



Back To School

Parent Kit

11 Things Your Elementary Student Needs From You

By Heather Stoll

It's time to go back to school! Whether this is your child's very first day of elementary school or their last first day, it's natural to feel both excitement and apprehension. You have purchased school supplies, filled their pencil case, removed the tags from the new backpack, and probably planned that first day of school outfit. It seems like your child has everything they need to enjoy a successful year.

But what about you? Have you prepared?

To successfully navigate elementary school, your student needs more than just new pencils and a snazzy backpack. Your child actually needs at least 11 things from you!

STRUCTURE

Everything changes for the family when school starts. Schedules, homework, activities, practices, and commitments clamor for time on the calendar and threaten the family rhythm.

When everything gets busy around them, your child needs to know that some things stay the same. Family dinner, bedtime routines, family worship attendance, chores, and technology limits create a structure that provides a steady framework for their life.

CONSISTENCY

In a world marked by extremes—and extreme busyness—consistency is a difficult standard to maintain. However, consistency is not about managing your schedule or waking up earlier to get everything done.

Consistency comes from the inside, rooted in the center of who you are and how you parent. It is a steadiness that refuses to over-react to elementary school meltdowns and peer parent pressure and holds to the values, goals, and priorities of your family. It is also reflected in a consistent adherence to family rules and boundaries, including bedtimes, technology limits, and chores and responsibilities.

AFFIRMATION

Everyone wants to feel (and be told) they are loved and valued. Affirmation is verbal confirmation that your child is loved, smart, creative, helpful, funny, and hard-working. It should be directed toward their identity, personality, and things within their control (effort, kindness, etc.).

Affirmation is not excessive praise for everyday activities or an indulgent focus on accomplishments. It does not shield your child from consequences or remove the sting of failure. Affirmation builds self-confidence and independence rooted in reality and prepares them to face challenges in the future.



ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement applies affirmation to everyday life. It builds on their identity and propels them to action. Encouragement helps your child try something new, join a club or sport, work towards an academic goal, or embrace a new friend. Encouragement tells them to keep trying when things get hard, provides comfort when they encounter failure, and cheers on the sideline whether they win or lose.

ENGAGEMENT

Engaged parents pay attention. They notice behaviors, eating habits, moods, grades, friend groups, and technology use. They ask specific questions and listen to the answers. Engagement is NOT management. It is participating in a relationship with your student in which you invest time and attention. Engagement communicates interest and requires time and creativity. It usually does not involve technology.

INVOLVEMENT

Involvement puts feet to engagement. Involvement means you show up. Your child will tell you that you don't have to come or it doesn't matter if you attend or someone else's parent can drive them. Involvement matters. There is no substitute for being there. It communicates that you care about them and what they do is important to you.

PRIORITY

Intentionality is a popular concept in parenting—and it is great to be intentional. However, you can be intentional to schedule time with your child each month and miss every family dinner or sporting event. You can be intentional to lead a family devotion each morning, but not make time for an impromptu ice cream date. Priorities are reflected in your calendar, your bank account, and your to-do list. Does your elementary student have a place there?

TIME TO REST

Our world is busy, and there is an immense amount of pressure to join the race. Your elementary child can join clubs and teams, take lessons, sign up for activities and programs, and participate in church and school events. Before you know it, they have an obligation every night of the week. Do you know what your elementary student needs from you? Time to rest.

Elementary children need sleep and rest and, as a parent, it is your job to set boundaries and say no—even if it means swimming upstream in a sea of peer parent pressure.

TIME TO PLAY

In the race to rear a tech-savvy, well-rounded, athletic genius, a parent can function more like an executive assistant, managing calendars and appointments and uniforms. One of the best ways to prepare your child for success is to give them space to be a kid.

Let them play a sport, but also let them play in the yard. Pay for art lessons, but buy them a box of chalk and send them to the driveway. Sign them up for STEM club, but dump all of the Lego's in the middle of the floor and build something together. Curiosity and creativity and ingenuity are cultivated through play. Give your child (and yourself) a wonderful gift. Give them time to play.

A SAFE PLACE

Today's world is a tough place. From mass shootings to weather disasters, there is always a tragedy occurring somewhere. It's easy for your student to become fearful, anxious, and unsure about the world we live in.

Home needs to be a safe place--physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It needs to provide a reprieve from the world and a space to laugh and play and rest.

PRAYER

Prayer is not the last thing your elementary student needs from you. In fact, it should be one of the priorities in the morning, and one of last things you do before you sleep.

