

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Wait a minute

Tweens are used to getting things quickly, from online information to fast food. Learning patience will help your child cope with stress and frustration when things *don't* happen fast. For example, if his computer crashes and won't reboot, he could take a deep breath or drink a glass of water before tackling the problem.

Eyes up front

How and where your middle grader sits in class may affect how well she pays attention. Suggest that she sit up straight and look at the teacher when he speaks. Also, encourage her to ask for a seat near the front if she finds herself distracted by other students.

DID YOU KNOW?

When your tween wears earbuds to listen to music, he should be able to hear what's going on around him. If he can't, or if his ears ring afterward, he may be damaging his hearing. Share the 60/60 rule: Keep the volume at less than 60 percent, and listen for no longer than 60 minutes at a time.

Worth quoting

"It isn't where you came from; it's where you're going that counts."
Ella Fitzgerald

Just for fun

Q: Why did the kid wear one boot?

A: Because there was a 50 percent chance of snow!



Everyday math

What does shopping have in common with achieving fitness goals? Your tween can use math to do both more effectively! Here are situations where math is sure to come in handy.

Find the bargain

Doing math may save your child money on craft supplies, snacks, and clothing. Have her calculate the best deals when you shop together. Say she has a coupon for 20 percent off if she buys more than one pack of colored duct tape. Should she buy one 6-pack for \$15.99 or two 3-packs for \$8.99 each?

Make more space

Interior designers measure carefully and use spatial reasoning. Maybe your middle grader wants to rearrange her bedroom to make space for a desk she found at a thrift shop. She'll need to measure the walls and furniture to make everything fit. Is her bookcase narrow enough to go in



her closet? Will her bed fit against the wall?

Finish the race

Your tween can do math to reach her workout goals, such as completing a 5K race (3.1 miles) in less than 30 minutes. First, she should figure out what her average pace must be ($30 \text{ minutes} \div 3.1 \text{ miles} = 9.67$, or about 9:40 minutes per mile). Now she can consider her current pace and how many weeks she has to train. Finally, she could plan practice runs so she shaves off enough time each week. 👍

Lessons in assertiveness

Assertive people know how to stand up for themselves firmly yet respectfully. Use these ideas to help your middle grader be assertive:

■ Explain to your child that he can be nice to others and speak up for himself at the same time. For instance, if someone cuts in front of him in line, he might politely point out where the line starts.

■ Have your middle grader practice saying no when necessary. Tell him that it helps to remember the 3 Cs: Show confidence by looking the other person in the eye, speak clearly, and stay calm. ("The party sounds fun, but I have a big project due Monday.") 👍



Protect your privacy online

Even the most tech-savvy child can share sensitive information online without realizing it. Share these ways to help your tween keep personal details safe.

- **Only interact online with people you know in real life.** Your child shouldn't accept chat invitations or friend requests from strangers. He'll need to use privacy settings on websites and apps to control who sees his posts.
- **Guard accounts.** Tell your tween to set a different password for each device and account. When he uses a shared computer



Also have him opt out of location sharing so strangers don't know where he is. 👍

(say, at the library, in school, or at a friend's house), he shouldn't store passwords, and he should log out of websites and apps after he's finished.

- **Avoid posting identifying information.** This includes your middle grader's full name, school, phone number, home address, and email address.



Parent to Parent

Motivated to learn

My younger daughter, Ava, seemed to care more about her social life than about learning and grades. I mentioned this to my older daughter, Erin. She thought a glimpse of college life might motivate her little sister in school, so on a recent Saturday, I took Ava to visit Erin on campus.

The girls had a great time. And Erin made sure to mention how much time she spends



attending classes and studying so she can land a teaching job after graduation. Ava came home talking about how she wants to study business one day and open her own "doggy day care."

I'm happy Ava is thinking about the future. When she shows me her assignments, we talk about how what she learns will come in handy one day when she's running her own business! 👍

Family meals with tweens

Did you know that eating together can boost your tween's self-esteem and make her less likely to try risky behaviors? Consider these suggestions for making family dinners pleasant on busy days.

