

Parents and Teachers: Partners in Mentoring Middle School Students

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Every summer, the quiet and empty hallways of the Middle School strike me as a bit unnatural. A middle school is meant to bustle with our students' laughter, with their intellectual curiosity, with their acute sense of justice and injustice and the thrills of their adolescent and pre-adolescent victories and the agonies of their perceived defeats. As we breathe life into a new school year, my mind turns to the joys of mentoring and educating our students through it all.

We recognize the life-lessons our students learn throughout their middle school years can be quite challenging. Through an open, student-centered partnership between home and school, parents and teachers can effectively develop our students. Each year, you, as parents, entrust us to nurture your child as we challenge them academically. It is in this nurturing capacity that we mentor your child in their moral, ethical, social and emotional development.

In the "Best of..." edition of *Character*, a journal published by Boston University's Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, Dr. Karen Bohlin writes an article entitled, "On the Homefront: Ten Tips for Navigating the Odyssey of Adolescence." These tips provide a wonderful framework for educators as well for engaging children in a manner that honors their journey into adolescence.

1. Lead by example.

As Robert Coles, a psychologist at Harvard University, states, "We grow morally as a consequence of learning how to be with others ... the child is an ever-attentive witness of grown-up morality – or lack thereof ..."

2. Love your children.

When you start with love, a whole lot of good can happen. The nuance comes in Dr. Bohlin's statement, "Love means caring enough to correct and correcting with affection and truthfulness."

3. Do not protect your child from failure.

We need to help our children learn from difficulties, suffering and disappointment. There are two outstanding books I would suggest that speak to this idea - *If You Want Your Child to Succeed, Let Him Fail* and *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee* by Wendy Mogel.

4. Help your children cultivate a talent, hobby, sport or skill.

5. Hold your children accountable – not their teachers - for their own academic performance.

I would ask that you hold us accountable for placing teaching of the highest quality in front of your child on daily basis. We are blessed to have outstanding educators in the Middle School.

6. Foster an attitude of gratitude
Common courtesies are common in the Middle School. We hold each other responsible for maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect. It is in this atmosphere that the greatest student learning can occur.
7. Nurture their moral imagination and memory.
Through structures like Middle School Forum, Student Leadership and our Wellness Program, our students engage in activities and discussions that develop their moral and ethical sensibilities.
8. Cultivate the art of communication.
Throughout our curriculum, students are provided opportunities to present their learning in front of their peers. These opportunities instill self-confidence and pride in their accomplishments. Through age-appropriate social events, cultural exchanges and co-ed groupings in advisory, our students also gain an appreciation for social norms and cultural sensitivities.
9. Be generous with your affection.
10. Don't lose hope.
Pre-adolescence and adolescence provide difficult moments for our children. While our natural instincts may be to protect our students from those difficulties, we must rather empower them as independent decision-makers and problem solvers. That's challenging. There will be hiccups, but don't lose hope.

I'm writing this article on the afternoon of our first day of school. This morning, I compared the beginning of school to an empty stage. No story is told until they step onto it and tell the story. I asked our students how they were going to write their story this year. Sure, there will be ups and downs, twists and turns, as there is with any story. However, with all of us here to mentor them, they will undoubtedly become the heroes of their own stories.

We look forward to serving you throughout the year. We thank you for entrusting us with the education of your children. Here's to a great 2009-2010 school year!