

Middle School Parents[®]

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Chambersburg Area School District

still make the difference!

Keep your middle schooler safe while surfing online



Your preteen uses the Internet to do homework, chat with friends and just have fun. But do you know what else she's doing online? Since middle schoolers can often be moody and secretive, it can be tough to get your preteen to open up and talk about what she sees and does online.

Besides, she may feel like she's old enough to handle whatever strange, scary things she encounters online. Or she may keep those things secret because she doesn't want to feel like a baby by telling you about them. Either way, it's vital that you keep tabs on her Internet use and that you know what she's doing in cyberspace.

Here are some signs that your preteen may be at risk for online trouble:

- **She spends lots of time logged on**, particularly at night. Kids who spend a great deal of time online (especially in chat rooms) are more likely to fall victim to online predators.
- **You discover pornography on her computer.** Predators often lure kids into sexual relationships by sending them pornography. And

even if no one sent her the images, the fact that you found them tells you she's visiting inappropriate sites.

- **She shuts off the monitor** as soon as you enter the room.
- **She withdraws from the family.** Although some "pulling away" is normal for preteens, a total withdrawal isn't.

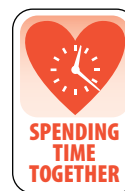
To keep your preteen from getting into serious trouble online:

- **Talk to her** about Internet dangers.
- **Keep the family computer** in the living room or other place, not in your child's bedroom.
 - **Use filtering software** to prevent her from visiting sites that are inappropriate.
 - **Spend time** with her online. Get to know her favorite sites.
- **Limit her computer usage.**
 - **Teach her** never to give out personal information online.
- **Insist that chat rooms** (if you decide to let her enter them) be kid-friendly and are monitored regularly.

Source: "A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety," Federal Bureau of Investigation, www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm.



Aim for a balance between family life & privacy



Staying close with your child through the preteen years is so important. But it can also be difficult. You want your child to talk to you and do things with the

family. Yet he craves alone time—or time with his friends—more than ever.

Still, time together is not impossible; it just takes a little more work and creativity. Consider these ideas:

- **Talk with your child** about your priorities for family time. For example, everyone is home for dinner three nights a week. Then allow him to sometimes make alternate plans for lower-priority family time, such as running errands with you.
- **Find a space for your child** at home. If he doesn't have his own room, at least give him a corner of the couch where he can curl up uninterrupted for a while.
- **Ask your child** what he would like to do with the family. Let him have his choice once a week or so. Ask him if he would like to further an activity by making an agenda.
- **Express an interest** in activities your child usually does alone. Don't force yourself into them. Just say something like, "What's your favorite song on that new CD?"

Source: Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, *Talking to Tweens: Getting It Right Before It Gets Rocky with Your 8- to 12-Year Old*, ISBN: 0-7382-1019-6 (Da Capo Press, 1-800-255-1514, www.dacapopress.com).

Admit your mistakes when it comes to unfair discipline



You're the parent, but that doesn't mean you're perfect—or that you won't make mistakes when disciplining your preteen. The trick is to own up to these mistakes and fix them. Doing so shows your child that you respect him and want to do what's right.

If you've messed up when disciplining your preteen (such as by falsely accusing him of—and then punishing him for—something), take these steps to make amends:

1. **Apologize.** Don't hide your mistake, acknowledge it. "I shouldn't have accused you of cheating on your math test without knowing all the facts first. I'm sorry."
2. **Let go of the guilt.** Every parent makes mistakes, so don't dwell on

the fact that you treated your preteen unfairly. Instead, accept it, repair it and move on.

3. **Review what happened.** What made you accuse and punish your preteen in the first place? Why did you act before knowing all the facts? Analyze what you did to prevent doing it again in the future.
4. **Create a plan.** Once you figure out why you did what you did, think of ways not to do the same thing again. Ask your preteen for input.
5. **Implement your plan.** Before you accuse your preteen of something, follow the plan you've laid out. It may prevent another episode of unfair discipline.

Source: Denise Witmer, "Learn to Fall Back and Regroup in 5 Easy Steps," About.com, http://parentingteens.about.com/cs/disciplin1/a/discipline_a.htm.

Encourage your child to help make school a better place



The late President John F. Kennedy famously said, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." This also applies to your child's school.

