

Why Student-Led Conferences?

Perhaps your child's middle school is offering student-led conferences. These conferences are a great educational tool for both the students and their families, so don't be put off by the fact that they are different from the type of conferences you have always known.

Student-led conferences are just that. The student is in charge of reporting his or her progress, often using a portfolio of work—a collection of tests, homework, and other papers that show how he or she has grown during the preceding weeks. The teacher (or team) is present, but the student must answer questions and talk about his or her goals for the next few weeks. Parents and guardians find out a lot about their child, and the student is pushed to realize that learning depends on him or her, not the parents or teachers.

Even primary grades are using student-led conferences these days. Try it—you'll like it!

You were wondering...

My middle schooler never shares anything with me. When I ask questions, usually all I get is a short answer or "I don't know." This is the same child who talked about everything just a few months ago!

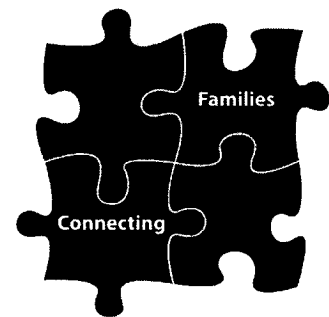
Young adolescents love privacy. To be able to keep things from adults is, to them, a sign that they, too, are grown up. Their rooms become off-limits, and their conversations dwindle to only what is required, especially if parents or guardians express curiosity about an issue.

Often what they are keeping to themselves is just their everyday lives. They don't want you poking around. Nonetheless, you are the true adult in the family, and you have to remain in charge without damaging the relationship. Parents or guardians always have free access to children's

rooms when they are not inside, or by knocking to deliver laundry or tidy up.

Never secretly listen in on phone conversations, but you can require that the phone and computer be used in communal spaces in the house, while giving your young adolescent as much privacy as possible.

Of course, if you suspect that your child is involved in something bigger than her or than she can handle (gangs, drugs, a suspicious relationship), intercede immediately. Privacy aside, you are always in charge.



Most middle schools require students to use an assignment notebook. This is a weekly planner with spaces to write assignments for each class. Teachers can also write notes in the spaces. This is a terrific source of information for parents and caregivers.

You and your middle schooler could make it a habit to look over the assignment notebook nightly or a least a few times each week. This is a good chance to comment on school (What was the film about in science? How did that test go? Do you have everything you need for the project?) and provide support where needed. You can even write a positive note to the teacher referring to an assignment or remarking on your child's interest in a specific class.



The Family Connection is published by National Middle School Association as part of its ongoing commitment encouraging family and community involvement in the education of young adolescents. NMSA is unique among educational organizations because of its commitment to addressing the needs of middle level students—youth ages 10 to 15. Membership in NMSA is open to all persons interested in and concerned about middle level education. Teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, college students, and other educational professionals are well represented in NMSA's membership. Call 1-800-528-NMSA to receive further information about membership and middle level resources.

About the Editor: Judith Baenen, a former classroom teacher, speaks and writes about middle grades students and the issues that affect them. She is author of National Middle School Association's pamphlets for families of middle grades students *HELP* and *More HELP*.