

# Parenting Pitfalls

Middle graders can be a huge contradiction. They might act grown-up one minute and throw near fits like young children the next. With all the ups, downs, and emotions of the early teen years, it's hard for well-meaning parents to treat their children consistently and not make mistakes.

Try these practical solutions to common parenting pitfalls—and smooth the bumpy ride through the middle years for you and your child!



## The Popular Parent

**Pitfall:** You want your child to feel loved, so you don't set any limits. *Example:* You allow your middle grader to spend hours in front of the television, even when he hasn't done his homework.

**Result:** Without limits, your child will lack the sense of security that comes with knowing what will happen when he makes specific choices.

**Solution:** Become **The Limit Setter**. Start with one limit. Let your middle grader know what it is and the reason behind it. *Example:* "You haven't been getting your homework done. From now on, you can watch TV only after you've completed your homework." Expect him to test you a few times. He'll learn you mean business when you follow through.

## The Accidental Parent

**Pitfall:** You don't set rules and consequences as general guidelines. Instead, you make them up as you go or apply them inconsistently. For example, you may give a severe punishment when your child violates curfew one time and no punishment the next time.

**Result:** Your middle grader continues to break the rules since she knows she probably won't suffer a consequence.

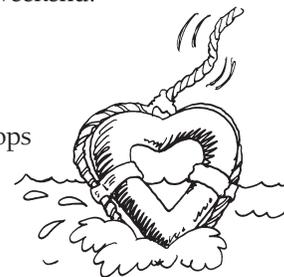
**Solution:** Become **The Predictable Parent**. Create rules with input from your child. Try to stick to big issues you feel can't be compromised. *Example:* "Setting a curfew is one way I can help keep you safe. What do you think a fair curfew would be?" Then, set clear, enforceable consequences. "If you come home past 10 p.m. on weekends, you will be grounded the following weekend."

## The Rescuer

**Pitfall:** When your middle grader drops the ball, you step in to save him. *Example:* He fails to plan for a class project, so you end up doing half of it yourself the night before it's due.

**Result:** If your child never suffers from making bad choices, he won't learn to make better ones. And if he doesn't learn these lessons now, he's not apt to develop a sense of responsibility for later in life when the stakes can be higher.

**Solution:** Become **The Responsibility Assigner**. Tell your teen that his responsibilities are his to manage. Then, teach him the skills for doing so. *Example:* Show him how to break projects into steps and keep a notebook with assignments and due dates. The next time he's about to miss a deadline, resist the urge to step in. A poor grade on the project may lead to better habits (and grades) later.



*continued*

## Middle Years



## The Control Junkie

**Pitfall:** You make choices for your middle grader most or all of the time. You hesitate to turn over the reins to a kid who can't seem to remember to take out the garbage.

**Result:** Middle graders have a growing need to take charge of their own lives. Without practice, your middle schooler won't learn the decision-making skills she'll need as she matures.

**Solution:** Become **The Choice Giver**. Try giving your child choices in small matters that won't jeopardize her (or anyone else's) safety. *Examples:* Let her decide whether to do homework before or after dinner; let her choose household tasks from a group of chores. This approach will help satisfy her own need for control and give her practice for making bigger decisions later.

## The Lecturer

**Pitfall:** When your child tells you he has a problem, you jump in with your opinion or brush aside his concerns. *Example:* He says a friend seems to be ignoring him. You tell him you never liked the child anyway and to stop worrying.

**Result:** Your middle grader may think you're more interested in giving opinions than in sympathizing with his feelings. If he doesn't feel understood, he may not be as likely to tell you about events in his life.

**Solution:** Become **The Listener**. When your child has a concern, listen without interrupting. Show you're paying attention by making eye contact. Then, acknowledge his feelings and encourage him to think through solutions. *Example:* "It sounds like you were hurt when James didn't talk to you after school. What could you do to make things better?"

## The Overachieving Parent

**Pitfall:** You push your child to get top grades and participate in a number of activities. You may also hope your middle grader can achieve things you didn't when you were in school.

**Result:** Your child might suffer from burnout. She could become withdrawn or irritable and end up with less motivation for schoolwork and activities.

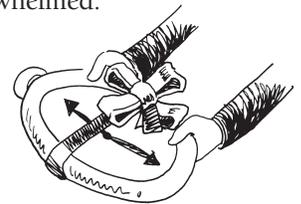
**Solution:** Become **The Balance Seeker**. Encourage your child to do her best in school, but emphasize effort, not grades. Ask her to be honest about which activities she enjoys and those she's doing to please you. Consider limiting them to one or two at a time so she can learn what she likes without being overwhelmed.

## The Invisible Parent

**Pitfall:** You and your child are so busy that you rarely have time together. Your schedules are jam-packed with work, after-school activities, homework, friends, and family.

**Result:** You lose touch with what's going on in your middle grader's life. And if he doesn't feel you're available, he may be more open to negative influences.

**Solution:** Become **The Present Parent**. Examine your family's activities and decide which ones can be dropped so that time with your child is a top priority. Take advantage of the pockets of time you have. *Example:* Declare the half hour after dinner each night as family time. Spend the time doing something your child likes to do, such as shooting hoops or talking over ice cream.



## The Silent Parent

**Pitfall:** You feel awkward bringing up tough topics with your middle grader. You opt for saying nothing, figuring she'll bring these things up when she's ready.

**Result:** Peer pressure and middle school go hand in hand. If your child doesn't know the facts about dangerous behaviors and where you stand on them, she's more likely to try something that could hurt her.

**Solution:** Become **The Values Sharer**. Talking to your child *before* she's in a difficult situation can make all the difference in how she responds. Use opportunities when the subject comes up naturally. *Example:* When you see an anti-smoking ad, ask your middle grader what she knows about smoking. Explain the dangers, and talk about ways she can say no if someone offers her a cigarette.

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