

Middle School Parents[®]

March 2008
Vol. 11, No. 7

Region 10 Education Service Center is proud to provide this service for you!

still make the difference!



Prepare to get the most out of your parent-teacher conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are often brief. To make the most of the time you spend with your preteen's teacher:

- **Chat with your preteen** ahead of time. Does she have any concerns about this teacher or the class? Find out before you head into the conference.
- **Make a list.** Don't assume you'll remember everything you want to talk about with the teacher. Write a few notes about the topics you'd like to cover.
- **Start on a high note.** Begin the conference by telling the teacher something positive. "My child loved the demonstration you did last week." An upbeat start may make the meeting go more smoothly.

- **Don't be defensive.** If the teacher has concerns about your preteen, don't get angry. Instead, ask for specific examples of the problem.
- **Develop a plan.** If your preteen's teacher mentions a certain problem, ask her for ideas on solving it. The plan should include things she can do in class and you can do at home.
- **Arrange for a follow-up.** Before ending the conference, make plans to touch base with the teacher in a few weeks. This will give you a chance to discuss whether the problem has gotten better.

Source: "Making Parent-Teacher Conferences Work for Your Child," The National Parent Teacher Association, www.pta.org/archive_article_details_1118085766734.html.

Teach your child life skills to build responsibility



Learning life skills will give your middle schooler a sense of mastery and teach him to take responsibility

for himself. Let your child practice these skills now, so that he will be a pro by the time he's on his own.

Teach your preteen to:

- **Prepare a basic meal.** He can handle simple cooking tasks such as boiling a pot of pasta, making a hamburger or preparing a salad.
- **Do laundry.** Teach your child how to wash, dry, fold and put away his own clothes.
- **Use the telephone.** Wait—you're thinking—he's great at that! No, not just to chat with his friends. He should know how to call and make appointments, schedule a repair person or make a reservation at a restaurant.
- **Stay on a budget.** Consider giving your child an allowance, along with a list of items and services he needs to purchase himself. Don't bail him out if he runs out of money—this is how he will learn to budget.

Source: Linda Sonna, *The Everything Parenting a Teenager Book*, ISBN: 1-59337-035-0 (Adams Media Corp., 1-800-872-5627, www.everything.com).

Give your middle schooler a process for making decisions



Most middle schoolers like to “go with the flow” and often make snap decisions as issues arise. Help your child make

better decisions by encouraging him to follow this five-step process:

1. **Take your time.** The more important a decision is, the more time you should spend considering it.
2. **Be informed.** Decisions are usually based on the facts of a situation. Find out as much as you can.

3. **List your choices.** Write down the “pros” and “cons” of each choice.
4. **Study your list.** Think about consequences. Ask yourself, “What would happen if ... ?”
5. **Make your choice.** Later, decide if your choice was correct. If not, think of what you might do differently next time.

Source: Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith and Pamela Espeland, *What Teens Need to Succeed: Proven, Practical Ways to Shape Your Own Future*, ISBN: 1-57542-027-9 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-800-735-7323, www.freespirit.com).

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



Your child is in middle school, and it is not necessary—or even realistic—to expect her to know what she wants to do for

the rest of her life. But it is realistic for her to have some sense of what she likes and what she doesn't, what she is good at and what she struggles with.

Dr. Mel Levine, one of America's foremost experts on learning, says that it's important for children to begin thinking this way once they get to sixth grade. He says a child who knows herself has a good head start on the future.

Keeping a journal can be a great way for your child to get to know herself better. In the journal, have your child answer these questions:

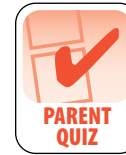
- “What are my strengths in school?” and “What are my weaknesses in school?”
- “What do I love doing outside school?” and “What am I good at doing outside school?” Dr. Levine calls these special areas of strength and interest “affinities” and says they are key to a child's success.

- “What do I like to learn about or would I like to learn more about?”
- “What is important to me right now?” “Do I prefer to work with others or alone?” “Am I happier indoors or outdoors?”

You child should update the journal every few months. Differences will happen and are important to note. But look for things that stay the same—these trends could provide clues to your child's future success.

Source: Mel Levine, M.D., *Ready or Not, Here Life Comes*, ISBN: 0-7432-6225-5 (Simon & Schuster, 1-800-223-2336, www.simonsays.com).

Are you modeling respectful behavior for your preteen?



