



Parent Education: Successful Strategies for Middle School

“Successful Parenting Strategies for Middle School”

HANDOUT #1

Panelists:

Dawn Bussey
Gary Davis
Becky Jevons
Lisa Harmon

Moderator: Kathy Besser

Dawn Bussey

Communications Director at FIRST 5 Santa Clara County and chairing the Walk-A-Thon at Cherry Chase on March 25th

Three daughters, one son: Allison, age 13, 8th grade; Aris, age 10, 5th grade; Annabelle, age 7, 1st grade; Clay, age 4, pre-K

Elementary: Cherry Chase

Dawn’s Top Five Tips/Strategies

1. Take away technology during homework time (even when they tell you they study better that way)
2. Chat with other parents about the kids (be sure to get to know parents coming from other schools)
3. Don't micromanage their school work (until your new BFF Pinnacle tells you that you must)
4. Allow your child the freedom to work through their own social dramas (support them at home with tips on how to be a good friend, etc.)
5. Your existence is embarrassing enough (don't do anything to elevate it)

Gary Davis

Project Manager

One son: Charlie, age 13, 8th grade

Elementary: Cumberland

Gary's Top Five Tips/Strategies

1. He's a garden: Never stop planting seeds and keep nourishing them. Some of them just might grow.

Always look for opportunities to discuss friendships, bullying, empathy for those less fortunate, hard work paying-off, the long-term value of education, etc.

2. The more he reads, the less effort it takes him to be successful in Language Arts.

- Struggles with writing have left him uninterested. It's changing now that he's using the computer, but he's behind.
- Ensuring he reads regularly (I try for 5 times per week for at least 30 minutes a day) has helped him with his writing.
- Reading has resulted in surprisingly strong language arts standardized test results.
- Benefits include increased vocabulary, comprehension, grammar, syntax, research skills
- For boys, ANY reading material is good – comics, magazines, video game strategy guides, fantasy. It all helps build skills and an appreciation for reading.

3. Every big assignment is a project. What's the plan?

- Examine the calendar from today to project due date
- What are the major tasks to get it done? (research, outline, rough draft, type it in, final edits & print)
- Ask him to map the steps to a calendar. If he wants weekends off that's OK, but he has to work harder during the week.
- Waiting until the last minute stresses him (and me) which makes him hate homework and robs him of the satisfaction of completing a quality project.

4. Organization: Agenda is king! Don't forget to turn it your homework!

- High School and College will require solid organizational skills.
- Worship the Agenda process as it plants the seed for the future. Audit the Agenda!

- One teacher told me, "It's common for boys to forget to turn in their homework." It's true! Create a system to ensure homework is turned in and check the bottom of the backpack (and Pinnacle).

5. Valuing Education vs. Privileges: more = more, less = less

- Valuing education is more than grades.
- It's also about the grades.
- Responsibility vs. Opportunity: The more successful w/schoolwork, the more opportunities for extracurricular fun (play dates, sleepovers, video games, etc.)
- Grades vs. Privileges
 - If he doesn't value education (poor grades), he doesn't deserve the privilege of his cell phone, iPod, video games, etc.
 - I never take away reading, writing, drawing, or exercise

BONUS: You are who your friends are (values, ethics, morals, etc.)

- Not always true, but most of the time it is true.
- At this age, kids learn from each other. They talk about everything.
 - I constantly talk to him about the need for high quality friends.
 - I audit him by frequently asking about his friends and keeping my eyes and ears open.
 - I influence the time he spends with high quality and questionable friends.

Becky Jevons

Biotech Consultant

One son and one daughter: Tomas, age 16, 10th grade; April, age 14, 8th grade

Elementary: Cherry Chase

Becky's Top Five Tips/Strategies

1. LISTEN: Don't speak or offer any input when they are talking, nod head and listen. They will talk more, feel less judged, you will know more and they will feel you understand. When you can, BE the DRIVER and LISTEN
2. Outside Tutors: Removes you from the situation and allows your relationship to separate from the work, especially if it keeps conflicts to a minimum
3. Use Pinnacle: Check kids' homework and turned in assignments every day
4. Exercise, Sleep, Eat Right: Some kids need to do homework immediately when they get home, others need to get exercise first, more sleep, breakfast with protein
5. Establish good study/homework habits:
 - Homework Club – good to have homework done with friends before coming home (Note: this no longer meets as HC but there are alternatives at SMS)

- AVID – a good way to make your kids accountable for their work, teach organization
- Signing Agendas – you can make your kids have the Agenda signed by the teacher every day, so you know homework is being written down
- Establish a phone tree – at Back to School Night, write down names of the kids your kid knows in each class, so if they are unclear about assignments, YOU know who THEY can call
- Email – don't hesitate to email teachers with your concerns
- Mentors – good if you can find them: in Scouts, at youth groups, etc.

