

Getting Started

A Handbook for Bellport Middle School Parents and Guardians



Acknowledgements

We thank all of the individuals who contributed to the development of this document.

Copies of the booklet may be obtained by contacting Bellport Middle School, (631) 730-1626

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Introduction

Bellport Middle School (BMS) is pleased to provide you with *GETTING STARTED, a guide for Middle School Parents and Guardians*. *GETTING STARTED* is designed to help adults navigate through the middle school years, thereby being in a better position to help their child. This handbook provides useful information covering a wide range of topics which is intended to help parents and guardians better assist their children, so they may be successful here at Bellport Middle School. We encourage you as a family to sit down and read *GETTING STARTED*. We hope you find *GETTING STARTED* an invaluable reference source. If you have questions, comments, or suggestions for ways to improve future editions of this handbook please contact Bellport Middle School.

What is the purpose of a Middle School?

The National Middle School Association defines the “purpose and functions of the exemplary middle schools”, as those which “center on the intellectual, social, emotional, moral, and physical developmental needs of young adolescents....

Exemplary middle level programs foster appropriate programs, policies, and practices that foster the development of these tasks in positive ways.”

Bellport Middle School administration, faculty, and staff are dedicated to meeting the high standard set by the National Middle School Association.

Here is a list of curriculum goals for the ideal middle school:

1. Provide a comfortable transition between elementary and high school.
2. Teach to the individual student.
3. Support the social and emotional development of young adolescents.
4. Provide varied instructional strategies and exploratory programs
5. Promote enrichment and encourage self-expression.
6. Integrate technology across the school.
7. Create a positive school climate and a sense of community.
8. Create a community building connecting the school to the community.

The BMS “Mission Statement”

The mission of the Bellport Middle School is:

- To provide a bridge between elementary and secondary schools.
- To shape a positive learning process.
- To inspire high academic performance.
- To encourage participation by all students.
- To promote respect for individual differences.

Bellport Middle School will graduate confident, independent, responsible, cooperative, and accepting human beings.

School Pays off in Your Child’s Future

At Bellport Middle School we understand the importance for your child to obtain a good education. We are dedicated to providing such an education, so that they may achieve success and financial well-being.

Average Annual Earnings by Educational Level, 2001

High school diploma	\$24,254
Associate’s (2-year degree)	\$32,563
Bachelor’s (4-year degree)	\$50,782
Advanced (Master’s, Ph.D., etc.)	\$72,720

U. S. Census Bureau 2001

Back to School

(Source – Kids Health for Parents)

Entering a new grade, a new school or starting school for the first time makes some children fearful. Although a few butterflies are normal in any new situation, a minority of children develop real physical symptoms associated with the start of school. "A seasonal spike in abdominal pain and other stomach complaints corresponds with the start of the academic year," says Roy Proujansky, MD, a pediatric gastroenterologist.

With any new or potentially frightening situation, allows your child time to adjust advises pediatric psychologist David Sheslow, PhD. Talk to your child about what worries him, and offer reassurance: Is he afraid he won't make new friends? Is the thought of schoolwork stressing him out? Is he worried about school violence or the bully from last year? To increase your child's comfort level with going back to school, you may want to consider adjusting your schedule to make the transition smoother for him/her. Dr. Sheslow suggests it's especially beneficial for parents to be home at the end of the school day for the first week. But many working parents just don't have that flexibility. If you can't be there when school lets out, try to arrange your evenings so that you are able to give your child as much time as he/she needs, especially during those first few days Dr. Sheslow says.



Fifty Great Things about Middle Schoolers!

(Source: Education World)

Everybody is aware of the bad rap that middle-grade students get. Young adolescents inspire all kinds of jokes.

Rita Rudner must have had young adolescents in mind when she said, "My husband and I are either going to buy a dog or have a child. We can't decide whether to ruin our carpet or ruin our lives."

And I think it was Steven Wright who said "Hire young teens...while they know everything!"

Middle school youngsters earn some of the barbs aimed at them -- because sometimes they act more like second graders than seventh graders! But students in the middle grades are in that strange netherworld between childhood and adolescence. Their bodies are changing. So are their minds, their thought processes. It's a time "when many battles for the self are won and lost," says Mary Pipher (*Reviving Ophelia*) of students in these in-between years...

MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS: MY HEROES!

Middle school teachers are a rare breed. They're my heroes! To be a middle school teacher -- something this former third-grade teacher could never imagine being -- requires great patience and creativity, great dedication, and, above all, a great sense of humor.

So why do middle school teachers love what they do? Why wouldn't they trade places with teachers in the elementary or high school grades? That's what I wanted to know. And that's why I enlisted the help of Education World's principals and the teachers on the Middle-L listserv... I asked them,

What's so great about middle school kids?

Through their responses shines that special dedication -- along with flashes of the required sense of humor!

Here, in honor of the Month of the Young Adolescent -- and with big-time thanks to the middle school educators who contributed are:

FIFTY GREAT THINGS ABOUT MIDDLE SCHOOLERS!

1. They are eager to learn.
2. They are willing to be directed.
3. They are diverse and interesting.

4. They leave after three years!
5. They're just plain fun to be around.
6. They have lots of energy.
7. Most of them love school.
8. They are like clay -- still impressionable.
9. They can be influenced...positively.
10. Ninety-two of them are great singers (says the director of the 93-member middle school chorus).
11. They keep me young.
12. They want to fit in, but they also want to do well in school.
13. They have great personalities.
14. Every day is different.
15. They are potty-trained -- hopefully!
16. They are a study in contrasts.
17. They love new ideas.
18. They have good manners...generally.
19. They will contribute to my social security fund!
20. They respond well to adults.
21. They are enthusiastic -- times two!
22. They are caring (usually *not* just about themselves!).
23. They are fun to teach -- and to learn from.
24. They're electric!
25. They are easy to please.
26. They grow out of it!
27. They're becoming so aware of everything around them.
28. They make me laugh all the time.
29. They are cool!
30. They come up with the most interesting ideas.
31. They like to try new things.
32. They aren't shy about sharing their thoughts.
33. They are so in-your-face honest!
34. They are independent, but they still like their teachers.
35. They love to use my mirror!
36. Hugs are still popular (as long as the other students don't see them giving you one!).
37. They still have hopes and dreams, and they love to share them.
38. They are fashion critics, sure to tell you if you're dressed to meet "the standard"!
39. Everything is funny to them.
40. They're unpredictable.
41. They have great conversation skills.
42. They enjoy my corny stories and jokes.
43. They're unorganized, but manageable.
44. There's no need for aerobics because teachers get plenty of exercise trying to keep up with them!
45. They are helpful.
46. They can be molded in spite of the "supposed" I-hate-all-grown-ups attitude.
47. The light in their eyes still shines.
48. You never know what will come out of their mouths next.
49. There's never a dull moment!

And the fiftieth thing teachers think is great about teaching middle schoolers...

50. *July! And August!*

When Families Stay Involved in Education, Student Success Rises

(Prepared by National Middle School Association)

Education doesn't just happen in the classroom; the home is also an important learning environment.

The importance of family involvement was a key message delivered by former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley. He said, "Thirty years of research shows that when family and community members are directly involved in education, children achieve better grades and higher test scores, have much higher reading comprehension, graduate at higher rates, are more likely to enroll in higher education, and are better behaved."

"Family involvement is especially important in middle level schools (grades five through eight)," reports Sue Swaim, Executive Director, National Middle School Association. "It's at this time when young adolescents are establishing habits that will follow them through their lives. Family support and a degree of structure in the home will provide a foundation for success for middle school students."

Swaim recommends five actions that families can take to support students:

1. Establish a daily family routine.

This includes providing time, space and materials needed for studying. Young adolescents should be assigned regular household tasks to help develop responsibility. Good health habits are also an important part of the home with the proper balance of rest and sleep, good nutrition, and a good breakfast before going to school. Hungry students aren't strong learners in the classroom.

2. Model the value of learning and hard work.

Reading at home and engaging in other learning activities demonstrate to students that parents see education as an important part of everyone's life. Some families designate a specific time when everyone reads. Parents can also encourage open discussions with young adolescents on issues of the day or decisions regarding their lives. When parents encourage frank discussions, they demonstrate that they respect their youngster's opinions.

