Online activities help your child celebrate Earth Day

Earth Day is April 22nd. Help your child find eco-friendly ways to celebrate the planet by logging onto:

• **The WWF Footprint Calculator**, [www.footprint.wwf.org.uk](http://www.footprint.wwf.org.uk). Even if your family is small, your “carbon footprint” may be big. Have your child figure out just how big with this calculator. After she answers a few questions about your food, travel and buying habits, she’ll receive an eye-opening score indicating how “green” your lifestyle really is.

• **Beyond the Barrel**, [http://azstarnet.com/app/images/flash/garbage/](http://azstarnet.com/app/images/flash/garbage/). What happens to your family’s trash and recycling after you haul it to the curb? This site spells it out for her. Although focused on Arizona, the site’s videos and information apply pretty much everywhere.

• **Biomes of the World**, [www.teachersfirst.com/lessons/biomes](http://www.teachersfirst.com/lessons/biomes). An online research project, this site is terrific for seriously studious kids. Using its outline and resources, your child can discover how ecosystems depend on one another. She’ll also find suggestions for cool ways to present the data she gathers. (Keep that in mind during science-fair season!)

• **Ecovoyageurs**, [www.ecovoyageurs.ca](http://www.ecovoyageurs.ca). What do green schools look like? How do your child’s everyday actions impact the planet? What can she do about it? Ecovoyageurs explains it all with straightforward language and splashy graphics.

**Source:** “Earth Day: TeachersFirst Editors’ Choices,” TeachersFirst, [www.teachersfirst.com/holiday/earthday.cfm](http://www.teachersfirst.com/holiday/earthday.cfm).

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**Is your middle school child overscheduled?**

Like you, your child needs downtime to unwind. But if his schedule is packed, he won’t get it.

To determine whether your child’s after-school hours are overscheduled, ask yourself:

• **Is he frequently irritable or tired?** If he has too many things on his to-do list, he may not be getting the proper amount of rest. Experts recommend pre-teens get nine to 10 hours of sleep per night.

• **Does he struggle to finish his homework?** If he’s taking appropriate classes but can’t seem to get his work done, it may be because he has too many other things on his plate.

• **Do “mystery illnesses” keep him from participating?** If he often gets a stomachache right before soccer practice, it could be a clue that he’s doing too much.

Once you’ve thought these questions over, talk with your child. “You seem super busy and stressed lately. How can we adjust your schedule so you get to do your favorite activities and have time to relax, too?”
Prepare your middle schooler for taking standardized tests

Standardized tests are part of your child’s life, and they can have a big effect on his future education. So the next time one of these multiple-choice exams looms, prepare your child by teaching him test-taking strategies. He should:

• **Read the whole question.** If he’s being timed, your child may be tempted to race through the test. Remind him to slow down and read the entire question before he jumps to finding its answer.

• **Pick out key words.** As he reads each question, your child should note key words like including, except and compare. They go to the heart of what’s being asked.

• **Consider each available answer.** Even if your child feels certain that the first answer he sees is correct, he should look through the rest. It’s possible that another answer is stronger.

• **Answer the easiest questions first.** To make sure he completes as many questions as possible, encourage your child to tackle the easy ones first. Once he gets past those, he can use the remaining minutes to revisit the tricky ones.

• **Make an informed guess.** If your child has no clue about a certain answer, he should guess (assuming there’s no penalty for doing so). To make a solid guess, he should eliminate answers that are obviously wrong and then choose from the remaining options.


“As your kids grow, they may forget what you said, but won’t forget how you made them feel.”

—Kevin Heath

Help your child understand what makes a good decision

Many children want to make the right choice, but do not know how to think it through. When your child is faced with a decision, she should:

• **Consider the consequences.** Your child should ask herself, “After I make this decision, what could be the next thing to happen?”

• **Think of others.** Almost always, good decisions do not hurt others. That doesn’t mean everyone else must be happy with your child’s decision. A friend might not be happy that your child decides not to go to a party because she has to study for a test. That is different from hurting someone personally or causing destruction.


Are you ready for the next stage of parenting?

Now that your child is in middle school, you are entering a new stage of parenting as you foster your child toward an independent adulthood. Answer yes or no to the questions below to see if you are ready:

___1. Do you allow your child to do as much as appropriately possible for herself, such as schoolwork, chores and making some decisions?

___2. Do you realize that your child needs to make mistakes to learn, and do you allow her to do so?

___3. Do you try to control your emotions when dealing with your child? Remember it is her job to begin to separate from you.

___4. Do you work with your child on setting the rules and boundaries she still needs?

___5. Do you feel comfortable with your changing role as a parent?

How well are you doing?

Mostly yes answers means you are ready for the exciting world of parenting a teen. For no answers, try those ideas in the quiz.

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Parents must be vigilant with prescription drugs in the home

When parents think of substance abuse, most think of alcohol or illegal drugs. But prescription drugs are among those with the highest rate of abuse. The top reason why: They are the easiest for children to get.

