

How Much Should I Help with Homework?

Ask the Experts: Should I review my middle school son's homework each night or can I expect him to be more independent?

By [Dr. Michelle Alvarez](#), Consulting Educator

Question: I am having trouble balancing being involved as a parent in my son's schoolwork and knowing when to back off and let him learn on his own. I know there are several parents who review their children's homework every night. I, on the other hand, take the less involved approach — I ask about school, what he is working on, if there are any tests coming up, but I never look at his binders and homework. I figure if he was doing poorly I could see it on PowerSchool (the Web-based system that many schools use to allow parents to monitor their child's progress) or somehow I would hear from school. Anyway, I know I am not alone and that this is a big dilemma for a lot of parents — learning when and how to let go of my middle-school child.

Got a Question?

If your middle school child has an academic or school-related behavior problem you would like help solving, send it to middleschool@greatschools.net.

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Answer: Middle school is a challenging time for children and their parents. Your son is trying to become independent and you are trying to find that balance between "parenting" your son and giving him a chance to begin to feel independent. That balance will look different in every relationship between parent and child. However, it is very important to stay involved in your son's life.

Parental involvement can be defined in many different ways. Utilizing a good relationship with your son as the foundation for your parenting, your role is that of monitoring his progress as he develops into a young adult. If he is doing well in school, completing assignments on time without much assistance, it is very appropriate to ask questions about school, his assignments, and his tests. E-mail his teachers and ask them every once in awhile how is doing and if there is anything you can be doing at home to support him. If what he is telling you does not match grades on assignments and/or feedback from the school, that is when your level of monitoring could increase. This sends a message that you continue to hold him accountable for his schoolwork but will not monitor it unless he needs more support in being successful.

Another area to consider monitoring, that is just as important as his schoolwork, is the realm of social relationships. Ask questions about who his friends are at school, what they like to do, about their involvement in school activities and anything your son is willing to share with you. Accountability for where he is and what he is doing during middle school and high school are very important. Hold him to your family rules about dating, going out with friends, and other social activities.

Finally, middle school is a very important time to keep lines of communication open on topics that may cause some discomfort for you. Let your son know you are available to talk about any topic he wants to discuss. Start conversations about topics that you think he needs to know about at this stage in life. You can do this in a manner that makes it interesting for him, for example, I read today that "The average age when youth first try alcohol is 11 years for boys and 13 years for girls", Do you think this is true in our area or your school?

*Dr. Michelle Alvarez is currently an adjunct professor at the University of Southern Indiana and project director of Safe Schools/Healthy Students for the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation. A former school social worker in Pinellas County, Florida, she is currently co-editor of **School Social Work: Theory to Practice** and chair of the National Association of Social Workers, School Social Work Section. She is also the parent of a special needs child.*

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