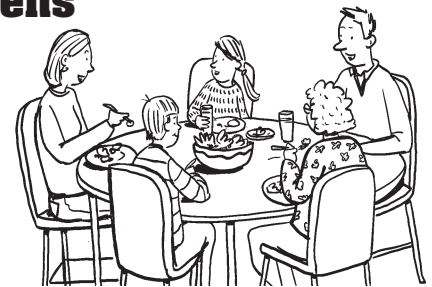
Plan ahead

Have meals ready to go so you're able to focus on each other rather than on what to cook. On weekends, you and your child could make double portions of casseroles or soups. Freeze them to pull out and reheat on weeknights.

Keep conversations light

While you eat, share an upbeat news story you heard or mention something funny your cat did that day. Save conversations about your tween's low test grade or missed curfew for another time. She'll look forward to coming to the table and chatting with you.

Tip: Put electronics in another room and silence them so you're not tempted to check messages or answer calls. 👍



Managing ADHD in middle school

Q My son started middle school this year. Now that he has had time to settle in, I want him to take more responsibility for managing his ADHD. What should I do?

A At this age, children start moving into the driver's seat when it comes to learning—and tweens with ADHD are no exception. Suggest that your son make a list of the accommodations included in his IEP (Individualized Education Program) or 504 plan, such as having extra time to complete tests. He could hang the list inside his locker or tape it inside the front cover of his

binder to remind himself to take advantage of them.

Also, discuss strategies he can use at home to help himself. For instance, he might call a friend to double-check on assignments each evening or take a homework break every 20 minutes. Have him experiment with ideas and see what works best for him.

Finally, organization is important for all middle graders. Your child should use a daily planner or to-do list, and sort through his backpack and locker on a weekly basis. 👍



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Making up work

When your child returns to school after being absent, remind her to ask her teachers about make up work. She'll avoid missing out on learning, and she'll make sure she has material that may appear on a quiz or test. At home, have her set aside time to complete the assignments.

Find the similarity

Play this game to stretch your youngster's thinking. Take turns naming two unrelated objects (flower, skyscraper). Encourage him to think about each object's attributes and come up with creative ways that they're alike (both stand up tall).

Follow through

An apology means more if your tween follows up on it. When she makes a mistake, ask how she plans to avoid a repeat. For example, say your trash can overflows because she forgot to put it out on pickup day. After she says, "I'm sorry," she might tape a reminder on the fridge ("Trash: Tuesday and Friday").

Worth quoting

"There is nothing like a dream to create the future." *Victor Hugo*

Just for fun

Q: When you look at me, I look at you. When you raise your left arm, I raise the right. What am I?

A: A mirror.



Solid research skills

With so much information available, there's plenty for your tween to draw on when he does research for reports, essays, or presentations. The key is knowing how to dig through the material and determine what he needs. Share these tips.

Stay on topic

Encourage your child to use specific search terms online so that what turns up will be closer to what he's looking for. Say he's writing a science paper on earthquakes. Simply typing "earthquakes" into a search engine may bring up news on recent quakes. He'll get better results if he instead tries "earthquake science" or "What is an earthquake?"

Get organized

Suggest that your middle grader develop a note-taking system that works well for him. For instance, he might write each fact and its source on a separate index card. When he's finished, he



could sort the cards into categories. He'll be able to see holes in his research, such as main ideas that need more supporting evidence.

Consider the source

Your tween should choose sites that are up to date, in-depth, and credible. Sites published by schools or universities (ending in *.edu*), government agencies (*.gov*), and nonprofit organizations (*.org*), tend to be more trustworthy. Also, it's important to verify facts by finding them in at least three places. 👍

Mindfulness for middle graders

Tweens face stress from daily activities like handling homework and navigating friendships. Being *mindful*, or present in the moment, may ease the pressure. Help your child practice with these ideas.

■ **Create a "calming jar."** Let your tween fill a clear jar with water and sprinkle in glitter. Have her screw on the lid and shake the jar, focusing on her feelings as she watches the glitter settle. Point out that when the glitter is still, it's easier to see through the jar — much like being calm helps her see a situation more clearly.

