

Top Ten Tips for Middle School Parents

Middle School is a time of great growth and experimentation for preteens as they begin to try to figure out who they want to be and how they want to relate to the world. It's not only a very exciting time, but a challenging one as well. Here is B-PEN's "Top Ten" list of parent-to-parent tips to help keep kids healthy and safe, discouraging alcohol/drug use and other risky behaviors.

1. Set aside **time** each week to spend with your child, whether it's having dinner as a family, taking a walk, going out for ice cream or a movie, shopping or driving to school. These can be casual yet important opportunities to learn about your child's life and chat about values -- balancing social life and academics, healthy relationships, etc.
2. **Get to know** your child's friends and their parents, and **stay connected**.
3. Help students to structure **homework** time to be sure that it is getting done. Take snack breaks with them.
4. Keep in touch with your teen's **teachers or guidance counselor** about any issues or questions.
5. Set clear expectations and **monitor screen use**, both time and content: TV, cell phones, the Internet, video games and apps, all of which can quickly become addictive. Consider restricting computer use to a family area, and resist requests for the latest social media craze – these apps and web sites often require users to be 13 and even then, the risks can far outweigh the benefits. (A great place to keep up with current trends in social media is www.common sense media.org.) Talk to your teens about what it means to be a responsible cyber citizen. Talk about the risks of cyber-bullying. Experts recommend turning off and removing phones, tablets and computers from the bedroom at night and storing in a central location.
6. Know what your child is doing during the weekday "danger zone" after school. Avoid unsupervised homes, and on weekends limit unsupervised **"hanging out time"** and set a **reasonable curfew**. If your teen is invited to a party or sleepover, **call the parent host** to make sure adults will be present.
7. **Substance experimentation** is becoming problematic even at the middle school level. **Communicate clearly** that you trust your child to behave responsibly and not use any alcohol or other drugs, and that breaking this trust will have significant consequences.
8. **Know the facts**, and let your teen know the risks of using alcohol, marijuana, other illegal drugs as well as other people's prescription drugs (Ritalin, Adderal, antidepressants, etc.). Discuss some of the bad decisions kids can make when they are under the influence. If you find signs of alcohol or other drug use, you can get **confidential information and support** through the Brookline Prevention/Intervention team at Brookline High School, 617-713-5155, www.B-SAPP.org.
9. Remember to give **positive feedback and encouragement** to your child on a regular basis. This period of transition can be a tricky time, and your teen needs your support.
10. Be **informed, involved and connected** at your school. Attend PTO meetings, Parent Network get-togethers, athletic and performing arts events, volunteer on a committee – this will help you connect with other parents and stay a vital part of your child's school community as they navigate these tricky transitional years.

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B-PEN (Brookline Parent Education Network) works with school administrators and PTOs to help parents navigate the common social, emotional and developmental challenges of adolescence via parent network meetings, presentations, print/electronic materials, and resource information.

For more information, visit www.B-PEN.org or contact coordinators
June Harris June_Harris@psbma.org or Karen Campbell Karen_Campbell@psbma.org

*informed * involved * connected*