



# The Family Connection

News to Use for families of young adolescents

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## Preparing for college—NOW!

Although the middle school years may seem a bit early to think about college for a 10- or 11-year-old, there are patterns and habits that parents should encourage to help ensure a college education. All of these practices and routines come before high school. Here are 10 things parents can do now:

1. Encourage reading! Help your child become a lifelong reader and open unlimited opportunities to learn and gather knowledge.
2. Establish a daily homework schedule. The habit of being responsible for assigned work will be important long past middle school and, once set in place, will be an expectation when no parents are around.
3. Provide a place to study. Pay attention to your child's learning styles—does she need white noise, absolute silence, a cozy place to curl up, or a well-lit table?
4. Make sure your child has access to a dictionary—and knows how to use it. Whether a hard copy or online dictionary, it is important for him to be able to find the meaning of an unknown word to expand his vocabulary.
5. Provide access to newspapers and magazines and prompt curiosity about articles of opinion and fact and

aid in discerning between the two. Take advantage of opportunities to discuss these ideas.



6. Encourage and praise good effort. Research shows that children who are praised for legitimate success and effort are more likely to succeed in school and work.
7. Visit your youngster's school and speak with her teachers about her progress and special needs. Teachers appreciate parent contact and your desire to help your child succeed.
8. Start saving. Even \$10 a week for the next five years will be almost \$3,000 with interest.
9. Encourage your child to save. Open a savings account and make a rule that half of every monetary gift or money earned will be saved.
10. Emphasize the importance of school and learning. Explore ways to enrich your child's education through local library programs, family games, cooking or building things, or community service.

### Parents Ask

**Q:** *How can I keep my seventh grade daughter 13, when she thinks and acts 17?*

**A:** David Elkind, psychologist and author of several books about young adolescents (*The Hurried Child* and *All Grown Up and No Place To Go*), states that children and young adolescents today are expected to be competent, not innocent. Elkind argues that in the U.S., children no longer have a protracted period when adults look out for them. Today, at younger and younger ages, they are expected to be competent—looking after themselves for more time while parents are away from home, caring for younger siblings or older family members, and dealing with an increasingly adult-oriented society.

In many ways, your daughter is responding to this last issue, where everywhere she looks she sees adult images of how she should look, act, talk, think, and respond to others. Fashion magazines show 13-year-olds made up to resemble fashion models; TV shows and movies depict 13-year-olds doing just about anything they want.

Laying down rules does not work. You must talk frequently with your daughter about what you expect, but you also must listen to her and what she has to say. The best parents can do is to be excellent role models for the kind of behavior they expect. Surround your daughter with experiences and people who exemplify the values and behaviors you want to emphasize.

## Planning End-of-the-Year Activities

Before we know it, end-of-the-school-year activities—the good with the bad, and the appropriate with the inappropriate—will be upon us. Some schools still have graduation complete with robes, a guest speaker, and pomp and circumstance. Other schools will sponsor formal proms with gowns, tuxedos, and limousines—or graduation trips. Still others will recognize the growth and learning of every student, provide opportunities for students to reflect on their accomplishments, and involve parents and caregivers in this important transition period.

Every middle level school has a responsibility to provide a truly special end of the school year, more than simply cleaning out lockers and classrooms, turning in books, and saying goodbye. The end-of-the-year is a time for consolidating learning, thinking carefully about what students have learned academically, personally, and socially, and a chance for both teachers and students to assess the goals they set earlier in the year. In some schools, parents are invited

into this process as well, through student-led conferences or other activities. Here are three important ideas that educators and parents should consider in planning for the end of the school year.

**First**, remember that these activities are for young adolescents. While proms, graduations, and trips may have been the norm in the past, seriously consider whether students in middle level schools want or *need* such activities at 13, 14, or 15 years of age. Think carefully about the purpose of end-of-the-year activities as a combination of celebration, transition to the next stage of their lives, reflection on their learning and responsibility.

**Second**, several of these year-end activities are “markers” of significant events, signaling the end of high school. A high school graduation is a unique and meaningful event; duplicating it in middle school may take away from its significance and meaning four years later. In similar fashion, graduation trips for eighth graders may be inappropriate as well.

Wouldn't it be better to use the time, money, and energy to take a series of learning trips during the year?

What kinds of end-of-the-year activities should educators and parents plan? Think about activities that celebrate the learning communities and relationships that have been formed during the preceding middle level years or activities that further student learning or allow students to use the skills and knowledge they have in their middle school years. A service learning project where students give back to their community is one possibility. Low-key rather than over-the-top celebrations are more appropriate: trips to nearby landmarks or points of interest; school events that honor all students for achievements during the year; social events that focus on students, teachers, and families. Think about a scavenger hunt with a theme of middle school memories or things learned during the past two to three years or a student-planned cookout or day at the local pool, with fun challenges and activities.

## Site-Seeing for Parents

*Web sites with valuable resources for parents.*

### **Edutopia—George Lucas Educational Foundation** [www.edutopia.org](http://www.edutopia.org)

One of the best sites on the Web for information and ideas about cutting-edge teaching and learning. Look for stories about innovative middle schools, videos that show ideas in action, interviews with experts, and an excellent set of resources on parent involvement (listed under “Priority Topics”).



### **National Middle School Association**

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