■ **Take a walk.** Pay attention to what you and your middle grader feel, hear, see, and smell as you walk together. What sound do your feet make when they hit the ground? What does the breeze feel like on your face? What scents come from the homes you pass? 👍



Is it bullying?

What does bullying look like, and what can you and your middle schooler do about it? Consider this advice to help her recognize and respond to bullying.

Be aware of “silent bullying.” Some bullying is easy to spot, such as one student deliberately tripping another. But it can also be less obvious. A child might take another student’s belongings or threaten a classmate when no one else is around. Encourage your middle grader to reach out to a classmate who seems fearful or withdrawn. A simple



“Hey, is everything okay?” could give a person who is being bullied the courage to confide in her.

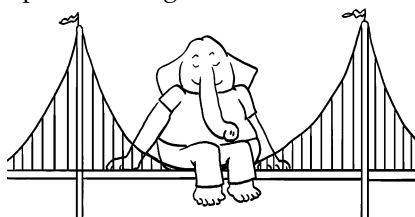
Know when behavior crosses the line.

Your tween may not realize that she is being bullied. Say a classmate repeatedly makes unwanted comments about her appearance—that’s a form of bullying. Let her know she can come to you if

she feels uncomfortable with how she’s being treated. Together, you could decide how to handle it (for instance, talking to her school counselor). 👍

Engineer a suspension bridge

Suspension bridges rely on cables to support the weight of vehicles traveling across them. Your child can explore engineering by making his own model suspension bridge.



First, have him look for suspension bridges when you’re on the road, in books, or online. What features does he notice? *Examples:* towers, cables, a deck.

Now let him select household materials and build the strongest suspension bridge he can. He might use paper towel tubes for the towers, fishing line for the cables, and heavy cardboard for the deck. How will he attach the cables to the towers and the deck?

He can test his bridge by counting how many toy cars it holds without sagging. Then, suggest that he redesign to build a stronger bridge that holds even more cars! 👍



Q & A

Pleasant chats with tweens

Q Whenever I try to have a nice conversation with my son, he ends up getting annoyed. Why is he acting this way, and how can we communicate better?

A There are several reasons your son may become easily irritated. At this age, he wants to be more independent—yet he knows he still needs your guidance, which may feel annoying to him. Plus, he’s dealing with changing hormones.

You might find that you have nicer conversations when you’re doing something side by side, such as putting away groceries or shopping to find a gift for a relative. It could also help to talk when your middle grader is relaxed like at bedtime or on a weekend afternoon while you’re sitting on the porch.

Finally, you’re more likely to keep the conversation upbeat if you ask about things he’s interested in, perhaps what happened in drama club today or in the last episode of his favorite podcast. 👍



Parent to Parent

Foreign language: Learn together

My daughter Kelsey is taking French this year. While she was studying for a quiz recently, I recognized a couple of the vocabulary words from when I took French. So I asked Kelsey if she would teach me more words.

She had fun helping me pronounce the words and quizzing me on their meanings. I learned that *la pomme* means

apple and *l’oiseau* is *bird*. Throughout the week, she even tried to weave the words into our conversations to see if I’d remember them.

Then, for family movie night, I surprised Kelsey by downloading a movie in French with English subtitles. As we watched, we listened for words we recognized.

Kelsey is doing well in French class—I think speaking and hearing the language at home is really helping. 👍



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Write a poem

Encourage your tween to experiment with language by writing a family poem. Together, make up a title about something your family loves (*Tasty Tortilla Soup*). Agree on a format, such as a limerick or free verse (no rhyme or regular rhythm). Then, take turns writing the lines, and let your child read your poem aloud when you finish.

Problem-solving pro

If your middle grader leaves for school without something she needs (book, graphing calculator), resist the urge to rescue her. Handling the situation herself will teach her to be a good problem solver. She might find alternatives like borrowing from a friend who has the same class during a different period.

DID YOU KNOW?

Taking an opioid like oxycodone for as little as five days can lead to addiction. Share this fact with your teen, and explain that he should never take medication that isn't prescribed for him. If he is injured or has surgery, ask his doctor about alternatives to opioids. And if anyone in your home takes an opioid, keep it locked up, and discard leftovers immediately.

