



Help your child build skills in two areas: social conversation and assertiveness. Help your child practice small talk, so he or she can feel comfortable in peer interactions. Pre-teens and teens who worry about their ability to talk with others often become isolated. Give your children many opportunities to meet new people.



Assertiveness is necessary for many situations. Kids need to know how to stand up to teasing, how to resist offers to engage in rule violations or risky behavior. Teach your child how to stand up for himself or herself, mentally as well as out loud. Kids need to know how to talk to themselves to counter any nasty or negative statements that are made to them. They need to know how to value themselves in the face of criticism. They also need to know how to tell people to leave them alone, to stop offering temptations and to stop teasing.



The way children are educated changes dramatically for most children during the middle-school years. With instruction provided by multiple teachers and one teacher for each subject, a child is faced with the challenge of learning from people who vary in personality, talent, investment in children, teaching style, class requirements and communication abilities. When compared to the elementary school



setting, children are generally required to respond to a setting that is significantly less concerned with their individual welfare, less personal in its atmosphere and less careful in its supervision of students. In this setting, pre-teens and teens have to learn to provide their own motivation and their own discipline for completing assignments and making advances. Many children lose their interest in school in this atmosphere, lose the capacity to meet demands, or become highly confused— and then discouraged—by the multiple demands from different teachers.

To help your child make the transition to greater independence in school, consider these ideas:



Talk to your child about school. Spell out your expectations for studying. Tell your child how you want to be informed about school. Let your child know that she can come to you if she is having problems with any subject. Don't threaten; you want your child to let you know when she needs help. Describe how she may find it hard to manage the change in demands.



Help your child build organizational skills and study habits. Discuss with your child a way to get and stay organized. You need to consider three basic steps: 1) Creating a method for recording assignments and keeping track of due dates; 2) Creating a way to consistently make lists of what books, supplies, and papers are needed at home and at school so your child does not forget items; and, 3) Creating a way to schedule time so that assignments are spread out over time, but deadlines are met.



Monitor your child's school effort and success. Ask about homework assignments and expect that your child will have homework every day.



Consider the suggestion that your child should spend a consistent amount of time each day on school work, reading or study of school subjects. Even if your child has a small amount of homework, consider setting aside 90 minutes to 2 hours for at-home study. Most middle-school children have 6 hours of free time each evening. Why not consistently dedicate a chunk of that time to academics? This will help your child get in shape for high school.



Stay interested in your child's day at school. Have many conversations about school and expect your child to share some details about classes.



Make sure you know the names of your child's teachers and what subject they teach. Ask your child to describe their personalities and their teaching styles. Raise questions about any possible struggles that your child might be having with the materials or with a teacher.

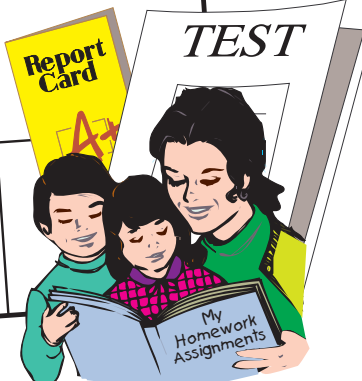


Let your child know that you are willing to help with school at any time. Make school a priority in conversation, in planning your family schedule and in your thinking.



Attend school functions and request a brief meeting with teachers to get to know the team. Let teachers know that you want to be informed of any problems. If you think your child will have trouble keeping track of assignments, request that the team of teachers working with your child provide you with a brief progress report every week or two weeks. This can be accomplished with a brief checklist. Most schools have these available through the guidance office. Consider this model:

	SUBJECT 1	SUBJECT 2	SUBJECT 3	SUBJECT 4
Homework complete?				
Participated in class?				
Any tests or concerns?				




Stay informed of your child's progress, even the small steps. Praise your child for his or her efforts. The classroom teacher will not be providing as much individual praise or contact as the elementary school teacher. Many kids need someone who is well informed to give them little boosts.



