

Firm, Fair & Consistent®

MONROE VICARIATE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Guiding Students for School Success

Middle schoolers crave communication

Middle schoolers face plenty of sticky situations, and parents want to help. But communicating with kids this age can be challenging. Sometimes they're aloof. They may seem disinterested in hanging out—never mind agreeing—with their parents. But that doesn't tell the whole story.

Research shows that two of the most important things to kids are family and school. Communicating about these and other matters is essential. To encourage this:

- **Be understanding.** Your child's brain is developing in ways that help him think critically. Everything isn't "black or white" or "right or wrong." And even if it appears that he's not listening, your child *does* want to talk and feel supported.
- **Be relaxed.** Instead of saying, "Let's have a talk," spend time together and let things occur naturally. Cook dinner, talk in the car or play a sport together. This builds a foundation for communicating. When heavy topics arise, discussing them will be easier.
- **Be a role model.** Listen to your middle schooler and his opinions with respect. He'll be more likely to show you the same courtesy. Remember that communication isn't always verbal. Notice what your child is "saying" with his emotions. Try to read between the lines.

Source: Lawrence Kutner, Ph.D., "Talking to 'Tweens,'" Family Education, <http://life.familyeducation.com/communication/tween/36173.html>.



Rely on rituals to curb nighttime chaos

Don't let evening stress throw your peaceful home into chaos! Create a sensible bedtime routine for your child—and commit to it.

While there's no one-size-fits-all routine for every family, a typical nightly ritual might include:



- **Snack** at 8:00 p.m.
- **Story** at 8:15 p.m.
- **Lights out** at 8:30 p.m.

Remember: The best routine in the world is useless if no one follows it.

Source: Dr. Ruth Peters, *Laying Down the Law*, ISBN: 1-57954-773-7 (Rodale, Inc., www.rodalestore.com).

Play your way to cyberbully smarts!

Cyberbullying—being teased or harassed online—is no laughing matter. But that doesn't mean your child can't use a game to learn how to handle Internet bullies.

Just log on to www.McGruff.org and click on Games, then on Shrink the Cyberbully. Each round of this simple, kid-friendly game will teach your child ways to respond to a cyberbully. And the better she gets at the game—the more the bully shrinks!



True, the rules you set are primarily meant for your child, not you. But for rules to have the most impact, you need to show that you can toe the line, too.



For instance, if you've made a "no reading at the table" rule, then it ought to apply to your newspaper, as well.

And that "no yelling in the house" decree? Be sure you're also using your "inside voice"!

Use chores to build responsibility

Chores aren't just about raking leaves or folding laundry. They're about building a sense of responsibility in your child. So have your child complete a few small jobs each week.



To help your child get the most from her chores, be sure they're:

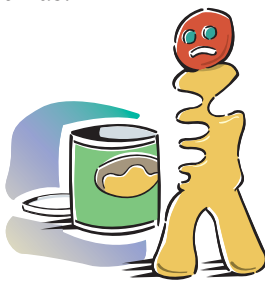
- **Age appropriate.**
- **Clearly defined.**
- **Part of her daily routine.**

Source: Dr. Marvin Marshall, *Discipline without Stress, Punishments or Rewards*, ISBN: 0-9700606-1-0 (Piper Press, www.piperpress.com).

Discuss ways to handle anger

Situations that call for discipline often involve anger. You may be angry with your child. Or your child may be angry with you. It takes self-control not to “blow up.” At a time when you’re *not* angry, discuss this with your child. “Sometimes we get angry and say or do things we regret. Let’s think of good ways to calm down.” Write down possibilities, such as:

- **Exercise.** Try a nonaggressive activity you enjoy, such as playing basketball.
- **Encourage.** Tell yourself something positive, such as, “I know I can stay calm.”
- **Use your hands.** Squeeze something mushy, such as a ball, a pillow or play dough.
- **Breathe.** Count to five silently as you breathe in—and as you breathe out—until you relax.



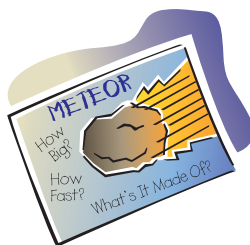
Source: Elizabeth Verdick & Marjorie Lisovskis, *How to Take the GRRRR Out of Anger*, ISBN: 1-57542-117-8 (Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com).

Questions & Answers

Q: My fourth grader is a good student, but he has developed a “ho-hum” attitude toward school this year. What can I do to get him excited about learning again?

A: Plenty! After all, you’re the biggest influence on your child’s success in the classroom. To keep him interested in school:

- **Be enthusiastic.** Take a genuine interest in your child’s education. Find out what he’s learning and then let him know you think it’s fascinating. “You’re studying meteors? That’s so cool! What can you tell me about them?” Enthusiasm is contagious, so help your child “catch it” from you.
- **Stay involved.** Make your child’s school a meaningful part of your family life. Volunteer in his class. Attend school activities together. Collect bottles for the recycling drive. And, on a day-to-day basis, read all the handouts he brings home. It’s a small gesture that sends a big message.
- **Make it easier for him to succeed.** You can’t do your child’s schoolwork for him. But you can give him a quiet place to study and stock it with pencils, paper and whatever else he needs. You can also send him to class rested and fed.
- **Continue to learn new things yourself.** Your school days may be over, but your education shouldn’t be. So broaden your own horizons. Take a class at the local community college. Read a thought-provoking book. Tackle that foreign language you’ve always wanted to master. Show your child that learning isn’t something to endure—it’s something to celebrate!



Praise may speed up a procrastinator

Does your little procrastinator constantly drag his feet? Rather than lecturing, try praising him whenever he manages to move more quickly.

“Wow! You did a great job finishing your homework early! Now we have a few minutes to play catch before dinner.”

Show him the benefit of tackling his work in a timely way, and he may be less likely to put it off next time.



Source: Marilyn Heins, M.D., F.A.A.P., “Procrastination,” ParentKidsRight, www.parentkidsright.com/pr-procrastination.html.

Enforce family rules

Does enforcing rules make you feel like the “bad guy” sometimes? To help minimize that feeling:

- **Post rules.** Put a list of rules in a common area, such as the kitchen. This reduces arguments and power struggles.
- **Use natural consequences.** Let your child learn from her mistakes. Leaving her homework papers lying around, for example, might mean they get ruined.

Source: Christina Frank, “How to Make Rules that Stick,” Parenting, www.parenting.com/article/Mom/Work-Family/How-to-Make-Rules-that-Stick-21355019/1.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

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