At school, your child receives an education. But there, too, she can give something back. This giving back happens when your child's presence makes the school a better place to be.

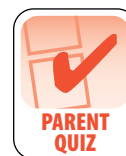
It's not as hard as you might think. Your child can give back to her school by:

- **Following the school rules.**
- **Being respectful** to adults and her peers.
- **Making her classes** a better place to learn by paying attention,

raising her hand to make a constructive comment and asking thoughtful questions.

Source: Rosemarie Clark, Donna Hawkins and Beth Vachon, *The School-Savvy Parent: 365 Insider Tips to Help You Help Your Child*, ISBN: 1-57542-072-4 (Free Spirit Publishing, 1-866-703-7322, www.freespirit.com).

Are you helping your preteen be thorough?



So many poor grades result not from a lack of knowledge, but rather from careless mistakes. Take this quiz to see if you

are helping your child do careful, accurate work. Answer *yes* to something you do often. Answer *no* to something you do rarely.

___ 1. **I check the assignment book** to be sure my child has completed all assigned homework.

___ 2. **I encourage my child** to pay attention to details such as putting the correct heading and date on papers.

___ 3. **I urge my child** to remember that "neatness counts," and that sloppy, hard-to-read homework and papers will be probably be marked down.

___ 4. **I encourage my child** to routinely check answers before turning work in.

___ 5. **I look over** my child's work or encourage him to have a peer do so, as another pair of eyes for neatness.

How well are you doing?

More *yes* answers means you are helping your child turn in work that is as free as possible from careless mistakes. More *no* answers? Check the quiz for some suggestions on helping your child to turn in better work.



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A more mature, focused person is emerging in your preteen



Middle school is a time of so much change that your child may hardly be the same person from one week to the next.

She is “trying on” new identities, interests and beliefs as she moves toward the adult she will someday be.

This turbulence is like everything else in middle school, though. Soon, it will change! If your child is in the spring before high school, you may see the roots of this change in the next few months.

Most middle schoolers differ from most high school students in that they:

- **Are anxious to be popular.** High schoolers enjoy being popular, but place more value on having a few trusted friends.
- **Still hang out mostly in groups.** High schoolers have a stronger

desire for relationships and may start dating.

- **Want you to stop** treating them like children. Still, they often act like children. High schoolers know that they need to be responsible to earn freedoms.
- **Battle with parents;** they don't see how parents could possibly know what they're going through. High schoolers begin to understand that parents were young once, too.
- **Sometimes aren't sure** what to think or what to believe. High schoolers have done more talking, thinking and reading. Their opinions and beliefs begin to be more solid.

*Source: Wade F. Horn and Carol Keough, **Better Homes and Gardens New Teen Book: An A to Z Guide for Parents of 9- to 16-Year-Olds**, ISBN: 0-696-20933-0 (Meredith Corporation, 1-800-678-8091, www.meredith.com).*

Reinforce your child's learning at home every day in simple ways



Your preteen isn't just reading and writing in school. He's also gaining practical knowledge that can be applied outside of

the classroom. To help expand that knowledge, take the things your child learns in school and reinforce them at home. Here are some ideas:

- **Sharpen his math skills.** It's nearly tax time, so enlist your preteen's help with crunching the numbers on your return. Don't give him anything too complicated (and be sure to check his work), but let him experience what it feels like to apply math in a real-life situation.
- **Encourage him to use logic.** Are you working on a puzzle or riddle? Ask your preteen to add his two cents. You might be surprised by

his ability to use reasoning to find the answer.

- **Get him to lend a hand.** If you're building something or doing repairs around the house, have your middle schooler pitch in. Carpentry isn't just a useful skill to have—it's also a concrete way to bring geometry (using such things as angles and straight lines) to life.
- **Ask for his input.** If you're looking for something to read, ask your preteen to tell you about that novel he just finished in language arts. By simply describing it, he'll be honing his communication skills.

“You can learn many things from children. How much patience you have, for instance.”

—Franklin P. Adams

My child does well on tests and quizzes, but she's really lazy about doing her homework. How can I get her to take these everyday assignments seriously?

Questions & Answers

It's critical that your child learn to take her assignments seriously. Although quizzes and tests have more “drama” surrounding them, it's homework that boosts her knowledge on a daily basis.

