

QUICK TIPS® FROM THE PARENT INSITUTE – FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENTS

Ways Busy Parents Can Help Children Succeed In Middle School

Research shows that early adolescence (the middle school years) is one of the two most critical periods in a child's life. The other time is early childhood. It is during these times that children need adult help the most. Schools and parents both have important roles to play in helping middle school children. But, every study finds that parents have the biggest influence.

The problem is middle school parents are already so busy that they hardly have time to brush their teeth. How can we find the time to help our children succeed in school?

Fortunately, some busy parents have figured out ways to do it. Here are some tips on how you can do it too.

Tips on 'Finding' MORE TIME

Some parents seem to fit more things into a day than the rest of us. No, they haven't found a way to stop the clock. They've just learned to use their time more efficiently to become meaningfully involved with their children. Here are some ways to find the time to help your child.

■ **Use Car Time**

You spend a lot of time in the car alone with your child. It's a wonderful time to have meaningful conversations and real influence on your child. Think about it. There are sensitive issues you (and they) both want to discuss – from the changes puberty brings to converse about what children want to make of their lives. In the car you don't have to make eye contact. They can't "leave the room." No one can overhear you. You can "go around the block" again if you need more time. It's perfect.

Try these tips. To get your child to really talk, you've got to really listen. Turn off the car radio. (You'll never agree on a station anyway.) Ask, "What would you like to talk about?" And then force yourself to be quiet and listen. "Repeat" the question with a silent glance if necessary, but be quiet. Listen... wait... and don't be surprised if you end up having the best conversation you've had in years. The privacy of the car and really listening are the secrets.

■ **Set Priorities.**

Sit down and list what's truly important to you. (Odds are, it's your kids.) Then consciously decide how to spend you time. Make sure your decisions reflect what matters. Have a choice between cooking a fancy dinner or talking with your child about school? Order a pizza and talk.

■ **Spend One-On-One Time**

"Quality" time is a deceptive myth. What children really need is "quantity" time with parents. They need time to talk with you. Time to see and hear how you would apply your experience and your values to the problems they face. There's nothing like spending time alone with a parent to make a child of any age feel special. Try making an appointment to spend some time alone with your child each week. Write it on your calendar. Then treat that appointment as seriously as you would an important business meeting.

■ Remember the 80/20 Rule

Businesses often use something they call the “80/20” rule.” Simply stated, it means that 80 percent of the results of any job come from just 20 percent of the effort. Use this rule as you decide how to spend your time. Instead of just “doing things right,” you’ll start “doing the right things.”

Volunteer After Hours

It’s great if you can help out at school. But, you don’t always have to make time during the day to be a “volunteer” for your child’s middle school. Check with your child’s teachers to see if there are things like these you can do at home or after the school day:

- ☛ Collect and send in materials the teacher needs for a class project.
- ☛ List community resources that support what the class is studying.
- ☛ Prepare food from a country one of your child’s classes is studying.
- ☛ Recruit other parents to volunteer.
- ☛ Enlist businesses to donate to a school fund-raiser.
- ☛ Attend school events held in the evening – open houses, band concerts, plays, athletic events, art fairs.
- ☛ Put together “Welcome Kits” for families new to your school.

Exchange Notes With Your Child

Notes are a great way for busy parents to keep the lines of communication open with their children while building self-esteem... by taking that extra minute to write a note shows your child that you really care.

Writing a note is a good icebreaker for your child... he may feel more comfortable broaching a subject on paper before talking with you face-to-face.

Other Ways to Communicate

From writing a special note to put in a lunchbox to singing in the rain and splashing in puddles, are just a few suggestions on how to communicate with your child and give him a strong sense of self-esteem. Reading with your child, giving a surprise hug, planting a garden together, and sharing a cup of hot cocoa on a winter's day are just some of the ways parents can instill feelings of love and self-confidence, and show children just how special they are.

Five Years From Now

Remember, five years from now, your kids won't remember the night you left the dishes in the sink. But, they'll treasure forever the memory of the walk you took with them to look at the night sky.