You can lecture your child about respect all day. But when the end of the day comes, he'll learn about respect from

watching you. Take this quiz to see if your behavior sets the example for your child to learn to respect you, himself, his teachers and others.

Answer *yes* for something you almost always do. Answer *no* for something you rarely do.

- ___ 1. **I treat my child** and others with honesty. This includes admitting my mistakes when I make them.
- ___ 2. **I am consistent** with my child regarding our household rules, my belief in his education and most of all, my love for him.
- ___ 3. **I show consideration** for the needs and wants of my child and others.
- ___ 4. **I maintain self-control** with my child. I find other ways to vent my anger rather than on him.
- ___ 5. **I keep in mind** that I am the adult and that my child may imitate me even if he swears he never will.

How well are you doing?

If you answered mostly *yes*, you are illustrating a life of respect for your child. Mostly *no*? Check the quiz for suggestions on how to model respect.

Middle School Parents

still make the difference!

Practical Ideas for Parents to Help Their Children. ISSN: 1523-1283

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 our website: www.parent-institute.com.

Published monthly September through May by The Parent Institute®, a division of NIS, Inc., an independent, private agency. Equal opportunity employer. Copyright © 2008 NIS, Inc.

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D. *Managing Editor*: Pat Hodgdon. *Editor*: Rebecca Miyares. *Writers*: Maria Koklanaris & Holly Smith. *Illustrator*: Joe Mignella.

Have an idea to share?

The editors of *Parents Still make the difference!* pay \$25 for each original idea published (in English, please), and you will receive credit in the article.

Send ideas to *Parents Still make the difference!* Editorial Staff, P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474 (or www.parent-institute.com/ideas/pmd). Materials sent cannot be returned.

Dole out consequences that are reasonable, respectful & related



The preteen years are full of conflict and growing pains—plus lots of good stuff, too—so maintaining firm, consistent

discipline can be especially tough.

Although there's no "one perfect way" to discipline, there are ways to make sure your approach is logical and fair. Ask yourself whether the consequences you dole out are:

- **Reasonable.** Do you treat your child fairly when he misbehaves, or do you blow a fuse and make empty threats? If you say he's "never going to watch TV again" because he messed up, you're being unrealistic. Consequences must make sense in order to be effective.

- **Respectful.** When you make a dig at your preteen while disciplining him—"If you weren't so lazy, I wouldn't have to yell at you!"—you're being hurtful. Instead, focus on the misbehavior and its consequences. Don't hurl insults.
- **Related.** When your child gets in trouble, be sure the consequence relates to the crime. If he refuses to put his dirty clothes in the hamper, the consequence could be that you don't do his laundry.

Following these "Three R's" should help you discipline your preteen more effectively.

Source: Teri Brown, "The Consequence System: Use Opportunity and Responsibility to Parent Your Preteen," [iParenting.com, http://preteenerstoday.com/resources/articles/consequencsystem.htm](http://preteenerstoday.com/resources/articles/consequencsystem.htm).

Really listen to your middle schooler, even if you disagree



Sure, you can *hear* what your middle schooler is saying. But are you really *listening* to her? Well, she wishes you would. Not

only is listening a sign of respect, it'll also make your child feel that you care about what she's saying.

To show your middle schooler that you're paying attention to her, try to be an active listener:

- **Ask questions** about the things she's saying. "Really? What happened next?"
- **Be sure you're hearing her correctly.** "What I think you're saying is ..."

Also, keep reminding yourself that "listening to" isn't the same as "agreeing with." In fact, you may completely disagree with what's coming out of your child's mouth, but you can show courtesy if you:

- **Hear her out** and don't cut her off.
- **Restate what you heard** and have her confirm whether you heard her correctly.
- **Tell her that you listened** to her point; however, you still don't agree with her.

Be prepared for your middle schooler to get upset if you disagree with her. That's just part of life with a preteen. But know, too, that you're doing the right thing by paying attention to what she's saying.

Source: "Parenting Pre-Teens: Listening Is An Active Process," [Raisingkids.co.uk](http://raisingkids.co.uk), www.raisingkids.co.uk/9_13/pre_htp09.asp.

"Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you."

—Robert Fulghum

Q: My seventh grader insists that *everybody* is going somewhere for spring break. I have taken the week off from work, but we're staying home. How can we make the most of our week off without breaking the bank (or constantly arguing)?