3. Monitor out-of-school activities.

It's important for youngsters this age to have rules, but those rules should be discussed with the child so that he or she understands why they are in place. Parents should also guide the use of leisure time so that it is constructive. This includes time with friends, after school activities and television or relaxation time. There's room for all these items, but they should be balanced. It's also important for parents to reward success and apply sanctions in a consistent manner so that young adolescents will understand that hard work is appreciated and there are limits to what they may do.

4. Encourage your child's overall development and progress in school.

When parents express an interest in their child's school work, it shows that parents value what students are achieving in their education. But this means more than simply asking "What did you do in school today?" Encourage your child to explain projects and other work. Attend appropriate school events, and stay in touch with your child's teachers.

5. Encourage reading, writing and discussing among all family members.

Education should not be seen as an activity in which only the child is involved. Parents can relate everyday experiences to what is happening in the classroom. Families should discuss current events, evaluate television programming they watch together, and plan local family trips together that have educational value. Writing together, whether it's something as simple as grocery lists or more formal such as letters or diaries, demonstrates the value of writing.

"At this age, young adolescents frequently try to push away from their parents, but there is no substitute for family involvement in education," said Swaim. "The time parents spend with their children today will increase their success in school and life."

Getting Your Child Organized

Challenge Your Child

Did you know that a child can accomplish goals that he or she sets for themselves?

Did you know that the more complex and complicated the goal, the more work a child needs to do?

Did you know that the more work a child does to reach their goal, the more knowledgeable they become?

Did you know that the more knowledgeable they are, the easier the task becomes?

Learning can be a really simple and fun experience. All they need are the techniques that help them to succeed.

If your child wishes to improve his or her skills and talents but needs help on how to succeed you should contact their teacher(s) and counselors. They are trained to help a child maximize his or her skills.

Be Prepared

When a child goes to school make sure they are well prepared. Their homework should be in their binder and their school planner should be with the rest of their school books. The planner is an extremely important part of getting schoolwork organized and can also help them organize their outside activities. If they write homework assignments down in the planner on a regular basis, they will always know the assignment for each class. Help them develop the habits of writing down all assignments and reviewing and checking when assignments are due; then, they will be set to reap the positive rewards of being a successful and excellent student.

Checklist for School Supplies

Listed below are the basic supplies your child may need for school. Teachers may require additional supplies.

- Three-ring binder (lined notebook paper), spiral notebook, or composition books
- Section dividers for the notebook
- Pencils, Pens (ballpoint or ink pens with blue or black ink)
- Plastic pencil case (attach to the inside of the binder)
- Ruler, Calculator

The Notebook

A neat and organized notebook can help your child do well in school. Here are some tips for setting up the notebook:

- Keep the planner with the notebooks. If they have more than one notebook, get them in the habit of bringing the planner to each class.
- Always write down homework assignments in the planner.
- Use dividers to separate their binder sections by subject.
- Keep extra loose-leaf paper in each section.
- Label the notes with the date and topic discussed.
- At the end of each marking period remove, but do not destroy, materials that are no longer needed from their three-ring binder. Save the materials for future exams.

Homework

Homework is a required part of the instructional program and will be assigned on a regular basis. They can expect to have one or two hours of homework daily. Homework includes not only the assignments their teacher gives them, **but also reviewing past work, practicing skills, and reading to improve knowledge.** It is always good for them to have the telephone number of a homework buddy in each of their classes so that they can check out questions about assignments.

Homework Tips

Here we offer you some suggestions for doing homework. There is no right or wrong way for doing homework. **The most important thing is that the homework be done and handed in on time.** This goes to the core of being a responsible person. Teachers will expect them to have their assignments.

- Some students prefer a quiet place to help them concentrate on their homework, while others find it helpful to work near an adult to ask for help when needed.
- Some students find it best to work first on the subject that they like least, while others find it gives them a sense of accomplishment to do their favorite subjects first.
- The important thing is to find a style that works for YOUR CHILD and stick with it.
- If you find they are still having difficulty getting homework done, have them see their teacher and/or counselor for extra help.

What Will My Child Learn?

Sixth Grade - is the beginning of middle school. Emphasis will be placed on increasing your child's proficiency in the basic skills. Your child will have more than one teacher because teachers are becoming subject specialists.

Here is a list of some of the core skills your child will learn.

