

# Parents Make the Difference!



## Do you know how to handle your child's difficult behavior?

Part of early adolescence involves leaving childhood behind and separating from parents. Another part involves answering questions such as: Who am I? What do I believe? As your child goes through this she may display some difficult and defiant behavior, even if she has never done so in the past.

For many middle school children, this means talking back to parents. Here are some guidelines for handling this behavior:

- Resist the urge to argue back. Instead, show your child who the adult is. Practice calm kindness in the face of her rudeness. For example, say "You sound pretty upset. I'm sorry to hear this. When you calm down, I'll be happy to help if I can."
- Continue to set limits. Some back talk is developmental. But there are some things you should never tolerate, such as profanity directed at you or another person. If this happens, give your child a choice: She may go to a quiet place to think until she is ready to apologize. Or she may lose a privilege.
- Enjoy the flip side of your child's arguing. When she is calm and happy you can have great conversations. Your child's new ability to argue actually reflects a growth in her ability to reason. She can now discuss things at a higher level than she could in elementary school.

## Keep your child motivated in school all year!

It's too early in the school year for your middle schooler to have a ho-hum attitude about class! Instead, he should be looking forward to the months ahead.

You can help him do just that, and keep him motivated, if you:

- Let yourself be "wowed." Do you give off a "been there, done that" vibe when your child tells you about something he's learning in school? Stop! A fact or idea may not be new to you, but if it's new to your child, show some enthusiasm. "Your science teacher poured liquid nitrogen on a flower and it froze? Just like that? How cool!"
- Celebrate small victories. Yes, scoring 100 percent on a math test is a reason for high-fives all around. But so is a solid B on a history project your child worked hard on. Show him that you notice the effort he's putting in, and it may motivate him to keep trying his best. Only congratulating your child for A's may squash his enthusiasm by causing him to think, "Why bother trying at all if only 'perfect' matters?"

## Connect with your middle schooler by sharing downtime

The most important thing to remember about "quality time" is that it's not the most important thing. Instead, focus on "quantity time." In other words, commit to spending downtime with your child every day. It's during those unplanned moments that you'll catch glimpses of who he really is. To build more "quantity time" into your life:

- Make it a priority. Everyone's busy, but your child must still come first. Make time for family time every day. During those hours, put away the cell phone, log off the computer and be available to your child.
- Be creative. If a must-complete chore is interfering with family time, have your child pitch in. He may not love the thought of a marathon laundry session. But if he gets to chat with you about his day while you make your way through piles of clothing, it might sweeten the deal.
- Relax. Don't feel compelled to constantly entertain your child. You don't need to take him out to lunch or go to the movies. Just hang out together. That's what "quantity time" is all about.