

Tip Sheet for Middle School Parents

What Are Middle Schoolers Like?

As children grow, they begin to experience physical, intellectual, and emotional changes. The way they learn, feel, see the world, and relate to other people becomes different from when they were younger.

These changes, along with demands from present-day society and peer pressure, create conflicts and tension in the adolescent, which are reflected in their behavior in school and at home.

Young people at this age show a good number of contradictions and conflicts, which is normal.¹ There are some common characteristics that should be kept in mind in order to understand and help the middle schooler in daily activities at home and at school:

- Adolescents have high levels of physical and emotional energy, which may contrast with long periods of idleness, generally disapproved of by adults.
- They take risks, are curious, and love danger and adventure, yet their feelings can be hurt easily.
- This is the time when they feel immortal, but they worry a lot about what their friends think about them.
- They want to be independent from their families, and at the same time, they need to be pampered and protected.
- They withdraw and want a private life, and at the same time, they worry about being accepted by their peers.
- They demand privileges but don't understand responsibilities. At the same time, they are developing an awareness of social problems and the welfare of others.

What can parents do at home to support education? Here's a few ideas...

- Discuss with your child what you hope to see in terms of grades, attendance, behavior and effort at school and why you want them to do well.
- Know your child's abilities and make sure they are placed in the right classes. If you think your child can do more, they probably can.
- If your child is showing effort but still not doing well, find resources such as homework clubs, Smarthinking.com, extra teacher help, etc.
- Talk about possible future careers or higher education goals with your student. What fields interest your student? Do they want to attend college or specialize in a trade? Are they interested in computers, science, the medical field, etc.? Discuss what education and experiences are needed to attain these goals. Find people in these fields who might share their experiences.
- Discuss learning strategies and help students link what is learned in school to the real world and their future aspirations.
- Do you know your child's learning style? For example if they are a visual learner, are they using the internet, television documentaries and other visual aids to help them learn the content in class. For more information on learning styles visit: <http://www.learning-styles-online.com/>

¹ "Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level," <http://www.middleweb.com/ParntInvl.html>

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- Encourage your child to develop good study habits, such as highlighting, rereading for clarification, independent research and note taking. Discuss how what they are learning in the classroom is relevant to different careers or interests. For example, if your child is interested in becoming a forensic scientist you might discuss or help them to research how math is used in that field. Provide a link between school work and future goals.

Other background information about middle school students:

- Adolescents' ability to think for themselves, solve problems, plan for the future and make decisions are formed during the middle school years.²
- It is during adolescence that goals, beliefs and motivations are internalized. These things are critical to academic performance and course selections. If students believe that they are capable of completing difficult tasks then they are more likely to do so.³

Other helpful tips:

- Spend some relaxed time with your children. Share a meal or a snack. Tell them often what you like about them.⁴
- Listen to and share their worries. Support what you believe to be good about the school and offer your help to change any school practices that you believe could be harmful to your child.
- Avoid scoldings and arguments when your teenagers bring bad news home. Listen to their reasons and offer your help to improve the situation. It helps if your children know you believe they will be successful.
- Encourage your student to make good choices with time management and organization.

² "Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level," <http://www.middleweb.com/ParntInvl.html>

³ "Parental Involvement in Middle School: A Meta-Analytic Assessment of the Strategies That Promote Achievement," Nancy E. Hill and Diana F. Tyson (2009).

⁴ "Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level," <http://www.middleweb.com/ParntInvl.html>