Questions & Answers

A: Chances are, "everybody" won't really be heading to the Bahamas. But they might as well be—at least in your child's mind. And while you don't need to compete with her friends when it comes to spring break, it's wise to plan a few entertaining things to do together during your week off.

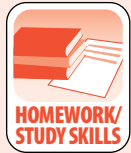
Here are some inexpensive, yet fun, ideas to get you started:

- **Become tourists at home.** What draws visitors to your region? Is it a first-rate museum? A beautiful state park? Whatever it is, you probably don't spend much time enjoying it. During spring break, though, try seeing your hometown with fresh eyes. Grab your child and explore your area's sites together.
- **Host a movie night.** See if your child can—surprise!—find a friend who's also home during spring break. Invite her over for pizza, popcorn and movies.
- **Shadow a professional.** Does your preteen love animals? See if you can arrange a day where she can "work" at a nearby veterinary clinic.
- **Make one day "vacation day."** For 24 hours, give your child a break from chores and rules (within reason). Let her sleep in, stay up late or eat extra dessert.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

It Matters: Test Preparation

Make test taking more successful with organization



Talk to your middle schooler about “organization” and he probably thinks about keeping his room neat.

But organization is also a building block for his academic success.

It will be hard for him to do well on a test if he doesn't know when the test is, what to study or the materials he needs.

In middle school, your child will have to keep track of all this information—multiplied by the number of classes he is taking. Few people can do this in their heads. He needs to create a checklist and refer to it often.

For upcoming tests, your child should write down the answers to these questions:

- What is the class?
- When is the test?
- What are the topics?
- What are the relevant pages in the textbook?
- What materials do I need to study—textbook, notes, study guide?

Your child can also create a study schedule. He should consider:

- **How many days** in advance to begin studying.
- **How much time** to devote to studying each night.
- **How well he knows each topic**—will it take heavy studying or will a review do it?
- **What (if anything) to do** besides reading—take notes from the book or make flash cards.

Source: Ron Fry, *Get Organized*, ISBN: 1-56414-233-7 (Career Press, 1-800-227-3371, www.careerpress.com).

Combat test anxiety by using strategies before, during tests

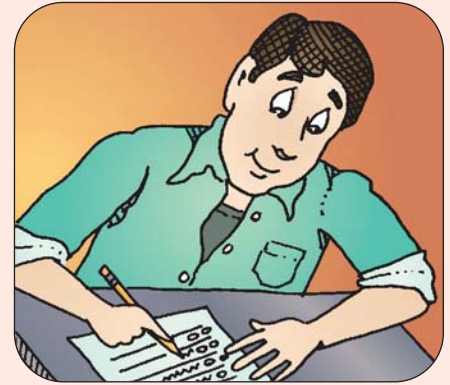
Does the thought of a big test make your preteen's palms sweat? Help him rein in anxiety and ace the next big exam.

Before test day, remind your preteen to:

- **Study for several days.** Never cram the night before.
- **Get plenty of exercise** and sleep.
- **Think positively** about the test.

During the test itself, he should:

- **Read the directions carefully.** If he doesn't understand something, he should tell his teacher right away.
- **Jot any memorized formulas, etc.,** in the margins. That way, he won't worry about forgetting them halfway through the test.



- **Answer easy questions** first to boost his confidence.
- **Ignore how quickly** other students finish and focus only on his own work.

Source: “Reducing Test Taking Anxiety,” TestTakingTips.com, www.testtakingtips.com/anxiety/index.htm.

Help your preteen consider test mistakes as learning experiences



Your child probably knows that a test is an assessment of what she has learned. But does she know that a test is also a *way* to learn? Unless your child is perfect, each test should be a learning experience for her.

Your middle schooler will learn the most from tests if she:

- **Jots down thoughts** about the test as soon as possible after taking it. What did she struggle with? What does she think she knew best?
- **Keeps the test** when the teacher hands it back! Some teachers require students to correct their tests. If her teacher doesn't, she

can correct it herself at home. She can use it as a study guide for midterms or finals.

- **Figures out** what kinds of mistakes she made. Were they careless errors? That is a warning to pay closer attention when marking answers. Were they errors representing a lack of knowledge? She can come up with ways to study more effectively next time, by taking notes from the textbook or making a study guide.

Source: William R. Luckie & Wood Smethurst, *Study Power: Study Skills to Improve Your Learning & Your Grades*, ISBN: 1-57129-046-X (Brookline Books, 1-800-666-2665, www.brooklinebooks.com).