- Identify major chronological events in history, as well as find the areas studied in history on maps and globes.
- Understand our legacy from ancient and early civilizations.
- Understand and perform all operations for rational numbers.
- Write, simplify, and manipulate expressions and equations in all areas of problem solving, including ratios, proportions, geometry, statistics, and probability.
- Use all stages of the writing process (organizing, drafting, revising, and editing).
- Write essays, reports, letters, stories, and poems using word processing skills.
- Set up and conduct simple scientific experiments.
- Understand the concepts of ecosystems, biomes, fossils, weather and climate, energy, astronomy, gravity, and the earth processes.
- Further develop an understanding and application of music through exposure in the music classroom or through the applied music curriculum (band, orchestra, or chorus).
- Develop creative problem solving skills through a variety of art media.



Seventh Grade - The learning pace increases in seventh grade because students are asked to handle a more challenging curriculum and do independent projects in many of their subjects. The curriculum also broadens beyond language arts, math, social studies, and science. Your child will have daily classes in such areas as foreign language, art, music, health, home and careers, technology, and physical education.

Here is a list of some of the core skills your child will learn.

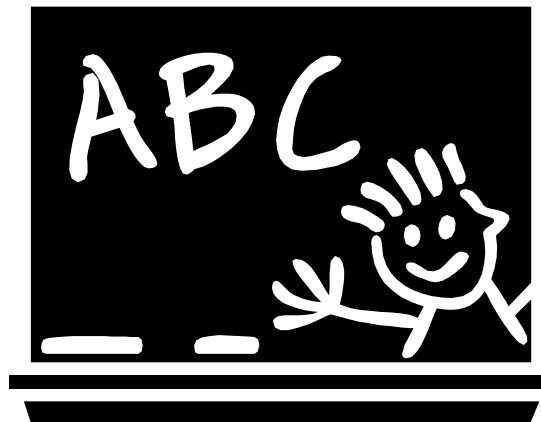
- Write papers that are mechanically correct and more than one page in length.
- Express himself/herself orally in a clear and organized way.
- Understand the principles of the U.S. Constitution and the structure of American democracy. Early American History to the Civil War.
- Understand angles and symmetry and construct various three-dimensional objects, plane figures, parallel lines, and circles.
- Handle statistics (mean, median, and mode) and determine the probability of events.
- Solve simple equations containing a variable.
- Understand in depth man's role in the living environment and the human body and its systems.
- Appreciate art and music and acquire basic skills in these areas.
- Further develop an understanding and application of music through exposure in the music classroom or through the applied music curriculum (band, orchestra, or chorus).



Eighth Grade – This is it -- the final year before students enter high school. Your child will need to take challenging courses in order to prepare. There will be more emphasis on discussion rather than the simple recall of facts. Your child will begin to make important decisions about careers and behavior. He/she also should be taking total responsibility for completing his/her assignments both at school and at home.

Find out what else your child will learn this year.

- Write essays that describe, persuade, narrate, compare and contrast.
- Read increasingly complex literature.
- American History from Reconstruction to present-day.
- Identify major chronological events in United States history and explain how a bill becomes a law.
- Do introductory algebra and a considerable amount of geometry.
- Understand the concepts of matter and energy, forces and motion, basic chemistry, and basic geology.
- Take notes and outline text and speeches.
- Participate effectively in classroom and group discussions.
- Stimulate divergent thinking and art appreciation through creative experiences.
- Further develop an understanding and application of music through exposure in the music classroom or through the applied music curriculum (band, orchestra, or chorus).



Assist Your Child in Time Management Skills

Help Plan Their Time

We all have the same amount of time—24 hours each day. Some people use it better than others. Success in school depends on how well you plan and manage your time. Students should plan their time so that they can get their work done and still have time for outside activities. Your child's schedule should be balanced to allow time for their academic and social needs.

If they feel that they don't have enough time to do all the things they really want or need to do, help them by making a copy of the Time-Learning Chart on the next page. They can use it to keep a record of how they spend their time for one week. At the end of the week, together, take look at the chart and have them ask themselves these questions:

- What are the three main ways I spend my time?
- Do I like the way I am spending my time?
- What would I like to change?

Now have them use the Weekly List of Priorities to plan next week. You can copy the Time-Planning Chart and let them plan a schedule for all the things they must do and the things they would like to do. Show them the five “**Steps for Planning Your Time**” listed below to help your child outline a schedule.