If your child is struggling, ask teachers and administrators to help you evaluate the situation. Don't wait too long or your child may become discouraged.





If your child has not been making a good effort, restrict other activities and entertainment. Make participation in desired activities connected to a reasonable effort in school. Don't assume that your child has a basic right to the television, the phone, the computer or free time away from home. Help your child learn that privileges come with responsibilities, and that school effort is a basic responsibility.

4. Safe and Unsafe Choices

The middle-school years are a time of one final transition that may be disturbing. During these years, the majority of kids in the United States go from being fairly naïve about tobacco, alcohol and drugs to being very familiar with them. At the end of elementary school, the majority of kids do not know slang terms for marijuana or other drugs. Yet, by the time they enter 7th grade, the majority of kids have heard the terms used by others their age. Use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana or other drugs is very rare in children under the age of 10. Yet, by the time they are 13, a small but significant minority have tried tobacco, alcohol, or marijuana. Between 10 to 20% of 13 year olds have tried one or more of these substances. Use further builds to the point that 25 to 35% of are regular users of at least one of these substances by the age of 17. Kids hear about substances, they are exposed to them, they witness friends trying them, and they report pressure to try them all in the middle school years. Thus, the middle school years are an important time for preventing use in the face of these pressures. What can be done to help kids get through the transition with healthy habits and little or no risky actions?



We have already indicated that you need to talk to your child about sexual development and sexual activity. It is also important to talk to your child about tobacco, alcohol and drugs. Use these conversations to find out what your child knows about these substances. Also use them to find out what your child thinks about using those substances. Listen carefully, and don't judge. Build your conversations on materials and instruction that have been provided at your child's school.



After you have listened to your child, spell out your expectations. Explain how you want your child to handle tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. Remember that each of these substances is illegal for children in this age group, and none of them is legal until at least 18. As you consider your expectations, why not consider expecting zero use? None of these substances is healthy for kids. Experimentation at this age is not unusual, but it is very risky. The brains of pre-teens and teens seem very susceptible to dependence and addiction in recent studies. Why let your child even think that a little taste or a short smoke is fine? Major harm

is not likely to occur, but use of substances just doesn't make sense.



Although you have had talks and spelled out expectations, monitor your child's actions to prevent experimentation. Studies indicate that many pre-teens and teens get a thrill from engaging in forbidden behaviors and actions that risk their safety. In the interest of obtaining excitement, they may be very tempted to try substances. So, watch their exposure and make sure that they are supervised in settings where substances are readily available.



Teach your child to refuse to use, and help him practice comfortable ways to say no. Direct peer pressure to try substances is a part of middle-school culture. Help your child know how to walk away or say she is not interested or how to change the topic when an offer is made. Ideas on refusal are constantly being generated by the Coalition for a Drug-Free America. These ideas are usually generated by kids, so they are practical and comfortable.



Watch your own use of substances. Make sure that it is healthy and moderate, at most. If you do use substances, still tell your children you do not want them to do so. Parents' words can be effective even when children know that they are users.



Support or sponsor activities where pre-teens and teens can get together in a healthy atmosphere that is substance free.



Support steps by local authorities to limit availability of substances for all teenagers. Report stores that sell to minors, request limits on advertisements and consider how substance use is portrayed in entertainment. Recently, an increase in tobacco use by actors in movies has been documented, and that increase has been associated with a rising impression by children and teens that smoking is "cool." Without being excessive or prudish, tell your children how you believe use by characters is wrong.



If you discover that your child has used substances, talk to your child. Find out how it happened and what circumstances lead to his use. Then, reiterate your standards, restrict his contact with sources of substances, and keep monitoring his actions so you will be aware of any other use. If use continues, discuss it further, further restrict his freedom until he has proven that he can be trusted, and seek advice from his doctor. Ignoring use or believing that it will go away on its own are steps that do not help the vast majority of kids.



