

## **Parenting Ideas for Middle Schoolers**

- ◆ Give your child the first shot at solving his or her problems. This complements his/her growing need for independence. Avoid the temptation to rescue your child. Keep in mind the larger learning taking place that comes through inevitable stumbles.
- ◆ Establish consistent routines and expectations both for school responsibilities as well as home contributions: walking the dog, loading the dishwasher, making the bed. These chores coupled with meeting the academic demands at school will help to reinforce self-discipline and the development of responsibility.
- ◆ When giving a party for your child, invite either a very limited group of friends or an entire group (e.g. 7<sup>th</sup> graders in a homeroom group, all girls in the class, an athletic team, etc.) Please avoid parties where the majority of some group is invited, leaving others out. The real hurt of those left out takes a long time to heal.
- ◆ When your child is attending a party or visiting a classmate's home, make it a family routine to call the home where the gathering is occurring to confirm chaperoning arrangements. This is an easy routine to establish in sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, but virtually impossible to establish in tenth or eleventh grades when you will want to know where your child is and what he or she is doing.
- ◆ While few of our middle schoolers are experimenting with alcohol or drugs, there is much conversation on these topics resulting from messages and images in the media as well as stories in the news, particularly with the legalization of marijuana. Students are making initial decisions about appropriate behavior. Direct conversations at home and clarity of family values are critical for middle schoolers.
- ◆ Consider “sacrificing” your dining area for a few years and establishing it as the study area for your child. This allows parents to wander by and glance at study habits, organization, and gives insights into what is going on at school.
- ◆ Monitor the use of technology. The most horrific stories of cyber cruelty are well documented in the media. More common are less dramatic yet nevertheless hurtful conversations and postings. Additionally, social media sites are not as private as many students believe. Instagram, Snapchat, and other sites deserve special attention and conversation. Ask.fm and After School, a website and app where children can post anonymous comments about others, have been problematic in the past. If your child does have access to a social networking site, it is appropriate at the middle school level for this access to be contingent on parents having access to the child's site through a shared password and that parents actively monitor conversations on these sites.

- ◆ Likewise cell phones and texting have changed the middle school social dynamic. Social interactions no longer shut down when students leave school. Have your child turn off his/her cell phone at a reasonable point in the evening and leave the phone charging in the kitchen. There is no need for an electronic device in your child's bedroom overnight.
- ◆ When your child is working on homework and needs access to the internet, consider downloading needed materials and then disconnecting from the internet. Work to eliminate ongoing chats and other disruptions while completing assignments. Multi-tasking does not work. Academic work suffers. So, too, do social interactions. Each deserves its time, but not simultaneously.
- ◆ Check out wild stories. “Sally’s mother is letting her ...” “My history teacher is so unfair, he made us ....”
- ◆ Make every effort to get to know other parents in your child’s class. Communication between parents is essential in providing secure, responsible limits.
- ◆ Praise successes: a positive written comment from a teacher, trying out for the musical, joining a sports team, being kind to a younger sibling. Look for all the successes you can find. Reinforce positive choices.
- ◆ Remember that middle school parents need to give the “two L’s:” love and limits.
- ◆ Have fun! These are the years to enjoy the energy, spontaneity, growing abilities, and developing maturity of your child.