Some weeks are busier than others. Sometimes it is hard to rank activities, all of which are important. Following these steps should help your child complete major tasks.

Steps for Planning Their Time

Step 1 List everything that you have to do for a whole week.

Step 2 Give every job or activity a time and place. Write this on a time chart.

Step 3 Make changes in your schedule as the week passes, if you need to.

Step 4 Check off each item on the schedule after you have completed it.

Step 5 Reward yourself when you finish a very hard task.

Remember, to have your child use the Time-Planning Chart to help them.

Now, have them review their lists and use the weekly chart to plan another week. Ask if they see improvements. Sometimes everything will not fit into their schedule and some activities may need to be postponed. Teach them to choose the things that are most important and do those things first. This is called “setting priorities.”

Together, review your child's choices and have them ask themselves if their choices are wise ones. Encourage your child to review their list and plan with you and/or teachers. With good planning, they will be ready when a big project must be done.

TIME-PLANNING CHART

TIME	MON	TUES	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	SUN
Morning	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							
10:00							
11:00							
12:00							
Afternoon	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx
1:00							
2:00							
3:00							
4:00							
5:00							
Evening	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx	xxxxx
6:00							
7:00							
8:00							
9:00							

Use this sheet to plan.

1. Make a list of things you ALWAYS DO every week (eating, sleeping, and homework)
2. Make a list of additional activities you MUST DO this week (sports, and other scheduled activities).
3. Make a list of OPTIONAL things you would like to do this week, if you have time.

Weekly List of Priorities

Things I ALWAYS DO every week

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Other things I MUST DO this week

For School

For Home

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ |
|--|--|

OPTIONAL things I would like to do if I have time this week

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Proven Ideas Parents Can Use to Help Their Children Do Better In School

(From the Pages of *Parents Make the Difference!* Newsletter – copyright 2000, the Parent Institute)

Making Time Count

- **Put specific times on your calendar** each week when you will spend time with your children. During that time, focus your love and attention on your child.
- **Use car time to talk with your children.** There's no phone or TV to interfere. No one can get up and leave. And kids know they really have your ear.
- **Plan to eat at least one meal together** as a family each day.
- **Look for things to do together as a family.** Get everyone involved in choosing how to spend your time together.

Reading to Your Child

- **Try relaxing your family's bedtime rules** once a week on the weekend. Let your child know that he can stay up as late as he wants—as long as he's reading in bed.
- **Help your child start their own library**—paperback books are fine. Encourage your child to swap books with friends. Check used bookstores. Give books as gifts.
- **Want your children to be good readers?** Let them see you read. More students than ever have reported that their homes contained few or no reading materials.

Building Self-Esteem

- **Have your child make a “book” about themselves,** with their own illustrations and wording. “A Book About Me” is a great way to help your child see himself/herself as “somebody.”
- **Help your child discover their roots** by talking with family members during holidays and other visits.
- **Constantly look for ways to tell your children** what you like about them, that you love them. There is no age limit on this. “When I do something well, no one ever remembers. When I do something wrong, no one ever forgets.” Those words were written by a high school dropout.
- **Let kids overhear you praising them to others.**
- **Help kids learn from problems,** not be devastated by them. Many parents don't ever use the word “failure.” They may talk about a “glitch,” a “problem,” or a “snag.” But even when something doesn't work out as they'd planned, successful people try to learn *something* from the experience.

Discipline

- **In good weather,** put two angry kids on opposite sides of a strong window or glass door. Provide each with a spray bottle of window cleaner and a rag. Then let them “attack.” Their angry words will turn to laughter...and your window will be clean!
- **Try role playing to eliminate constant fighting.** For five minutes, have the fighters switch roles. Each has to present the other person's point of view as clearly and fairly as possible. Odds are, they'll start laughing and make up. Better yet, they may come up with a compromise solution both parties like.
- **For better discipline, speak quietly.** If you speak in a normal tone of voice, even when you're angry, you'll help your child see how to handle anger appropriately. And if you don't scream at your kids, they're less likely to scream at each other...or at you.

- **Try a “black hole”** to keep toys and other belongings picked up. All you need is a closet or a cabinet with a lock—the “black hole.” When something is left out that should be put away, it gets put into the “black hole” for 24 hours. Once a favorite toy or something your child needs is locked up for 24 hours, there is a greater incentive to keep it where it belongs. This works best when the whole family participates.