Prayer is one of the over-arching themes of your entire elementary school parenting journey.

Unlike you, God sees all and knows all and hears all. When your student faces peer pressure, God can supply courage. When your student is anxious about a test, God can provide comfort and peace. When they are struggling with feelings or fears that they have not even shared or recognized, God can minister to their hurting hearts. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, and absolutely heartbroken, God can give you wisdom and remind you that nothing is impossible for Him. You see, prayer is not just something your child needs from you. It is something you need, too.

Heather Stoll has more than 20 years of ministry experience, predominantly in the area of communications and media. She has served churches in South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee, alongside her husband, Jeff. Together, they have two children, and they currently reside in Saint Augustine, FL.



11 Things Your Middle School Student Needs From You

By Heather Stoll

Middle School. What an appropriate name for a season of life that stuck in the middle of everything else. It's like the middle seat on an airplane. As a middle school student, they are too old to score the window seat for entertainment, yet they can't be trusted to keep their feet out of the aisle. So they are relegated to the middle seat with no armrests, no personal space, and no freedom. It's a no man's land of awkwardness, insecurity, and survival of the fittest. They just have to endure it.

It doesn't have to be that way!

Middle School provides an amazing opportunity to cultivate a relationship with your student to sustain them (and you) for the next eight to twelve years. It's a chance to erect the foundations of your "teenage parenting experience," so you can continue to build on it through high school and beyond. It doesn't come without some effort, though.

As a parent, you need to do your part. With that in mind, below are eleven things your middle school student needs from you as they head back to school.

STRUCTURE

Everything changes for your student when they enter middle school. Their body, their brain, their friends, their interests, their clothes, and even their hair. While everything around them changes, they need to know that some things stay the same. Family dinner, bedtime routine, family worship attendance, chores, and technology limits all create a structure that provides a steady framework for their life.

CONSISTENCY

In a world marked by extremes—and extreme busyness—consistency is a difficult standard to maintain. However, consistency is not about managing your schedule or waking up earlier to get everything done. Consistency comes from the inside, rooted in the center of who you are and how you parent. It is a steadiness that refuses to over-react to middle school emotions and peer parent pressure and holds to the values, goals, and priorities of your family.

AFFIRMATION

Everyone wants to feel (and be told) they are loved and valued. Middle school students need it more than anyone and in every way. Affirmation is verbal confirmation that your child is loved, smart, creative, helpful, kind, hard-working, and pretty (or handsome). Don't neglect affirmation of their appearance.

Although your emphasis should be on their inner self, middle school students struggle deeply with how they look and appear to others. They need to be affirmed in this area as it can be the most significant source of insecurity during these years.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement applies affirmation to everyday life. It builds on their identity and propels them to action. Encouragement tells your student to try something new, join a club or sport, work towards an academic goal, or embrace a new friend.

Encouragement says to them to keep trying when things get hard, provide comfort when they encounter failure, and cheer on the sideline whether they win or lose.

POSITIVITY

Whether your student exudes pure sunshine or charges money for every smile, negativity often colors their perceptions and perspective in middle school. They will be devastated because they wore jeans when everyone else wore shorts, brought a sports drink when others brought a soda, or didn't receive an invitation and everyone else did.

Positivity becomes a necessary countermeasure in these moments. Positivity doesn't discount the struggle or hurt feelings, but instead shines a light on another perspective, reassures them it will work out and reminds them of the blessings in their life.

VISION

Vision takes the focus off the events of today (or this week or even this year) and points to the bigger picture and purpose of their life. By casting vision for your student, you teach them to approach their challenges with confidence, their failures with faith, and new experiences with expectation.

ENGAGEMENT

Engaged parents pay attention. They notice behaviors, eating habits, clothing choices, grades, friend groups, and technology use. They ask specific questions and listen to the answers. Engagement is NOT management. It is participating in a relationship with your student in which you invest time and attention. Engagement communicates interest and requires time and creativity. It usually does not involve technology.





INVOLVEMENT

Involvement puts feet to engagement. Involvement means you show up. Your student will tell you that you don't have to come or it doesn't matter if you attend or someone else's parent can drive them. Involvement matters. There is no substitute for being there. It communicates that you care about them and what they do is important to you.

PRIORITY

Intentionality is a popular concept in parenting—and it is great to be intentional. However, it is possible to be intentional by scheduling time with your student each month yet miss every family dinner or sporting event. You can be intentional to lead a family devotion each morning, but not make time for an impromptu ice cream date.