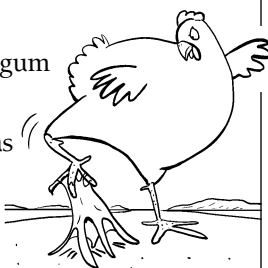
Worth quoting

"Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." *Mahatma Gandhi*

Just for fun

Q: Why did the gum cross the road?

A: Because it was stuck to the chicken's foot.



Respect: The 4th R

Treating people with respect can help your tween form strong relationships with classmates, teachers, and family members. Consider these ideas to help your middle grader show consideration for others.

Look for examples

Point out respectful behavior to your child, such as knocking on a closed door or being quiet while others are speaking or performing. Likewise, let her know what disrespectful behavior looks like. After a concert, you might say, "It was not nice when the people behind us were whispering. That was disruptive to the musicians—and the audience."



Be a model

Middle graders are quick studies when it comes to life. What they see is what they learn. If you treat your child respectfully, she is apt to follow your lead. And if you embarrass her in front of her friends or invade her privacy for no reason, she will get the idea that actions like these are acceptable.

Set limits

Make it clear that disrespectful language is never allowed. If your tween loses her cool and behaves rudely, suggest that she take a break. Tell her you'll listen when she calms down. Letting her know that you won't tolerate disrespect provides the guidance she needs to change her behavior. 👍

Spring science

Warm weather brings opportunities to explore science outdoors. Share these activities with your tween.

Design detective. Georges de Mestral invented Velcro after noticing burrs stuck to his dog! Suggest that your child observe objects in nature, pick one, and invent something inspired by its structure. Maybe he'll watch a turtle emerge from its shell, then design a retractable phone case.

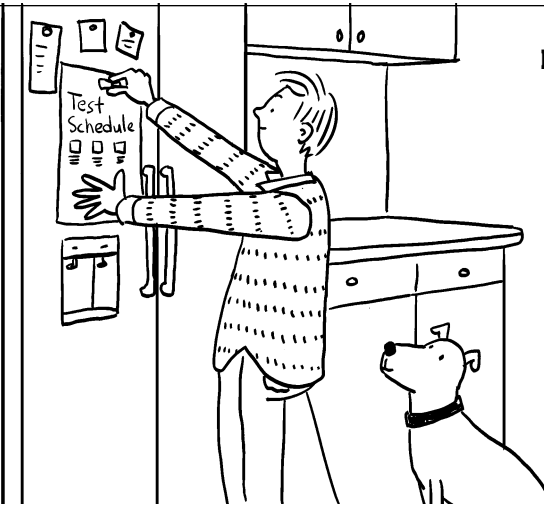
Energy consultant. Have your middle grader look closely at renewable energy sources like solar panels on buildings or wind turbines spinning in the March breeze. Based on his observations, perhaps he'll try making a model turbine that will spin in the wind. 👍



Standardized test success

Your child may be gearing up to take standardized tests soon. Here are ways to support him so he can do his best.

Plan ahead. Have your tween post the school testing schedule on the refrigerator and highlight dates for the ones he's taking. Then, try to be sure he gets 9–11 hours of sleep and eats a healthy breakfast on test day (and every day).



Ease nerves. Talk calmly and positively about the tests to reassure your middle grader. Explain that effort is what matters most. Also, he'll feel well prepared if he's in class each day leading up to the tests, since teachers often review material or give practice tests.

Follow up. After each test, ask your tween how it went. Which parts did he find easier, and which were more difficult? Reflecting on a test can help him do better on the next one.

Note: When you receive the test results, go over them together. 👍



Parent to Parent

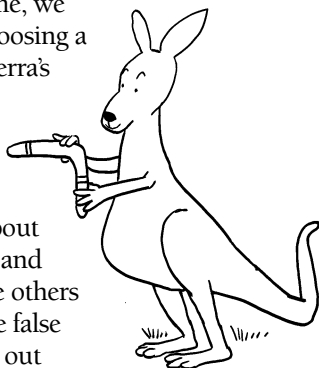
Wordplay

Our family loves games like Scrabble and Boggle. They're fun, and they help my daughter, Sierra—and all of us—build vocabulary. Recently, we've started adding variety by inventing our own word games.