To help your child take homework more seriously:

- **Tell her how you feel.** If you haven't spelled it out yet, do so now. “I've noticed that you blow off your homework quite a bit. That's not okay, so let's figure out how to change the situation.”
- **Enforce a daily work time.** Find a time that works for her (it doesn't need to be right after school) and stick to it. “Okay, your half-hour work session starts at five o'clock. No arguments.” If she doesn't have any assignments, she can use the time to review her notes or read.
- **Tie homework to privileges.** If you must, play hardball. “If your homework isn't done every afternoon, there'll be no TV or basketball after dinner.” To show her you're serious, be sure to check her work before taking her word that she's finished with everything.
- **Follow up at school.** If your home strategies don't work, get her teachers involved. Warn your child that you'll be checking with them each week to see whether she's turning in completed assignments. If she isn't, be sure to enforce immediate, appropriate consequences.

—Holly Smith,
The Parent Institute

Support a child who may be less socially successful



Problems with peers are common in middle school. Many kids can navigate this on their own, but others can't.

You can't control your child's social life like you may have done when she was five years old. But if your child struggles socially, there are things you can do to help and support her.

You can:

- **Help her play to her strengths.** What is your child good at? What does she enjoy most? Chances are there is a club or group centered around one of your child's interests and it will be filled with other kids who share that interest. Your child's teachers or counselors may have a suggestion.
- **Nurture your child's friendships.** Allow your child to invite a friend home to watch a movie or TV show they both enjoy. Serve a snack.
- **Look for a structured activity.** Even if it's not your child's first choice, consider trying a recreational team, a group at a place of worship or a club at your local community center. It is helpful for less socially skilled children when adults are there to plan and supervise the activities.
- **Be watchful.** Sometimes less socially skilled children are targets for children who want to use them for an unfriendly purpose. Use the limits you have always given your child and review your rules with her again. Help her understand that breaking a rule because a "friend" asked you to is wrong, and that real friends do not aim to get each other into trouble.

Source: Perri Klass, M.D. and Eileen Costello, M.D., *Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In—When to Worry and When Not to Worry*, ISBN: 0-345-45142-2 (Ballantine Books, 1-800-726-0600, www.randomhouse.com).

Supply your middle schooler with time & reasons to read



You already know you can't force your child to read. So focus your efforts on making sure he has time to read and finds reading worth his while, at least for a few minutes each day.

Have you tried:

- **Letting your child** stay up a bit later to read? (No more than about 15 minutes—he needs his sleep!)
- **Asking your child** to read to another person? This gets your child reading and allows him to do something nice for someone else, all in one. Reading to a younger child, if you have one at home, is an obvious choice. But an older relative would love your child to read to him, too.
- **Encouraging your child** to read in his own way? Your child does not



have to finish every book he starts. Let him know that he can put a book down if he doesn't like it. Or he can read a series out of order if he wants. Reading is a form of freedom!

- **Not criticizing** what your child reads? Unless the material is harmful or disturbing, try not to worry too much about what your middle schooler reads. You may think teen magazines are "junk," but reading them is better than reading nothing.
- **Suggesting** that your child offer an opinion? Middle schoolers like to think they can influence others. By writing a book review, either on paper or online, your child can.

Source: "Quick Click: 17 Ways to Keep Your Middle-Schooler Turning the Pages," Scholastic, <http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=1548>.

Teach your middle schooler the importance of healthy snacking



You make sure to cook healthy meals for your child. You encourage him to stay active even if he isn't all that interested in sports. But how can you make sure he's making smart choices when you're not around?

If he has a busy schedule—or even if he gets hungry between getting off the bus and dinnertime—he may just grab whatever food is around. And chances are it's not the healthiest thing he could be eating. Stress the importance of healthy snacking. Try these ideas for nutritious snacks:

- **Trail mix.** Combine whole-grain oat cereal with chopped walnuts and dried cranberries.
- **Mini pizzas.** Spread pizza sauce on top of an English muffin or mini pita. Sprinkle low-fat mozzarella cheese and your child's favorite vegetables. Toast or bake at a low setting to melt the cheese.
- **Ants on a log.** Spread peanut butter onto celery sticks. Top with raisins.
- **Baby carrots,** whole grain crackers and fruit. Encourage your child to keep a few nutritious snacks with him when he's not at home.

Source: "Smart Snacking," Teens Health, www.kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/wellbeing/healthy_snacks.html.