Your calendar, bank account, and the to-do list is a reflection of your priorities. Does your middle school student have a place there?

A SAFE PLACE

Today's world is a tough place. Home needs to be a safe place--physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It needs to provide a reprieve from the scrutiny and pressure, offering a space to express and decompress. Don't be afraid to give them some extra space or occasionally let their chores slide or turn up the music and dance in the living room.

PRAYER

Prayer is not the last thing your middle school student needs from you. In fact, it should be one of the priorities in the morning, and one of the last things you do before you close your eyes to sleep. Prayer is one of the over-arching themes of your entire middle school parenting journey.

Unlike you, God sees all and knows all and hears all. When your student faces intense peer pressure, God can supply courage. When your student is anxious about a test, God can provide comfort and peace. When they are struggling with feelings or fears that they have not even shared or recognized, God can minister to their hurting hearts. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, and heartbroken, God can give you wisdom and remind you that nothing is impossible for Him. You see, prayer is not just something your middle school student needs from you. It is something you need, too.

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11 Things Your High School Student Needs From You

By Heather Stoll

We love the idea of a fresh start. There is something about the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and start anew that stirs up hope and optimism—and an unusual desire to purchase a new calendar!

High school provides not only a fresh start academically but also the promise of a fresh start personally. The high school years are unlike any other season in life. Students mature at a breakneck speed and experience a multitude of “firsts” and “milestones”—driving a car, going on a date, traveling independently, making decisions about college and career, and much more.

During the four years of high school, your awkward, insecure teenager will graduate into a young adult, armed with a high school diploma and society’s permission to begin the rest of their life. This season is not the time to coast in your parenting. It is not an opportunity to relax. Instead, it is time to sharpen your focus and take your game to the next level. As much as you want your student to succeed, you also need to finish well in your parenting journey. With that in mind, below are eleven things your high school student needs from you.

AFFIRMATION

Everyone wants to feel (and be told) they are loved and valued. High school students need plenty of it. Affirmation is verbal confirmation that your student is loved, smart, creative, capable, hard-working, and pretty (or handsome). Don’t neglect affirmation of their appearance. Although your emphasis should be on their inner self, high school students struggle with how they look and appear.

In our social media-saturated society, they are constantly comparing themselves to others and bearing the brunt of that scrutiny from their peers. They need to be affirmed in this area as it can be a significant source of insecurity.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encouragement applies affirmation to everyday life. It builds on their identity and propels them to action. Encouragement tells your student to try something new, join a club, try out for the team, work towards an academic goal, or embrace a new friend. Encouragement says to them to keep trying when things get hard, provide comfort when they encounter failure, and cheer on the sideline whether they win or lose.

ACCEPTANCE

Although closely related, acceptance is not the same as affirmation. Affirmation speaks to your student’s identity. Acceptance reminds them of your love and approval. High School offers the chance

for students to explore who they are and who they want to be—and it's not just fashion choices and hairstyles.

Your student may have played sports for six years, but has now decided to join the marching band. Your shy, awkward introvert has declared his candidacy for freshman class president. The middle schooler who did not care about grades has now added two academic classes to be more serious about their studies.

Your student needs to know that you accept them and love them regardless of their club activities or high school stereotype. They need to know you love and accept them for who they are.

CONSISTENCY

In a world marked by extremes—and extreme busyness—consistency is a difficult standard to maintain. However, consistency is not about managing your schedule or waking up earlier to get everything done.

Consistency comes from the inside, rooted in the center of who you are and how you parent. It is a steadiness that refuses to over-react to high school drama and peer parent pressure and holds to the values, goals, and priorities of your family. It also reflects in adherence to rules and boundaries, such as curfews, technology limits, or attendance at family functions. Don't allow your parenting insecurities and fears to express themselves through shifting standards or exaggerated rules.

INDEPENDENCE

High school students yearn for independence, but often seem unprepared for it. Many parents make the mistake of granting total freedom at a certain age or after a student passes a significant milestone. Independence is not something achieved, but rather a collection of skills that should be gradually built and taught.

The gift of independence is one of the most valuable assets in your parenting portfolio. Start early with an area of strength for your student. Do they love the outdoors? Let them take care of the lawn (and that of a few neighbors!) Do they like to cook? Assign to them one or two nights a month to prepare the family meal (including shopping and budgeting). Do they long for more freedom in their driving? Let them handle the weekly errands for the family.

Build on those skills and then expand to other areas. Celebrate their successes. Use the failures as growing moments. Students don't know what they don't know. It's your job to teach them.