The Parent Toolbox

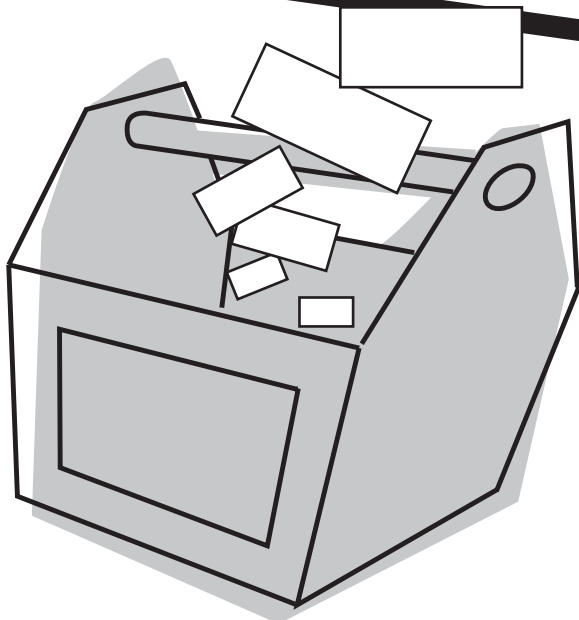
As you raise your middle-school aged child, please remember the set of tools available to you. If you use these tools carefully at the right time, you are likely to have a great deal of success.

AFFECTION AND ATTACHMENT Use your positive qualities to stay connected and informed. These tools should be used often and excessively. Be positive in your contacts and have many of them.

BALANCE WITH GUIDANCE AND DISCIPLINE – Provide advice in small doses. Don't overwhelm a middle-school aged child, but make suggestions for consideration. Spell out expectations for how you want your child to act. Describe rules for behavior and firmly warn about consequences for rule violations. Use discipline by removing privileges and restricting freedom when necessary. Don't be afraid to be "hated" or the temporary object of scorn. Sometimes it is necessary to be the "bad" parent.

CHECK ON CHALLENGES – Keep informed about your child's adjustment and what struggles he or she is facing. Keep informed about events at school and what is occurring in your neighborhood. Occasionally watch your child's development from a distance and ponder what he or she is experiencing.

DEVELOP SKILLS TO TEACH SKILLS – Figure out how to help your child become or remain socially connected and not isolated. Help your child develop good study habits and appropriate involvement in school. Teach your child to refuse appropriately. Help your child become assertive. Help your child become effective at analyzing risks so he or she can complete cost-benefit analyses before taking action.



And, for all of the adolescent years, use good problem-solving steps.

Whenever you are faced with a problem, take the following steps:

- 1** Stop your actions and momentarily relax. Take a deep breath or close your eyes for a moment to gain control.
- 2** Think about the situation. Notice how you feel about the situation. Are you angry? Worried? Scared? Sad? Use your feelings to help you determine the nature of the problem. Fill in the blank: "You are angry (or, sad, or worried) because ...?" This step will help you define the problem.
- 3** Once you have defined the problem, think of many possible solutions, including doing nothing. Don't criticize your ideas as you consider them; just generate as many possible solutions as you can.
- 4** Then, review the possibilities. Consider each idea and decide how events will turn out if you follow that idea. If your child has a problem, you will often have to decide if you should demonstrate affection, provide guidance, exercise discipline, teach new skills, or simply monitor the situation to see what develops. Consider elements of all of these options when you are making choices.
- 5** Pick the action that is likely to have the best outcome.
- 6** After you have made your choice, follow through and watch what happens. Use your observations to determine if this idea is a good one that you should hold onto.





Making Out-Of-School Time Safe and Productive for Your Middle Schooler

Parents face an enormous challenge in making their schedules mesh with the available after school activities in the community and clearly requires active communication with your child, perseverance and networking. A few facts help to frame why it is so important to try to minimize your child's time at home alone.