Always follow these steps to guard against prescription drug abuse:
• Be aware of the prescriptions in your home. Know how many prescriptions your family takes, and for whom they are prescribed. Monitor their use.
• Consider keeping all prescription drugs in a locked cabinet.
• Keep track of your child’s use of over the counter medicines. Monitor these, too, so you would know if any were missing from your home.
• Make clear to your child that he is never to take medicine prescribed for someone else. Ever.
• Take special care if someone in your family takes medicine for pain or for ADHD. These prescriptions are at risk for illegal sale, as well as abuse by people for whom they were not meant.


Middle school students often need a refresher course in respect

A child with a sense of fairness, kindness and responsibility is a child who respects others. However, these qualities don’t always come naturally. And even when they do, a child may have to recommit to them in middle school, where negative peer pressure sometimes makes it hard to do the right thing.

To reinforce respect in your home:
• Emphasize empathy. Middle school students are going through many changes. As a result, they are pretty wrapped up in themselves. So remind your child that his actions can affect others, too. Example: “You walked right past Grandma and Grandpa without even saying hello. How do you think that made them feel?”
• Work on solving problems. Not everyone is going to agree with your child. Teach that the first response should be: “Okay, how can we cooperate?” This is a tough one. Middle school students like to have their way. But keep at it.
• Make clear you don’t approve of media and games that seem to glamorize disrespectful speech or behavior. You can’t police your child every moment. But you can label such media offensive and not allow them in your home.
• Don’t tolerate disrespect. Your child should have consequences for disrespectful talk and behavior. Letting it go sends the wrong message—your child will interpret it as not being a big deal. But remember that discipline must be done respectfully too. Do not insult or ever use physical punishment. That can undo in an instant all the good lessons you have been trying to teach for months.


Q: My child used to chat with me all the time. But now that she’s 13, she’s much more likely to go to her friends. She’s a great kid and does fine in school, but should I be worried that we’re not communicating like we once were?

A: Probably not. As they reach the teenage years, it’s normal for kids to change how they interact with their parents.

According to Dr. N.I. Bernstein, author of How to Keep Your Teenager Out of Trouble and What to Do If You Can’t, typical teenage communication is often:
• Hurried. It’s rare for kids this age to crave long heart-to-heart chats with Mom or Dad. Instead, they’re likely to be in a rush and may even cut you off. They’re honestly not being rude—they’re being developmentally appropriate!
• Spontaneous. Your child may go days speaking to you in monosyllables. Then suddenly she’ll open up and share half a dozen things that happened during math class. Such is the nature of teenage communication. It’s usually feast or famine.
• Focused elsewhere. It can feel jarring (and a little sad), but it’s completely natural for teens to prefer talking to their friends rather than their parents. It’s part of growing up.

Remember, if there’s something serious happening in your child’s life, she’s still apt to tell you about it. But her day-to-day ups and downs? Most of those will be shared with friends.

—Holly Smith, The Parent Institute
Protect your child from cyberbullying!

Research from the Cyberbullying Research Center shows some upsetting statistics. About 20 percent of middle school students have been affected by cyberbullying. This type of bullying involves insults, posting of inappropriate photos or other material, or threats made online or by cell phone.

To keep your middle schooler safe from cyberbullying:
- **Monitor cell phone activity.** Cell phone use is a privilege and a responsibility. If your child has one, set limits on its use. Make it clear to your child that you retain the right to review the contents of her phone at any time. Keep the phone out of her room at night by setting up a charging station in your kitchen.
- **Follow established rules for social networking.** For example, Facebook’s policy is that all users must be 13 or older. If your child is of age and does have a Facebook or other such account, consider getting one yourself. Require your child to be your “friend” so you can see her page.
- **Tell your child to stop and think** before she posts or texts. Could this message be hurtful? Could it get her in trouble? Could it get the receiver in trouble? If she can answer yes to any of those three questions, she shouldn’t do it.


Know where to find websites for your middle schooler

The Internet is now a necessary part of your child’s academic life. Students go online daily at school. Most go online each afternoon or evening for homework, too. But it’s a challenge to figure out which sites are appropriate for 12- to 14-year-olds. It helps when someone has done the research for you.

You can suggest your child visit the Virtual Middle School Library (www.sldirectory.com/virtual.html). This site was founded by a retired school librarian in Philadelphia. She maintains the site and checks links often to make sure they work.

The website features include:
- **The Reading Room**—a collection of sites and suggestions for good books on any topic.
- **Educational sites** for students on every subject. This includes links to sites on writing research papers and doing science fairs.
- **Resources for parents.** This includes information on learning English as a second language.
- **Information** on how to design a website.


Technology can lead to more engaged, motivated students

If your child spends all his leisure time welded to his MP3 player, tablet or laptop, you may think these techy gizmos are little more than glorified video games. Well, think again.

According to research, students who use technology in and out of class are likely to:
- **Strengthen** problem-solving skills.
- **Have better scores** on school assessments.
- **Work** well with peers.
- **Feel** motivated to learn.
- **Display** a positive attitude.

This is good news, especially considering how prevalent technology is in students’ lives. Today, 90 percent of kids use computers at home and/or in school, and 99 percent of public schools offer Internet access.

It’s important to set limits on your child’s screen time. But don’t discourage his love of technology!