



### **The Middle Years: Encouraging School Success**

Perhaps it is not surprising that the link between doing poorly in school and engaging in other risky behaviors is well documented. It is also not surprising that children who do well in school and are connected to school through school activities such as music, sports, or clubs are less likely to become involved in risky activities such as substance abuse, crime, or violence. As parents, you have critical influence over your child's school success in several important areas. Those areas include:

- *Connectedness.* Encourage your child's attachment to parents, guardians, grandparents, teachers, or mentors who will support lasting relationships and friendships.
- *Competency.* Help your child develop academic and social skills, including the ability to solve problems and make age-appropriate, independent decisions.
- *Aspirations.* Support your child's ability to set goals for a successful future and develop strategies for achieving those goals.
- *Effective schools.* Help your child to find a supportive, safe learning environment that challenges all students to do well and that supports them in their efforts to do so.

Parents play an important role on their child's teaching team. Making time to attend parent-teacher conferences and school activities is one part of that role. Being available to help if the teachers have a concern about your child's progress also shows that you care. It helps to make time to talk to the teacher if you have questions or are worried about how your child is doing.

While some teachers may hesitate to intervene unless a child is lagging two or more grade levels behind other students in the class, the evidence suggests that early intervention is critical. The further behind a student falls in his or her school work, the more likely it is that he or she will fail and develop a sense of hopelessness. Seek out the teacher and discuss what you can do before your child's academic problems become overwhelming.

One way that parents can help teachers identify problems early is by sharing their concerns and being open about relevant parts of their child's history. Parents can also take the lead and request an assessment if they are concerned that their child might have a learning disability. When parents, teachers, and school staff work together, most difficulties can be resolved and strategies can be developed that will help the child have a successful school experience.

*The information contained in this summary is taken from the Middle Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).*

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