In one game, we take turns choosing a word from Sierra's textbooks or vocabulary lists and writing three statements about it—two true and one false. The others try to spot the false fact. I figured out Sierra's incorrect fact

for the math word *acute* ("A boomerang has an *acute* angle"), so it was my turn to pick a word.

We also made up a vocabulary version of 20 Questions. One player thinks of a word. Then we ask yes-or-no questions like "Is it a living thing?" and "Does it have fur?" The first person to figure out the word selects the next one. I wonder what new game we'll come up with next! 👍



Q & A

A perfect image online

Q My eighth grader is new to social media. When she sees classmates' posts, she thinks they have perfect lives. Help!

A Suggest that your daughter compare scrolling through social media posts to watching a movie trailer. The trailer doesn't tell the whole story—it just shows scenes that will attract viewers' interest. On social media, children (and adults!) tend to share happy moments, not ones that are boring or embarrassing.

If your daughter feels jealous of a classmate's vacation pictures, for instance, have her think back to a trip she took, perhaps when you went camping last summer. Ask which moments from the trip she would and would not want made public.

Also, set limits on your child's social media use. Maybe she can check her accounts once after she finishes homework and then log off for the evening. Kids need time away from social media to experience real life—not the lives their friends are "creating" online. 👍



"Sunny" mornings

Daylight saving time begins March 10. Even if it's still dark when your tween wakes up, you can make mornings bright and cheerful in your home—and send him off to school ready to learn. Try these tips.

1. Turn on the lights.

Light sends signals to the brain that it's time to wake up.

2. Play music. Ask your middle grader to make a playlist called "Good morning!" He can include everyone's favorite upbeat songs.

3. Laugh. When you hear or see a funny joke, save it for morning. You could tell it at the breakfast table.

4. Exercise. Have sneakers and headlamps or reflective gear ready to go the night before, and head out for a quick run or to walk the dog together.

5. Enjoy trivia. Get everyone's brain in gear with a question of the day. Keep a deck of trivia cards on the table, or ask your smart speaker for today's Jeopardy question. 👍



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Short Stops

Year-end planning

As the school year winds down, your child's schedule will fill up with exams, projects, and events. To stay on top of everything, she might write obligations on a wall calendar. Or she could use an electronic calendar and share it with you so you're in the loop.

Acne advice

A good skin-care routine helps prevent or reduce acne. Encourage your middle grader to wash his face with a cleanser twice a day. Tell him not to pop pimples, since that could cause scarring. If the problem persists, consider taking him to a dermatologist.

Sixty-second challenges

For a quick, fun way to connect with your tween, have family members create challenges you can do in a minute or less! For example, set a timer and race to see who can stack the most plastic cups one-handed. Or compete to be the first to wriggle a cookie from your forehead to your mouth.

Worth quoting

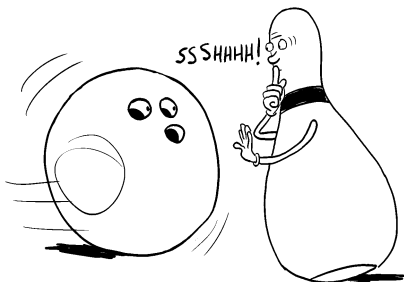
"It is spring again. The earth is like a child that knows poems by heart."

Rainer Maria Rilke

Just for fun

Q: Why should you be quiet at a bowling alley?

A: So you can hear a pin drop.



On a roll with reading

Reading for pleasure on a regular basis will boost your tween's vocabulary and general knowledge, and it may improve his test scores, too. Get him on board with these strategies.

Find a good fit

Falling in love with reading may simply be a matter of finding the right books. Suggest that your middle grader try the first book in a popular series—if he enjoys it, he may be eager to read the next one. Also, he can get lists of books similar to those he likes by googling the title plus the term "read-alikes."

