

# Middle Years

Working together for school success



## Short Stops

### Holiday teamwork

If your family celebrates a winter holiday, invite your tween to help with preparations. The bonding time can create special memories. You might work side-by-side to bake, wrap gifts, or decorate. Let your child know how much you enjoy her company—and her help!

### Be a travel agent

Boost your youngster's imagination and research skills. Ask him to pretend he's traveling back in time to drum up tourism for an ancient city like Troy or Alexandria. He can read books and websites to learn what might attract visitors (theater performances, athletic competitions, poetry readings) and then design a travel brochure.

### Hygiene habits

Middle school is a good time for you and your children to evaluate their hygiene routines. At this age, they'll start to sweat more, so they'll need to work harder to keep their skin clean. Introduce habits like washing their faces morning and night and wearing deodorant.

### Worth quoting

"Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it."  
Samuel Johnson

### Just for fun

**Q:** What's the worst thing that can happen to a geography teacher?

**A:** Getting lost.



## Acts of kindness

It's free, it can be big or small, and it can make your child feel good whether she gets it or gives it away. What is it? Kindness!

Middle graders who are considerate get along better with classmates and adults. They also tend to be happier and feel better about themselves. Foster kindness with these ideas.



### Talk about why

Tell your child that when you help others, it benefits you as well as the person you're helping. You can get your mind off your own problems and feel good about making a difference. Plus, kindness makes life better for people in your youngster's school and community. Ask her to look for examples (a teacher helping parents learn English, a neighbor clearing snow from community sidewalks).

### Take action

Encourage your middle grader to be kind whenever possible. For example, if there is a new student in her classes, ask her how she might feel if she was new. Putting herself in someone else's shoes makes it easier to be compassionate.

Then, she can think of ways to make the new girl feel welcome, such as introducing herself or sitting with her at an assembly. Also, suggest that she ask the school counselor if her school provides ways to help others (collecting books for needy children, for instance) and then participate.

### Celebrate kindness

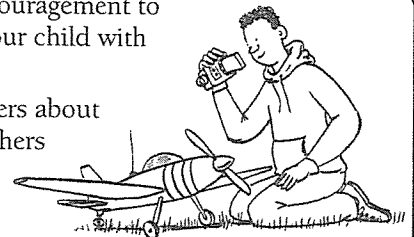
Highlight your child's kind behavior when you see it. You might say, "That was so nice of you to put away your brother's laundry while he's sick." Or declare "Kindness Week" at your house. Family members can write down random acts of kindness they see each other do. At the end of the week, take turns reading them out loud at dinner. Try to guess which family member did each one. 👍

## Achievement boosters

Middle schoolers sometimes need extra encouragement to do their best. Create learning enthusiasm in your child with strategies like these:

■ Suggest that your youngster talk to his teachers about creative approaches to assignments. Some teachers may allow students to use different formats for projects. For example, your teen might make a video, do a slide show, or interview an expert.

■ Encourage him to use subjects he likes to help him do better in those he's less enthusiastic about. If he loves science but isn't fond of writing, for instance, he might write a science fiction story for a creative-writing assignment. 👍



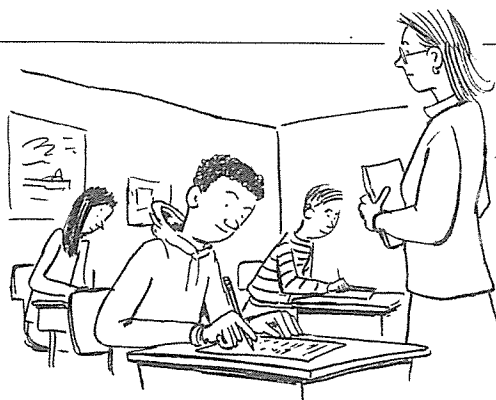
# Passing the test

A test can show your child—and his teacher—how much he has learned. But if he gets confused by the way a question is phrased or leaves an important point out of an essay, his grade might not reflect what he knows.

Share these techniques for tackling different types of questions with confidence.

## True or false

- Read the whole statement. If any part is incorrect, the answer is “false.” The entire statement must be accurate for the answer to be “true.”
- Take a guess. If there’s no penalty for wrong answers, select the answer that makes the most sense, even if you’re not sure. You have a 50 percent chance of getting it right.