Lisa Harmon

Director on staff in Children's Ministry at Peninsula Bible Church in Cupertino

Two daughters: Aislinn, age 14, 8th grade; Sydney, age 7, 3rd grade

Elementary: Cherry Chase

Lisa's Top Five Tips/Strategies

1. Understand where your child is at developmentally first, then set expectations
2. Rules without a relationship leads to rebellion
3. Allow your kids to learn from their mistakes and problems
4. Be ready to listen whenever they want to talk
5. Apologize when you make a mistake

Kathy Besser

Freelance graphic designer and first time author (*dirt&sunshine* parenting book)

Two sons: Dane, age 13, 8th grade; Tate, age 11, 6th grade

Elementary: Cherry Chase

Kathy's Top Five Tips/Strategies

1. Increase responsibilities and consequences
 - This includes: getting themselves to and from school (if they are biking, I recommend them going as a group so they are more visible to drivers); making their own lunches; packing their backpacks (including P.E. clothes); and other household chores such as emptying the dishwasher, etc.
 - The biggest deterrent to unwanted behavior seems to be the threat of losing their electronics (cell phones in particular).
 - When we discovered our 8th grade son had missed a NUMBER of assignments, we made him track them down or do them, even if he would not receive credit for all the made-up work; we emphasized that doing and turning in homework is about respect and a good work ethic – not turning in homework or assignments is NOT acceptable in our family

2. Moodiness is ok, disrespectfulness is not

- Having read *The Blessing of a B Minus* by Wendy Mogel, I have a better understanding of what is going on in my teenage son's brain and as a result am less inclined to take his moodiness personally – I never, however, allow him to speak to me or anyone else in a disrespectful manner (that merits an immediate correction and consequence)

3. Try not to "rescue" them (i.e. only one forgotten item delivered per year)

- I'm fairly certain I made more than one delivery when my first child was in 6th grade but I have gotten better over the years at making them face the consequences of forgetting something – the sting of the teacher's disapproval (even just once) is usually enough to make them more diligent (but then again I don't often chance this happening– see #4 below)
- If your child is very "Type A" and would absolutely have a meltdown/horrible day if you don't bring the forgotten item, by all means do so but try to find a time when the consequence isn't so great and use it as a "hey, this is what happens when you forget something – it's survivable" teaching moment

4. AM Quiz: "Do you have your lunch, P.E. clothes, water bottle?"

- This evolved out of necessity: 6th grade students have P.E. every other day and mine do not like using the gym lockers to store their uniform; after one or two panicked phone calls and trips to SMS, I now ask daily about P.E. clothes!
- Pre-teens and teens are forgetful by nature when it comes to things parents have previously provided them (like lunches), but amazingly, they never forget their cell phones!

5. Don't check/correct daily homework but DO provide feedback on larger projects

- I will periodically scan homework to ensure it is completed but I don't focus on making sure every answer is correct. In many classes, students do peer review/corrections in class and I feel it's important for the teacher to see what **types** of homework problems our children are getting wrong (in other words, 100% correct homework does not show the teacher where their understanding is failing though it will certainly show up on a test!)
- That said, however, if one of our sons is struggling in a particular area, one of us will take the time to go through the homework and make sure they understand how to do a problem or where they might be lacking information – the math books ALWAYS have sample problems for reference, the homework sections specifically call out the page/example number for each set of problems. In math especially, I think it's important to look up sample problems lest you hear "that's not how to do it, Mom." There are different techniques that will give you the same answer and invariably, the math methods we employed as students are not always what they are doing today.

- Feedback on projects does NOT mean assistance! If necessary, demonstrate a technique for them but do not perform tasks for them. I remember typing both my sons state reports in fifth grade; as I went through their handwritten notes, I either suggested corrections or just went ahead and fixed them. In retrospect, I feel this painted an incorrect picture of our sons' abilities and did not serve them well in the long run. In middle school, I have taken a huge step back and let them get the grades they deserve for the quality of work they turn in. I still provide feedback, but I try to tell them **where** I see a need but not necessarily what the need is – I challenge them to figure it out for themselves.