Here are Some Facts to Consider:

- ➔ Approximately 8 million children ages 5 to 14 spend time without adult supervision on a regular basis (including 4 million children between the ages of 5 and 12 years, and 4 million children between the ages of 13 and 14 years).
- ➔ Throughout the school year, more than 1 in 10 children spend time alone or with a sibling under 13; however, these children spend twice as much time unsupervised during the summer (averaging at about 10 hours a week) compared to the school year.
- ➔ Young people with a lack of options during out-of-school time miss important chances for growth and development. These children are placed at a higher risk to do things and to go to places that will negatively influence their development and futures.
- ➔ Students who do not spend time in extracurricular activities are 49% more likely to use drugs and 37% more likely to become teen parents than those who spend one to four hours a week in after-school activities.
- ➔ After-school programs provide a strong foundation for nurturing reading and writing skills and provide a variety of literacy experiences.
- ➔ Participation in after-school programs is positively associated with better school attendance, more positive attitudes towards school work, higher aspirations for college, better work habits, improved interpersonal skills, reduced drop-out rates, higher quality homework completion, less time spent engaging in unhealthy behaviors and improved grades.
- ➔ So, the way children spend time after school is important. Reducing the time they spend totally unsupervised can increase their safety and well-being (and reduce your stress!) Many young people see child care and after-school programs as “baby” programs and don't want to go anywhere near them. What's a parent to do? Try some of these ideas.



Use the resources that your community has to offer. There are a variety of sources here for you to look into: the public-school system and local non-profit and community-run agencies (i.e. literacy programs, mentoring programs, homework helper programs, sports and recreation classes). Sometimes, it is all about detective work! We have some resources at the end of the booklet to get you started. Other times, it is all about advocating for children and rallying parents together to generate resources in your community. You can assertively move your local government to do more.



Planning is a parent's greatest weapon against the perils of a child left idle. Take the necessary time and care to strategize and synchronize your child's out-of-school time.



What excites your child? Find resources to build on these interests—or develop new ones. Two days a week at Chess Club or three days at Karate class (or any other activities like these) reduces the number of hours of alone time and gives your son or daughter activities to focus on.



For the hours that your child will be alone, have him/her make a list of things he or she would like to accomplish during after-school hours. Reward your child for being diligent in completing these things. A schedule works best.



Get to know your neighbors. If an emergency were to come about, knowing people in your immediate vicinity can be an invaluable resource in times of crisis. Make sure these are people you and your child can trust.



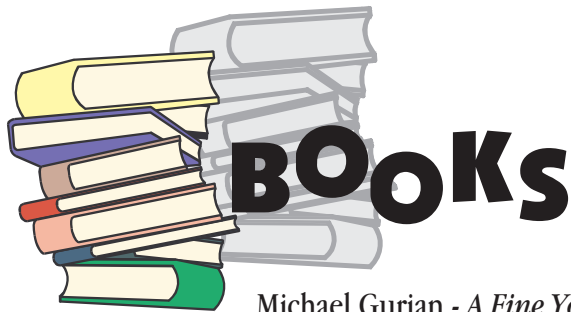
Get to know the parent's of your children's classmates. Talk to your child about his/her peers. It is almost a law to know your children's friends. Make play-dates and homework sessions for your child. It is all about coordination and cooperation.



Limit the time that your child has access to television and video-games. Ask your child to spend more time engaging in an array of activities (i.e. reading, writing, art projects, make-believe play, educational computer games, and board games). Don't underestimate the power of Scrabble and other non-electronic games.



8 Out-of-School Time: Resources for Parents



Michael Gurian - *A Fine Young Man: What Parents, Mentors and Educators Can Do to Shape Adolescent Boys into Exceptional Men*, (1998, Penguin Putnam, Inc.).

Charles E. Schaefer & Theresa Foy DiGeronimo - *Ages and Stages: A Parent's Guide to Normal Childhood Development*, (2000, Wiley, John & Sons, Inc.).

Carol J. Eagle, Carol Colman - *All That She Can Be: Helping Your Daughter Maintain Her Self-Esteem*, (1994, Fireside Publishers).

William Damon - *Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in Our Homes and Schools*, (1995, First Free Press).