Read with friends

Offer to drive your child to meet friends at the library. They might browse the shelves for fiction or nonfiction based on their own interests, then find a spot to settle in and read side by side. Or perhaps they'll all get copies of the same book to

read at home. When they finish, they could meet up to discuss their thoughts about the book.

Family story hour

If you think your tween has outgrown listening to you read to him, think again! In fact, children of all ages benefit from being read to. Offer to read the first chapter or two of a book out loud. Then, leave the book where he'll find it. He just may get hooked and read the rest on his own. 👍



Raise an appreciative child

Tweens don't always realize how much their parents and others do for them. Help your child feel and express appreciation, and ward off a sense of entitlement, with these ideas:

- Teach your tween to be grateful for things she might consider no big deal. Maybe you wait in the car every week during her music lesson, or a friend's mom drives her to a birthday party. Encourage her to think about the effort involved ("It was nice of Mrs. Lake to go out of her way to pick you up") and to say thank you.
- Explain that you provide for your middle grader's *needs*, but set an expectation that she'll save or work for *wants*, like a skateboard or video game. Suggest that she do odd jobs, such as babysitting or washing cars, to earn money. 👍



Conflict resolution: Find your path

When your child has a disagreement with a friend or sibling, she can actually use the experience to improve her relationship. How? By handling the situation the right way. Suggest these steps.

1. Ask your tween to think about how she normally reacts to a conflict. Is she a “hippo” who charges into an argument, a “turtle” who withdraws from clashes, or a “deer” who freezes when a squabble puts her in the spotlight?

2. Once your middle grader knows her usual response, she can adjust as needed. A hippo may need to walk away to



calm down or to remind herself to listen quietly. A turtle might think about how good it feels when problems are solved, then make an effort to discuss the situation. A deer could admit, “I don’t know what to say,” and agree to talk after she thinks things over.

3. Encourage your child to practice new responses until they feel natural. Discuss how conflicts work out when she responds one way vs. another—what seems to get the best results? 🍊

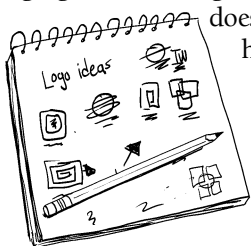
Design a logo

Ask your child to imagine he’s starting his own company. What logo would send the right message to his audience? By designing one, he’ll practice creative thinking and build communication skills. Here’s how.

First, encourage him to think critically about logos on websites, food packaging, and clothing. For instance, why does the Amazon logo have an arrow that goes from A to Z?

Then, have your middle grader research what people associate with certain colors, shapes, and fonts. For example, yellow is often considered cheerful, and squares are thought to hint at trust and stability. Different fonts can convey everything from fun to elegance.

Now your tween could use what he learned to design his logo. For a tech support company, he might choose yellow, a square, and a futuristic-looking font to suggest that he’s cheerful and that customers can trust him to solve their technology problems. 🍊



Q & A

Mental health ed

Q My son’s school started putting mental health lessons into health class. Why is this necessary?

A The school wants to keep students safe and healthy—physically and mentally. That’s why they’re trying to help children recognize and deal with mental health problems like depression and suicidal thoughts.

Ask your son what he’s studying in health class, just as you would with any subject. For example, he may be learning about symptoms of depression or how to ask for help if he has suicidal thoughts. Let him know he can come to you if he feels down or thinks about harming himself.

If you’d like to find out more, talk to your son’s health teacher, school counselor, or administrator about the curriculum they use and how you can support him at home. 🍊



Parent to Parent

Learning about heritage

I recently started researching my family’s genealogy. When I mentioned this to my daughter, Evelyn, she wanted to help out. It turned out to be an interesting history and geography lesson for her—and for me.

I knew about our Spanish heritage, but after talking to my parents and digging a little deeper online, Evelyn and I discovered that we also had ancestors from England and

France. On one genealogy site, she searched for old census records that traced some relatives all the way back to the mid-1700s. Then we looked at maps to see where they lived.

Evelyn has decided to make a family tree for an upcoming social studies project. She needs to know where the other half of her family came from, so she’s going to do genealogy research on her mom’s side of the family next. 🍊



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