

PARENTING THROUGH MIDDLE SCHOOL

By Sue Blaney &
Shelly D. Mahon, M.S.

Tips to Connect Home and School

Communication

Sometimes, parents can use help encouraging their middle schooler to talk about his or her experiences at school. Here are some ideas that other families have found to be helpful conversation starters at the dinner table.

- **Share a high point from the day**, a low point, and a wish. There are several variations on this theme. An alternative is for each person to report one good thing, one bad thing, and one funny thing that happened during the school day. This exercise can help a parent gain insight into their middle schooler's day, as well as the names of new friends, their developing values, and the things that seem to matter to them the most.
- **Say one good thing about someone at the table** and one good thing about himself/herself. This can help your child focus on other people's behavior, gain experience in self-reflection, and get used to saying – and hearing – positive comments about themselves and others.
- **Share a problem** they are currently having, or one they have had in the past. They can expand on how they intend to solve it, or share insights on what has worked in the past. Letting an adult go first in this conversation enables your teen to hear an adult's thought process and approach. You can teach a lot by modeling. When your teen shares a problem that she is facing, ask if she would like your input. This approach can give everyone at the table the opportunity to coach her through how to analyze the issue and develop a plan for solving the problem. Be careful here; don't tell her what to do! Listening respectfully is an important part of this approach.

More Conversation Ideas

- Buy or create a series of "conversation cards." Choose a thoughtful question to discuss at dinner. Here are some suggested questions:
 - What do you like about your country? What could be improved?
 - What relative would you want to meet from your families past, and why?
 - What would you like to be famous for?
 - Where would you live if you could live anywhere?

Activities

Activities and experiences deepen your teen's learning. The more active the involvement, and the more you apply different modes of learning, the deeper the learning will be. Opportunities to apply what your teen is learning surround you every day. With a little focus and creativity, you can make a big difference in your teen's ability to appreciate what is being taught at school.

Try these activities to stretch their learning:

- **Help** him apply his math skills in every day situations. He can use math at the grocery store, in cooking, and in projects at home.
- **Watch** and read about the news together. Discuss politics and apply the principles that she is learning about in her social studies class.
- **Point out** the foreign languages spoken in your community. Ask your teen to read signs or information that is presented in the new language he is studying.
- **Apply** the relevant science principles as you heat your home, fix your car, cook dinner, and water your houseplants.
- **Encourage** debating, acting, singing, dancing, and hands-on experiments. The more active the involvement, the more learning is likely to stick. Use techniques that involve your teen's senses.

Do what you can to make it fun!

Parenting Through Middle School is a short, easy-to-use tool kit for parents with middle school aged children. We use helpful video clips, audio interviews, focused articles and downloadable tools so you, as parents, can learn what to expect, what you need to know, and how you can best support your changing child.

© Copyright 2010: Sue Blaney
and Shelly D. Mahon, M.S.



www.ParentingTeensInfo.com
800-234-2150