

Lead On

You've barely had time to catch your breath in the rush from the office to the parent-teacher conference when you're informed—albeit gently—that your middle schooler is the class clown and is pulling too much focus. Before you scold your budding comedian, consider this: His ability to rally other kids around him may be a sign of future leadership skills.

It's about channeling certain traits, some of which may seem disruptive to teachers, into the ability to lead, says Alan E. Nelson, EdD, the author of *KidLead: Growing Great Leaders*. And now's the time. "Most leadership training happens after college, but psychologists say a child's character and moral compass are set by age fourteen," he contends. "If we want to shape the skill and character of a leader, ages ten to thirteen are essential."

Indicators of preleadership qualities include initiating new projects, setting goals and following through, or being picked for class monitor or team captain. But seemingly negative traits like being bossy, opinionated or even disruptively funny may also signal potential, says Dr. Nelson. (Evaluate your child's aptitude with the assessment tool at kidlead.com.)

To help your tween hone and refine these traits, for example, turn an everyday chore into a leadership project. Let him be in charge of dinner: what the family will eat, what to shop for, who will shop, who will clean up and so on. And offer feedback afterward. We can create future leaders by seeing our kids as leaders right now, says Dr. Nelson. "Instead of saying, 'Someday you can be this,' tell him, 'You can be this now.'" —Tiffany Forte



Make the Grade

Volunteering at your child's elementary school and editing her English assignments may have helped better her grades, but what works better from middle school on is emphasizing the value of an education as

well as its link to the real world—to future goals and jobs—according to a multiple-study review by Duke University.

Why this shift? Tweens and teens are growing more analytical and goal focused. So they're now more likely

to see that a good school-work ethic can help them achieve future desires, says lead researcher Nancy E. Hill, PhD. But they still need parents' guidance to reach their goals.

Talk to your child about academic performance over

the long term, says Dr. Hill. Communicate expectations: that she graduate from high school and college, that she promote her skills and talents. Help her plan ahead, and encourage her to choose courses based on her dreams.

HOW TO GROW A LEADER

Help your child boost his potential for leadership, says Dr. Alan Nelson.

▶ **Encourage him to l-e-a-d.** Assign a family project, like preparing a meal, and suggest that he **listen** to the team's ideas, **establish** the plan, **assign** tasks and **determine** the progress. Debrief and ask questions afterward to measure effectiveness.

▶ **Show respect for the group.** Remind him that leadership is a team effort. It's about helping people work together to accomplish what you might not be able to do alone.

▶ **Lead, but let go.** Parents of emerging leaders are often strong leaders themselves. Be careful not to intimidate your child. Honor his opinions and let him fail at times.

▶ IN A FLASH



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