

## Ways Busy Parents Can Help Children Succeed in Middle School



**R**esearch 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 years 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 that middle school parents are already very busy, so how can they find the time to help their 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

**S**ome 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 three ways to find the time to help your child:



**1. Set priorities** Sit down and list what's truly important to you. (Odds are your kids are at the top of your list.) Then decide how to spend your 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.

**2. Spend one-on-one time** "Quality time" is a deceptive myth. What your child really needs is "quantity time" with you. He needs time to talk with you. Time to see and hear how you would apply your experience and your values to the problems he is facing. 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.

**3. Use the 'off' button** You probably have more time than you think, but it's being stolen from you and your child by electronics! So what can you do?

- **Turn off the television.** Record any programs you and your child just can't miss.
- **Turn off your phone** (and your child's cell phone). Let the answering machine catch the calls for several hours each evening.
- **Turn off the computer.** Or set a timer. It's amazing how much time can be lost to searching the Internet, emailing and instant messaging. Use your media-free time to help your child with homework problems, to read together or just to talk.

## 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 you can do at home or after the school day. For example:

- **Collect and send in materials** the teacher needs for a class project.
- **Create a list of community resources** that support what the class is studying.
- **Prepare food from a country** your child's class is studying.
- **Recruit other parents** to volunteer.
- **Enlist businesses** to donate to a school fund-raiser.



- **Put together 'Welcome Kits'** for families new to your school.

And don't forget to attend school events held in the evening—band concerts, plays, athletic events, art fairs.

## Use Car Time

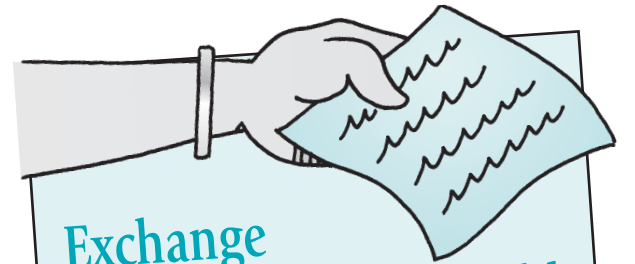
You spend a lot of time in the car alone with your child. It's a wonderful opportunity to have meaningful conversations and a real influence on your child. Think about it. There are sensitive issues you (and your child) want to discuss—from the changes puberty brings to concerns about what your child wants to make of her life. In the car you don't have to make eye contact. Your child 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 might not 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.

### Five years from now ...

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



## Exchange Notes With Your Child

Notes are a great way to keep the lines of communication open with your child and build self-esteem and writing skills at the same time.

When you have a few free moments throughout your day, write a note to your child. Compliment her on a job well done, or just let her know you are thinking about her. Write about the things you are doing at work, or something that's been on your mind. And ask your child to write to you.

You can exchange notes in the morning before school or right before bedtime. Your middle school child needs to be reminded often that you love her. Notes are another way to say, "I love you."

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