Solving School Problems

- **Try looking over children’s study materials** and making up a sample quiz as they study for upcoming tests.
- **Talk with the school “in time of peace”** before major problems develop. In most cases a call to the teacher can resolve the problem.
- **How to make report cards a positive experience:**
 - Preparation** – Ask, “What do you think your report card will tell us?” Getting ready is helpful
 - Perspective** – Understand that a report card is just one small measure of your child. A child with poor grades still has plenty of strengths.
 - Positive action** – Find something to praise. Focus on how to improve.
- **Be aware that your attitudes about school** affect your child. If you hated math, be careful not to prejudice your child.

Motivating your Child – Praise children constantly

- **Children need the 3 “A”s as well as the 3 “R”s: Attention, Appreciation, and Acceptance.**
- **Some researchers believe every child is gifted** – if we will just look for the ways. Helping a child see his/her giftedness is very motivating.
- **Encourage children to read biographies** about successful people. As children learn about the traits that made others successful, they are often motivated to adopt those same success patterns in their own lives.
- **Motivate your children in math** by challenging them to figure out how much change you should get back from a purchase. If they get the amount right, they get to keep the change.

Building Responsibility

- **Try a simple cardboard box** to help make your child responsible for school belongings. Have your child choose a place for the box—near the door or in his room. Every afternoon, his FIRST task should be to place all belongings in the box. When homework is finished, it goes in the box, too. In the morning, the box is the last stop before heading out the door.
- **Help children understand and take responsibility for the consequences of their choices.** “I chose to do my homework. The result was that I got an “A” on my math test.” “I chose to get up 15 minutes late. The result was that I missed breakfast...and nearly missed the bus.”
- **Try giving your child the responsibility** of growing a small garden—even in just a flowerpot. The positive and negative results of carrying out your responsibilities are very clear.

Reinforcing Learning

- **Talk about geography in terms children can understand: Go through your house** and talk about where things came from. A calculator may have come from Taiwan. A box of cereal may have a Battle Creek, Michigan address, or White Plains, New York. **Talk about where** the wheat for your bread came from. Where was the cotton for your blue jeans grown? **Tell your children** where your ancestors came from. Find places on a map.
- **Show your child that writing is useful.** Have them help you write a letter ordering something, asking a question, etc. then show them the results of your letter

Tips for Disciplining Your Child

These tips are provided by *The Royal College of Psychiatrists* and *Kids Health*. They are for educational purposes only. For more information visit The Royal College of Psychiatrists or Kids Health on the internet.

What is discipline?

People often think of discipline as being about punishment. It isn't really. It's mainly about how you can teach your child how to behave – about teaching them the rules of life. Although you start by having to teach them, after a while they will learn to control their behavior themselves – inner discipline, if you like. Although you may sometimes have to concentrate on stopping them doing things you don't want them to do, it's just as important to teach them to do the things you do want them to do. Discipline is an important part of loving and caring for your child.

Why is discipline important?

Rules are an important part of everyday life. They make it possible for us to get along with one another. If children do not learn how to behave, they will find it very difficult to get on, both with grown-ups and other children. They will find it hard to learn at school, will misbehave and will probably become unhappy and frustrated.

Is there one method which is right?

There are some basic ideas about behavior that nearly everybody seems to agree on. For example, most cultures encourage their children to be honest and polite and discourage them from being rude and aggressive. But people from different backgrounds have different ways of teaching their children how to behave.

For example, people used to think that "Children should be seen and not heard". A popular saying was "Spare the rod and spoil the child". Things have changed. We now know that it is helpful for children to be able to say what they think. We also know that it is abusive and damaging to hit children, although many families still use a light physical punishment occasionally. Most importantly, we now know for certain the best way to stop bad behavior. It is to make sure children feel secure, loved and valued, and that we pay attention to them when they are behaving well.

Every family and set of parents has its own particular way of doing things. But there are some strategies that most people seem to find helpful.

Stopping behavior you don't want

Planning ahead Don't make up the rules as you go along. It's not so helpful to tell children to stop doing something if they didn't know they shouldn't be doing it in the first place! It helps if you and your child know the rules for particular situations, before they happen.

