

## Spending time together is important for your preteen

What gets lost in all the “bad news” stories about families today? The fact that there’s so much good news! Research shows that plenty of families have strengths that help kids thrive.

**Many of these strengths revolve around parents and kids simply spending time together. Common family strengths include:**

**Sticking to routines.** Basic things like doing chores and eating together can keep families bonded. Studies indicate that kids who come from families that follow routines are less likely to use drugs or be suspended from school.

**Communicating.** When parents communicate positively with their kids, everybody wins. Studies show that most adolescents get praise from their parents. And half look to their parents for guidance. When kids are supported like this, they’re less likely to have emotional problems.

**Having fun together.** Simply “doing stuff together” means a lot to parents and kids. Research shows that kids who enjoy enriching activities at home are more motivated to learn than their peers. And spending time together—even if it’s just playing cards or watching a ball game—leads to good feelings all around. It also lessens kids’ chances of engaging in risky behaviors or getting in trouble at school.

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**Building Respect: Don’t fall into the trap of being your middle schooler’s ‘friend’**

Your child is growing up before your eyes. She may look more like a young adult and less like a young child. She can understand concepts that escaped her a year ago.

Remember that she is still your child and not your peer. She needs you to be the parent and she still needs to respect you and other adults. Do:

Require that your child speak politely to you and other adults. Don’t allow your child to talk to you when she is being rude. Walk away and do not grant her wishes until she speaks respectfully.

Insist that your child continue to follow your rules. Middle schoolers shouldn’t have a huge list of rules, but a few important ones that must be followed. Consider withholding privileges if your child willfully breaks rules.

**Do not:**

Try to be the “cool parent” in the neighborhood. You should be kind and caring to your child and her friends, but you are not “one of the girls.” Children lose respect for parents who act like children.

Make decisions based on what would please your child and her friends. They might like if you paid for them all to see an R-rated movie, but is it a wise parenting choice? Trust yourself as the adult and make decisions accordingly.

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### **Reinforcing Learning: Encourage home activities that will strengthen skills**

Your middle school student is working on new skills, such as doing in-depth research. He is strengthening other skills, such as discussing literature, and using math in different ways.

You may worry that you can't come up with activities at home to match what your child is doing in school. Relax—no one expects you to come up with your own homework assignments! However, there are activities you can encourage that will directly tie into and strengthen what your child is working on at school.

Some of these include:

**Reading.** You have probably always encouraged reading. But at this age your child will need to handle more nonfiction. Suggest a biography of a famous person your child admires.

**Research.** Did you know that interviews are one great way to do research? Your child can interview almost anyone to get some practice. Have him sit down for a bit with a grandparent or another older person to ask questions about the person's youth. Your child will learn a lot and the older person will probably love the chance to share.

**Vocabulary.** Point out less common words you see in newspapers or magazines. Challenge your child. Who can be the first one to find out what the word means and properly use it in a sentence? Calendars that offer a "word of the day" can be a fun and inexpensive holiday gift.

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