn best, what excites him about school, and what gives him trouble.
- Work with the teachers to develop an action plan that will help your tween succeed. Talk about how best to monitor his progress. Plan to follow up with the teachers.

After the conference

- Write the teachers a note or an email thanking them for their time and suggestions.
- Discuss the conference with your child. If he didn't attend with you, tell him what the teachers said, and outline the plan you and the teachers came up with.
- Keep track of his progress, and stay in touch with teachers.

Middle Years