## Multiple choice

- Predict the answer. Before you read the choices, have an answer in mind. You’re less likely to get tripped up by answers that aren’t quite right.
- Consider “all of the above.” If you’re sure more than one of the responses is correct, then all of them may be right.

## Essay

- Identify key words. Pay attention to whether the question calls for you to “compare,” “analyze,” “summarize,” or “explain.” Base your answer on what you are being asked to do.
- Make an outline. Having a quick plan will help you focus on the main ideas and not forget a point you want to make in your answer. 👍

## Parent to Parent

### Which activity?



When my son Peter started middle school, I wanted him to find an after-school activity so he could try something new.

I suggested that he get a list of activities from the school office. He also talked to his buddies about groups they participated in. We were both surprised at the variety! There was a foreign-language club, drama program, yearbook staff, and debate team.



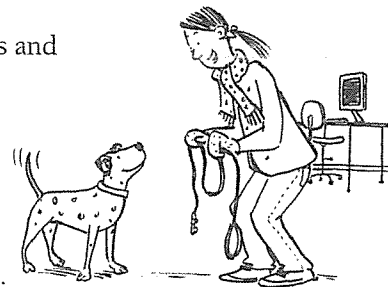
My son went through the list and starred the ones he most wanted to try. Together, we went over the time commitment for each of his favorites.

Peter decided to join the yearbook staff with his friend Ratul, and so far, he loves it. I’m happy he’s involved in a new activity, and he’s excited to be busy after school. 👍

## Technology time-out

Between TV, computers, and phones, most teens and tweens spend a lot of time using technology. Try these tips to encourage moderation:

- Set an example by unplugging on purpose. You might put your cell phone away during dinner and shut down your laptop while your family is watching a movie together. Explain that you can’t pay attention to family while you’re texting or emailing.
- Make it clear that homework comes first. Consider checking finished work before your child turns on the TV or plays a video game. If she’s using a computer for homework, she should sign out of instant-message programs and social-networking sites.
- Have a screen-time limit—experts recommend no more than two hours a day—and let your middle grader decide how to use it (texting, surfing the Internet). You might insist that she spend one hour being active (walking the dog, shooting baskets) for each hour she spends in front of a screen. 👍



## Q & A Young love

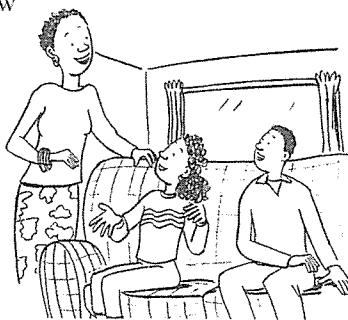
**Q** My eighth-grade daughter has her first boyfriend, and they see each other a lot. How should I handle the situation?

**A** Let your daughter know that you’re happy for her. She’ll be more likely to come to you with questions or concerns if she feels like you’re on her side.

Consider making rules about where she and her boyfriend can go. You might insist on group

dates in public places, like roller skating or movies with friends. Also, encourage her to invite him home so you can get to know this special person in her life.

Tell your daughter that even though she wants to be with him, it’s important for her to spend time with family, too. Also, she should continue talking to her girlfriends and hanging out with them. If she “drops” them for her boyfriend, she could end up losing valuable friendships. 👍



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## Short Stops

### Games galore

Board games are entertaining *and* educational.

Simply having them lying around can make your middle schooler more likely to play. Leave chess, Monopoly, Clue, or Scrabble wherever family members tend to gather (living room, kitchen). Then, when you have free time, suggest that you play a game together.

### After-school greetings

If you're not home when your child returns from school, you can still greet her with a cheerful "hello." Leave a note on the counter or a voice mail on her phone. ("Thinking of you. I'll be home around 5 p.m. We're having tacos for dinner!")

### Volunteering from home

Too busy during the day to help out at your youngster's school? Ask in the school office about ways to volunteer outside the building (email parents about events at the school, do fund-raising paperwork). Let your child see you working on these projects—he'll know that you care about his school.

### Worth quoting

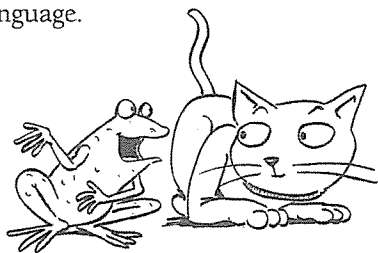
"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference."