Involve your children Sit down with your child to make sure that you both feel that the rules are reasonable. This may not always work, but you may be surprised at how much you can both agree on!

Make rules and commands clear You need to be clear. For example, "Please keep your food on the plate" tell children exactly what you expect them to do. Telling them just to "Be good" does not.

Make rules and commands brief If your child can't understand you, they can't obey you. Keep it short and simple.

Clear, quick punishments (If... then) Long-term threats such as "If you carry on doing this, you won't get a bike for your birthday" don't work well. It's much better to threaten something that will happen soon. For example, "If you don't do it now, then you can't watch TV today".

Be realistic If you are offering a reward or threatening a punishment, it's got to be something you can do. It is no good threatening a heavy punishment that you can't bear to deliver. It's no good promising a wonderful reward if you can't provide it. It's much better to offer small rewards and punishments that you can actually carry out.

Be consistent If you don't stick to the rules, your child will learn that if they ignore them, you will probably give in.

Be calm This can be difficult when your child seems to be disobeying you on purpose. The trouble is long, angry arguments don't help. If you say harsh things in the heat of the moment, you may just be storing up trouble for the future. It works much better if you can respond quickly and calmly – send your child to their room, switch off the TV or whatever – and then just get on with the rest of the day.

Encouraging behavior you do want

Telling children what they should not do doesn't necessarily teach them what they should do. You can do a lot to help and encourage the behavior you want. Putting this into practice is harder than it sounds. Here are some practical suggestions:

Notice and praise good behavior You could say something like "Thank you for walking carefully", or "I really like it when you play quietly together".

One step at a time Don't expect perfection! If your child has only partly tidied the bedroom, you have a choice. Instead of criticizing your child for not having finished, you can praise them for having started.

Clear, quick rewards (When... then) If you want your child to do a certain thing, you promise that when they do it, then you will reward them. For example: "When you've eaten your lunch, then you can play"; or "When you've had a bath, then you can watch TV"; or "When you finish your homework, then you can stay up another half an hour". Rewards need to be simple, practical and fast.

The importance of your relationship

Troublesome behavior can make it difficult for you and your child to get on well. At times like this, it's easy to forget that you can actually have nice times together. Both of you can end up feeling angry and upset. To make things better again, discipline isn't enough. You need to plan to have good times together. You could plan to play for ten minutes every day. With an older child, you could plan to play a game, read, cook or play football.

How can it go wrong?

Your own experience of childhood is very important. If you were punished a lot, you may find yourself doing the same with your own children. Or you may do the opposite and find it hard to be as clear and firm as you need to be.

If parents disagree about rules, their children can get quite mixed up because they don't know whose rules they should be obeying. They may just learn that if they can't get something from one parent, all they need to do is go to the other.

Discipline takes energy! It's easy to let things slip if you are depressed, tired, very busy, or don't have any help with your children. If there haven't been any rules for a long time, children can simply get into the habit of behaving badly. If you have ignored their good behavior, they may have just learned that bad behavior is the easiest way to get your attention.

What can help?

Talking problems over with friends is often useful. It can be hard to see what's going on from inside the situation. Talk to your child's teachers. There may be a similar problem at school. It will help your child if you and the teachers can agree on how to tackle the problem. Changing difficult behavior is a slow, hard job but it can be done – you can see big changes after two or three months.

If things are still not right after three months, it is worth asking your general practitioner for advice. If more specialist help is needed, they will be able to refer it. Specialists can help to find out what is causing the problem and also suggest practical ways of helping.

Continued

Ages 9 to 12

Kids in this age group - just as with all ages - can be disciplined with natural consequences. As they mature and request more independence and responsibility, teaching them to deal with the consequences of their behavior is an effective and appropriate method of discipline. For example, if your fifth grader has not done his homework before bedtime, should you make him stay up or help him finish? Probably not, since you'll be missing an opportunity to teach him something about life. If he doesn't do his homework earlier, he'll go to school without it the next day and suffer the resulting bad grade. It's natural for you to want to rescue your child from his mistakes, but in the long run you'll be doing him more of a favor if you let him fail sometimes. He'll see what behaving improperly can mean, and will probably not make those mistakes again. However, if your child does not seem to be learning from natural consequences, you should set up your own consequences to help him modify his behavior more effectively.

