

Ways Busy Parents Can Help Children Succeed in Middle School

Research shows that early adolescence 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.

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?

Use Car Time. 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.

Set Priorities. 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. Business often use something they call the "80/20 Rule." 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-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 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 you back.

You can exchange notes in the morning before school, or right before bedtime. Middle school aged children need to be reminded often that you love them. Notes are another way to say, "I love you."

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.