



Five Ways to Help Your Young Adolescent Be Successful in Middle School

A new year, a fresh start. Now is the time to ensure that the pieces are in place to make this a successful year.

- Plan now for the year. Don't wait for things to go wrong. The first weeks are the honeymoon period of every new school year when good intentions are uppermost with students, parents, and teachers. This is the time to talk honestly with your young adolescent about what worked last year: studying after school and not after supper; eating breakfast; keeping an assignment notebook. Talk about what did not work: staying up too late on school nights; procrastinating on long-term projects; trying to play on the school team and a recreation league team in the same season.
- Know what your young adolescent is doing by talking to him everyday. Don't grill him, but find a time when you can sit down and really talk about his day. Many families still make dinner a priority on most nights so they can talk about the events of the day in a calm and unhurried manner. If dinnertime doesn't work for your family, perhaps a short walk in the evening or a time before bed when you can connect and talk about what is important.
- Stay in touch with the school. Middle level schools are generally organized by teams, often with a designated team leader, so the team should be your contact. Other schools have advisory programs and the advisor is the person to talk

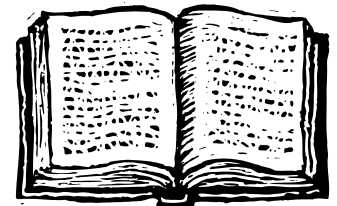
to. In either case, know your child's teachers and stay in contact. Some schools allow you to phone in to hear about the school and assignments; other schools have Web sites with lots of information about the school. It doesn't take long to stay in touch so you know what is going on.

- Encourage your young adolescent to become an active citizen this year. Have your child practice doing for others. Visiting a special senior citizen; helping with community clean-up; or becoming an advocate for recycling, literacy, or kindness to animals will help your young adolescent be an involved member of society and maintain that balance between caring for others and attending to her own needs.
- Remember that middle school is a time for students to explore new opportunities. Doing well on tests and learning are critical, of course, but students are also learning a great deal about themselves. So, think carefully about what being successful really means. Is it more than receiving all As? Is it learning to be a self-starter? Is it learning to follow through on commitments?



What Parents Should Know About Homework

If Shakespeare were alive today, he might write, "To assign homework, or not to assign homework, that is the question." While some experts recommend that schools give no homework at all, most schools have guidelines like 20 minutes of homework per grade or 30 minutes of homework in each subject every night. But these are hardly accurate gauges of what is appropriate for every student and such guidelines ignore the important issue. Does homework really make a difference? Homework is helpful if it encourages students to think, practice new skills, or show initiative. You don't have to be the homework police, but make sure that your young adolescent's homework is meaningful.



- Emphasize quality over quantity. Thirty math problems may be too many when 15 problems done well reinforce the mathematical processes.
- Take time to discuss homework completed. Ask your young adolescent to explain the key ideas.
- Ask to see homework that has been checked by a teacher. If students know homework will be checked, they are more likely to complete it.

TIPS for Parents

The years from 10 to 15 represent a time of physical, emotional, social, and intellectual change. The former Center for Early Adolescence identified seven needs that promote healthy development during this time:

- competence and achievement
- social interaction with peers and adults
- diversity
- participation in school and community activities
- self-exploration and definition
- routine, limits, structure
- physical activity

As these needs suggest, young adolescents search for personal meaning in their lives. They attempt to determine who they are and what kind of person they will become as they participate in activities that give them a sense of accomplishment.

Young adolescents learn to define themselves by being exposed to a wide variety of experiences. Exploration is the key word, literally a “trying out” of many different opportunities and possibilities. Help your child build meaning in her life by encouraging “safe” risks, and providing parental limits and unconditional love.



Remember, the experiences that build responsible, caring, and morally courageous adults begin long before adulthood. And in this particularly vulnerable period from 10 to 15, young adolescents need more guidance than ever as they move from childhood toward adulthood.

Month of the Young Adolescent



In October 2003, schools, communities, and organizations across the country and around the world will celebrate the seventh annual Month of the Young Adolescent, drawing attention to the unique needs and special

qualities of 10- to 15-year-olds. Initiated by National Middle School Association (NMSA), Month of the Young Adolescent represents a collaboration of over 40 national education, health, and youth-oriented organizations and 58 NMSA affiliates focused on the challenges and opportunities of these young people.

Join us in this year’s Month of the Young Adolescent celebration by visiting www.nmsa.org. It lists a variety of ways for parents, community members, middle level educators, and students to get involved. Participate in National Middle Level Shadow Day on October 16, 2003, and see firsthand what’s happening in middle level schools in your community. Look for ways to be a volunteer with young adolescents through tutoring or mentoring programs, career exploration opportunities, and after school or youth sport programs.

Together we can make a difference.

For more information contact NMSA at 1-800-528-NMSA or visit us online at www.nmsa.org.

Parents Ask

Q: *“My daughter spends so much time with her friends that I am concerned that her mother and I have no influence on her anymore.”*

A: A recent study reiterated what research has demonstrated over and over again – that young adolescents depend on their parents and other significant adults for critical help and advice. A popular myth says that young adolescents pull away from their parents and learn more from peers, but this is not true for the important issues in their lives. Young adolescents need guidance, support, and love from their parents, and still depend on them for shaping the values that guide their lives. Peers are obviously very important to young adolescents, but for the really important aspects of their lives, your children depend on you!



➔ **About the Editors:** Edward Brazee is editor of professional publications for National Middle School Association and professor of middle level education at the University of Maine. Constance Carter is director of Operation Breaking Stereotypes, a non-profit organization that facilitates exchanges between rural and inner-city middle schools and high schools.