



the family connection

News to use for families of young adolescents

Volume 12 Number 4

Parents and educators talk about what is important in schools for young adolescents

Parents say...

My primary concern about middle school is how well my child will be prepared for high school. Will she continue to learn and use good study habits and time management skills, as she is faced for the first time with having to change classes, work with multiple teachers, and the demands of concurrent projects and deadlines. Like many parents, we encourage her to try new activities, which all compete for time.

For my own daughter, how do you have a conversation about sex, drugs, and other equally difficult topics, when she still believes in Santa and the tooth fairy? Handling all these issues simultaneously is challenging for middle school kids and their parents.

—a Maryland dad—

It is most important to me that my middle school child is not overwhelmed socially and academically. Clearly, it is a big change, and the children definitely sense the hype around their move from elementary to middle school. I appreciate the schools that start with a “sixth grader only” day, allowing students to find their lockers, practice their combinations, and search out the routes for their classes. I also think lunchtime can be overwhelming for students, and I believe the sixth grade only lunches, at least at the beginning of the year, are helpful. Academically, while I hope my child is challenged substantively, I hope he is eased into the rigors of lengthy homework assignments and long-term projects. I am hopeful that his middle school supplies him with various tools for organization, such as day planners, and the best methods by which to use them.

As we know, this age can be tricky in terms of who our 11- and 12-year-olds listen to. If the school were to address these issues, they might hold more weight than if left solely to parents. I hope there are new and interesting electives and after-school clubs that will ease the tension of these new middle schoolers. I don't know if there are programs in which the older students get to know the new entrants at a small-group level, but that would also work to ease the transition and take away some of the fears of the younger students.

—a Washington mom—

Middle schools should continue to guide kids through this time in their lives, reminding them that they are still kids and it's OK to be just that. We are so bombarded with adult

situations in society from TV, movies, music, and clothing that it gives the impression that they need to grow up too quickly. Are we pushing them to this by the consistent need to be tuned in, texting, and connected to be accepted? I'm sure we all agree that technology is a positive in education but so is personal interaction; and unplugging some of the distractions is a good thing. Go back to the basics from time to time, read a book, write a letter with pen and paper, play cards, go outside and run around, play a game, and just be a kid.

—a Maine mom—

A middle school principal says...

The middle school years are crucial to students' academic, social, physical, and emotional growth, and every middle school must respond with curriculum and structures reflective of research and best practices—that keep students in the forefront. These structures include small teams, looping, integrative curriculum, and advisory. While each focuses on learning, each also focuses on the key relationship between teacher and student—the importance of having at least one (and hopefully more) adult to advocate for each and every student.

In my school every teacher meets daily with an advisory group of 10 to 12 students composed of fifth through eighth graders. Every week students and their advisor participate together in several activities—physical exercise twice each week, student portfolio development, special activities, focus activities on school-wide issues (bullying for example), and fun! Another way that teachers and students form close working relationships is through small teams that keep them together for two consecutive years.

Why do I believe that an adult advocate and advisory time are so critical? Why are small teams so beneficial to students? No matter how close kids are to their parents, an adult at school who knows your child can help steer the way through a difficult journey that may at times, be pretty scary. That connection can last well beyond the middle school years. The student who leaves middle school having had strong guidance from her team teachers and advisor enters a new world in high school. With a strong connection to an adult in middle school, the young adult can enter the high school “confident in who she is as a person and confident in how she learns.”

Thanks to Sandy Nevens, principal of Warsaw Middle School, Pittsfield, ME, for his words of wisdom to parents.

Helping your young adolescent find a great summer read

When children first learn to read, they want books that immediately catch their attention—a splash of color on the cover or pictures that draw them in. As they get older, children begin to question their world—how and why things happen. Young adolescents become curious, wanting to read for fun but also to discover the new, the interesting, and the exciting. Look for these elements in books for young adolescents:

- Revolve around a few well-defined characters, not legions of characters who are difficult to follow. One sign of a really good book is that characters are fully drawn and readers are pulled to them as real people.
- The main characters are your child's age or a bit older. Of course, young adolescents are interested in seeing and hearing about others their age. Such books should be relevant to your child's life.
- Have a straightforward plot and use realistic language. Reluctant readers in particular don't want too many plot twists; they want to be able to follow the story. And nothing turns off young adolescents more than language that is stilted or inappropriate.

Parents who follow these tips will have a better chance of suggesting a book that their young adolescents will connect with and take pleasure in. Although adhering to these suggestions may take a little time and effort, the end result will be worth it. When summer hits, take your young adolescent to a library, bookstore, or browse online booklists and Web sites to find several books to start your son or daughter off on the right reading foot.

Thanks to Lisa Katz for writing this Tips article. Lisa is a literacy specialist at Sutherland Middle School in Charlottesville, VA, where she lives with her husband, Adam, and their two children, Jordan and Avery.

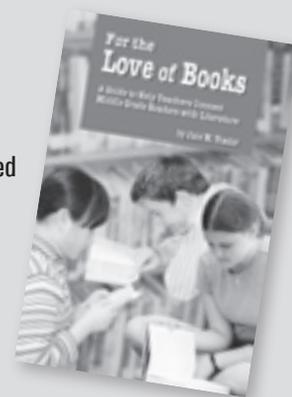
Tips for Parents



For the Love of Books

A resource for parents as well as teachers, this exceptionally useful guide responds to kids' issues by drawing upon the plethora of excellent young adolescent literature available. Included are in-depth descriptions of recommended novels about standing up and speaking out, family relations, survival, growing up in other cultures, strangers, and the homeless. Use this book to teach your children the love of reading.

Item #1314 – Retail \$18.00 – Member \$14.40



To order, visit www.nmsa.org/store or call 1-800-528-NMSA



The Family Connection is published by National Middle School Association as part of its ongoing commitment encouraging family and community involvement in the education of young adolescents. NMSA is unique among educational organizations because of its commitment to addressing the needs of middle level students—youth ages 10 to 15. Membership in NMSA is open to all persons interested in and concerned about middle level education. Teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, college students, and other educational professionals are well represented in NMSA's membership. Call 1-800-528-NMSA to receive further information about membership and middle level resources.

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