VISION

Vision takes the focus off events of today (or this week or even this year) and points to the bigger picture and purpose of their life. In high school, it is easy to get hyper-focused on one test or assignment, one dropped football pass, or one missed opportunity.

By casting vision for your student, you help them put events in the right perspective and teach them to approach challenges with confidence, failures with faith, and new experiences with expectation.

ENGAGEMENT

Engaged parents pay attention. They notice behaviors, eating habits, clothing choices, grades, friend groups, and technology use. They ask specific questions and listen to the answers. Engagement is NOT management.

It is participation in a relationship in which you invest time and attention. It is walking alongside your student and experiencing life with them. Engagement communicates interest and requires creativity and often a willingness to stay up late!

INVOLVEMENT

Involvement puts feet to engagement. Involvement means you show up. Your student will tell you that you don't have to come or it doesn't matter if you attend or someone else's parent can drive them. But, involvement matters.

There is no substitute for being there. When your student looks up and sees you in the stands, the theater, or the back of the room, you tell them they are a priority and what they do is important to you. It is an investment in your relationship that will reap the rewards for years to come and build credibility for your parenting. Could there be a better use of your time and attention?

FORGIVENESS

Everyone makes mistakes. High school students make more than the average human. That's why forgiveness is an integral part of parenting a high school student. Forgiveness does not mean that you overlook bad choices or forgo punishment or shield your student from consequences. It does mean that you give them another chance. And another. And another.

You don't hold their mistakes against them, leverage them for compliance, or weaponize them for your gain. You love, forgive, teach, and repeat.

PERMISSION TO REST

The pressure felt by the average high school student would cripple most adults. They study to earn excellent grades and test scores to gain admission into college. They participate in activities to bolster their resume and play on a team to win a championship. They find a job to gain experience and learn how to budget money. They volunteer in the community to catalog service hours, craft beautiful and clever Insta-stories to maintain a good online image, and the list goes on. Do you know what your high school student needs from you?

Permission to rest. Reassurance that it's okay to take a day off. It's also a good idea to throw in an occasional coffee date, a dance party in the kitchen, and a few extra hours of sleep on a morning when they need it.

PRAYER

Prayer is not the last thing your high school student needs from you. In fact, it should be one of the priorities in the morning, and one of the last things you do before you close your eyes to sleep. Prayer is the over-arching theme of the entire high school parenting journey.



Unlike you, God sees all and knows all and hears all. When your student faces intense peer pressure, God can supply courage. When your student is anxious about a test or a date, God can provide comfort and peace. When they are struggling with feelings or fears that they have not even shared or recognized, God can minister to their hurting hearts. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, and heartbroken, God can give you wisdom and remind you that nothing is impossible for Him.

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A Dad's To Do List

GIVE STRUCTURE

BE CONSISTENT

AFFIRM

ENCOURAGE

ENGAGE

BE INVOLVED

MAKE A PRIORITY

PERMISSION TO REST

PERMISSION TO PLAY

BE A SAFE PLACE

PRAY

#elementaryschool



A Mom's To Do List

GIVE STRUCTURE

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#elementaryschool

A Dad's To Do List

GIVE STRUCTURE

BE CONSISTENT

AFFIRM

ENCOURAGE

BE POSITIVE

GIVE VISION

ENGAGE

BE INVOLVED

MAKE A PRIORITY

BE A SAFE PLACE

PRAY

#middleschool



A stack of books and a notebook. The top book has a light brown cover, and the one below it has a green cover with a map. To the left, a clear plastic object is partially visible.

A Mom's To Do List

GIVE STRUCTURE
BE CONSISTENT
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BE POSITIVE
GIVE VISION
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BE INVOLVED
MAKE A PRIORITY
BE A SAFE PLACE
PRAY

A stack of colorful sticky notes. The top one is pink and has the text '#middleschool' written on it in black. Below it are light blue sticky notes.

#middleschool

#highschool

A Dad's To Do List

AFFIRM

ENCOURAGE

ACCEPT

BE CONSISTENT

GIVE INDEPENDENCE

GIVE VISION

ENGAGE

BE INVOLVED

FORGIVE

PERMISSION TO REST

PRAY

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#highschool

Cover Photo: David Pisnoy

Photos By:
Christopher Burns
Joshua Eckstein
Alessandra Casetta
Nathan Dumlao
Moren Hsu
Martin Widenka
Thomas Tokos
Kelli Tungay
Jesus Kiteque
Joanna Kosinska
Tim Arterbury
Skyla Design

Graphic Design By: Elisabeth Lee