

Real responsibilities: Real responsibilities are useful activities that other people depend on. Some might be household chores some might be volunteer work at school, at church, or in the community—something that helps others. Your 8th grader should be taking more and more responsibility, needing less and less direction and reminding. Finding the right level of help with time management is a tricky challenge for a parent. Try not to nag, but do praise your children for carrying out the responsibility, mentioning all the people who rely on them for it.

Talk to your children about their roles, risks, and responsibilities. Make opportunities for them to try new ones, and discuss the skills they learn there. Roles, risks, and responsibilities help prepare middle schoolers to make the jump to high school.

Math really counts for middle school and high school success!

One of the best things we can do for our middle-school children is to get them onto the math track and keep them there. Starting today, encourage your teenager to take heaping helpings of math.

Why? Because we know that math skills are crucial for success in high school and beyond. Here's the story that the research tells us:

- More than half of today's high school graduates don't have the math skills needed in today's job market.
- More than 80% of the middle- and high-school students who take algebra and geometry enroll in college. Fewer than 42% of the students who don't take algebra and geometry go on beyond high school.
- Among low-income middle- and high-school students, 71% of those who take algebra and geometry enroll in college, and only 27% of those who don't take algebra and geometry go on beyond high school.
- Minority students who master algebra and geometry in high school succeed in college at almost the same rate as white students.

And the time to prepare for high-school math classes is right **now**, in 8th grade. Make sure your children are studying math in middle school: this is a jump-start into high-school math. And make sure they are **understanding** the math they are studying now.

Math is taught in steps. If a student gets lost at an early step, it will be very, very difficult to catch up later. If your child seems to be struggling, ask the teacher or a counselor for ideas about how to help.

A lot of middle-school students want to “drop out” of math too early. They decide it is too hard, or boring, or not connected to what they think of as real life. They don't know how critical math will be to their future success.

So your assignment as a parent is to encourage your child to take all the math, science, and tech courses available in middle school and to keep taking those subjects all the way through high school. Bring math—calculations, percentages, costs, estimates—into conversation whenever you can. Talk about how important math is to whatever jobs and careers your child shows interest in. Help your middle schooler understand that mastering math skills keeps the doors of opportunity open all through adult life.

How parents and families can help

You can see that there's a lot going on with your children at this age and a lot that you can be doing to help them prepare for high school. Learning to listen is among the most important parenting skills to help 8th graders meet all the significant personal, social, and academic challenges they face. The major roles of adults are to:

- Help children understand who they are and what they are becoming
- Listen to them and take them seriously as they explore their newly forming identities
- Continue coaching them about organization, time management, study skills, and step-by-step planning for assignments and activities
- Help them see the connections between what they are doing and learning now and the careers they want to explore in the future. These connections help them understand the importance of building strong skills early.

Ask your child—

Out of all the chores and activities you do, what's your favorite?

Is there an adult job you wish you could do right now? Which one? Why?