Ages 13 and Up

By now you've laid the groundwork. Your child knows what's expected of him and knows that you mean what you say about the consequences of bad behavior. Don't let down your guard now. Discipline is just as important for teens as it is for younger children. Just like the 4-year-old who needs you to set a bedtime and stick to it, no matter how he whines, your teen needs to know his boundaries, too. Make sure to set up rules regarding homework, visits by friends, curfews, and dating and discuss them beforehand with your teenager so there will be no misunderstandings. Your child, although he will probably complain from time to time, will realize that you are in control. Believe it or not, teens still want and need you to set limits and enforce order in their lives, even as you grant them greater freedom and responsibility.

When your teen **does** break a rule, taking away privileges may seem to be the best plan of action. While it's fine to take away the car for a week, for example, be sure to discuss with your child why coming home an hour past curfew is unacceptable and worrisome.

It's also important to give a teenager some control over his life. Not only will this limit the number of power struggles you may have with him, it will help him to respect the decisions you must make for him. With a younger teen, you could allow him to make his own decisions concerning school clothes, hair styles, or even the condition of his room. As he gets older, his realm of control might be extended to include an occasional relaxed curfew.

Top Signs of Trouble in Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Grade

Here are some warning signs that your child might be in trouble

Sixth Grade

For many sixth-graders, the transition to middle school can be difficult because they have to adjust to a new and much larger school, new friends, and several teachers. Frequently, their report-card grades drop because of the transition and the increased amount of work.

Your child will have trouble if he/she is not able to:

- Determine when he/she needs help and know how to get it.
- Handle different test formats (essay, short answer, multiple-choice, true-false).
- Study efficiently.
- Resist drug and alcohol experimentation.
- Demonstrate a genuine interest in school and learning

Seventh Grade

Your seventh-grader is entering a period of change on all fronts. He/she is on the threshold of becoming a teenager, trying to determine who he/she is and what he can do separately from you. To navigate the year successfully, your child must learn how to balance academics and social life and how to have confidence in his/her academic abilities.

Your child will have trouble if he's not able to:

- Establish a feeling of belonging within a group.
- Appreciate his/her own individuality.
- Avoid risk-taking behaviors.
- Complete and turn in all assignments in a timely fashion.
- Accept responsibility.

Eighth Grade

For many students, this is the last year to catch up on poor reading, writing, and math skills. If they don't, many will leave high school without graduating. Students who are not motivated to succeed in school will have trouble handling assignments this year and in high school.

Your child will have trouble if he/she is not able to:

- Use the computer as a research and word processing tool.
- Handle Homework without prodding or assistance.
- Communicate easily with his/her teachers.
- Demonstrate good, solid study skills.
- Skillfully express himself/herself in words and in writing.

Report Cards

Suggestions for Improving Report Card Grades

Every ten weeks during the school year, parents and students eagerly await the arrival of the report card. This report is intended to serve as a means of assessing academic performance. It also reflects the time and effort spent at home in preparing for success in school. Parents will also receive progress reports. The progress report is distributed in time to allow students to improve their performance before the end of the marking period.

Parents and students are encouraged to use the suggestions listed below to improve the opportunity for learning and achievement in school. Following these suggestions will help your child bring home a report card that reflects progress and accomplishment.

When the Report Card Arrives

- Set aside a specific time to discuss the report card with your child. Show you understand the school's learning objectives, as well as yours and the child's.
- Give praise and positive feedback for good efforts and for good school attendance.
- Follow through with teachers and a counselor if there is concern about academic progress.

During the School Year

- Keep up with the child's assignments and encourage good study habits.
- Let your child know your expectations for school work, class participation, behavior, and school attendance
- If necessary, find out about tutorial help available.
- Remember, that reading, writing, and arithmetic skills are mastered through practice.
- Remember, that homework is always a regular part of improving academic skills, and that there is always homework.
- Don't wait for report card time if you are concerned about academic progress. Make an appointment with your child's teachers or a counselor.

Throughout the Year

- Help your child set both short and long term goals.
- Make reading a regular part of life. Visit the library regularly.
- Encourage your child to participate in extra-curricular school and community activities and volunteer experiences.
- Let your child know that you value him/her as a person.