Charles E. Schaefer & Theresa Foy DiGeronimo - *How to Talk to Your Kids About Really Important Things: Specific Questions and Answers and Useful Things to Say*, (1994, Jossey-Bass, Inc.).

Rosalind Wiseman - *Queen Bees & Wannabes: Helping Your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends & Other Realities of Adolescence*, (2002, Crown Publishers).

Myrna Shure, Ph.D., et al. - *Raising a Thinking Preteen: The "I Can Problem Solve" Program for 8-12 Year-Olds*, (2000, Owl Books).

Myrna Shure, Ph.D., et al. - *Raising a Thinking Child Workbook: Teaching Young Children How to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along with Others*, (2000, Research Press).

William Pollack, Ph.D. - *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, (1998, Random House, Inc.).

Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D. - *Surviving Your Adolescents: How to Manage and Let Go of Your 13-18 Year Olds*, (1998, Child Management).

Tom McMahon - *Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents with Kids 11-19*, (1996, Pocket Books).

Curtis Easley, Courey R. Easley - *The Coolest Nerd*, (2001, School House Publishing).



Afterschool.Gov: www.afterschool.gov

Connects people to federal resources that support children and youth during out of school hours.

The American Academy of Pediatrics: www.aap.org/family/puperty.htm

Puberty Information for Boys and Girls, Public Information Brochure.

Boys and Girls Club of America: www.bgca.org

Community service organization providing recreation and companionship; club program and services serve to promote and enhance development.

Phone: 1800-854-CLUB

Boy Scouts of America: www.scouting.org

Youth program to foster character development and values-based leadership training.

Greater New York Council: www.bsa-gnyc.org

350 Fifth Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10118-0199, Phone: 212-242-1100

Girl Scouts of America: www.girlscouts.org/

Youth program that encourages increased skill building and responsibility, and promotes the development of strong leadership and decision-making skills.

The Greater New York Council: www.girlscoutsnyc.org

New York, New York 10010-4283, (212) 645-4000

National Association of School Psychologists: www.naspcenter.org/b2sbandout.html

National Mental Health and Education Center, Back to School Transitions: What Parents Can Do.

The National Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR):

www.reeusda.gov/4h/cyfar/cyfar.htm

Provides information about resources and support available to community-based programs targeting at-risk children and their families.

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time: www.niost.org

A resource offering information about the importance of out-of-school time; their mission is to ensure that all children, youth, and families have access to high quality programs, and opportunities during after-school hours

The National Network for Child Care: www.nmcc.org

A resource serving professionals and families who care for children and youth, offers thousands of informative child care resources.



National PTA: www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/bts/a3_transitions.asp
Back-to-School, School Transitions: From Preschool to Kindergarten, Elementary to Middle, and Middle to High School.

The National School-Age Care Alliance: www.nsaca.org
National organization of after school programs providing information and support to programs serving school age children when schools are closed. The local affiliate is the New York State School Age Care Coalition (NYSSACC) at www.nyssacc.org

The Nemours Foundation: <http://kidshealth.org/parent/misc/about.html>
A Parent's Guide to Surviving Adolescence, Understanding Puberty, and Nine Steps for More Effective Parenting.

The New York City Website www.nyc.gov

Resources for Youth

Community/Region: Fun & Activities

http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/portal/index.jsp?pageID=nyc_community1&catID=881&cc=881&rc=741&ndi=42

Community/Region: Summer Camps

http://www.ci.nyc.ny.us/portal/index.jsp?pageID=nyc_community1&catID=1600&cc=1600&rc=741&ndi=42

School Transitions www.thefamilyworks.org/Parenting/SchTrans.htm
School Transitions: Tips for Parents.

21st Century Community Learning Centers www.4bafterschool.org
Provides learning opportunities to school age youth in urban, suburban, and rural communities across America.

YMCA of Greater New York www.ymcanyc.org/ygny/
Community service organization that promotes positive values, welcoming all people with a focus on youth.