Winston Churchill

### Just for fun

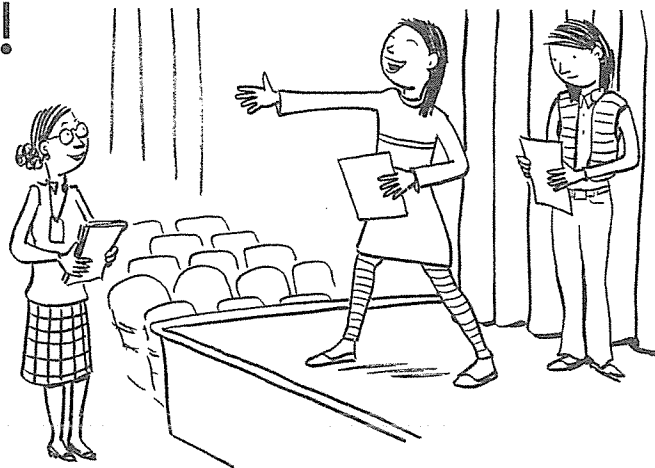
**Q:** Why did the frog say "meow"?

**A:** Because he was learning a foreign language.



## I like me!

Middle schoolers who feel good about themselves have an advantage during the tween years. They're less dependent on impressing others, and they tend to face challenges with confidence. Here are some ways to build self-esteem in your child.



**Be realistic.** If your youngster is like many middle graders, her view of herself (outgoing or shy, artsy or athletic) is based on where she fits in among her peers. But instead of comparing herself to others, urge her to recognize her strengths and pursue them. If she has a knack for acting, for instance, suggest that she take drama classes, try out for school plays, or attend community productions.

**Choose friends wisely.** Encourage your child to spend time with people who build her up and to avoid those who put her down or talk behind her back. She might invite good friends home more often and stay away from

a lunch table full of classmates who are catty. *Tip:* She should also be a friend to herself. For example, if she misses shots in a basketball game, she can think about what she'd say to a friend in that situation. ("You were great on defense!")

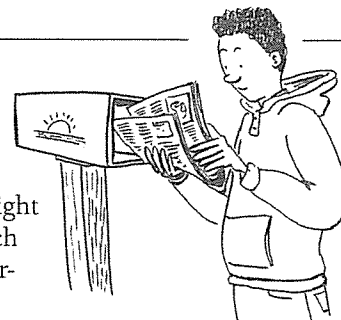
**Help others.** Making a difference in another person's life can boost your middle grader's self-confidence. She will take pride in being a leader and a role model. Suggest that she tutor younger students at school or volunteer with children's programs at a community center or place of worship. Or she could ask her school counselor about peer mentoring programs. 👍

## In the know

From politics and business to health and entertainment, there's always something interesting going on in the world. Motivate your child to stay informed about current events with these ideas.

**1. Start a habit.** Stay up to date as a family. You might listen to morning news on the way to school, watch the evening news on TV after dinner, or email interesting articles to each other on a regular basis.

**2. Make it relevant.** Talk about how articles relate to your middle grader's life. For example, a new state law might determine when he can get a driver's license, while school lunch legislation could affect what he eats in the cafeteria. 👍



# Bringing science home

Science doesn't have to take place in a lab. In fact, your middle grader can use science skills to solve household problems. Suggest these experiments.

**Recommend a product.** Next time your child comes home with grass stains on his pants, give him two brands of a stain remover. Ask him to try both and compare the results. For a controlled experiment, he needs to use an equal amount of each product—one stain remover on one pant leg and one on the other—following the directions on the bottles. Which one works better?



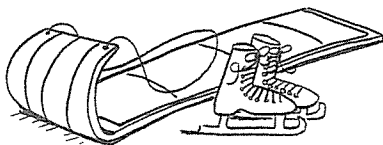
**Conserve energy.** Do family members leave electronics plugged in? Your youngster can help you save energy by only plugging in devices (laptop, iPod, phone) when they need to be charged. Have him let the items' batteries die completely and then fully charge them. He can write down how long it takes to charge each one, let the batteries die again, and write down how long each one lasted. Scientists use repeated trials

for accuracy, so he should do this three times per device. Using the data, he can calculate the average life of each battery and draw a conclusion. ("My phone battery takes 45 minutes to charge and lasts about 50 hours. I need to plug it in every other day for 45 minutes.") 🍌

## Family outings

Where does your family like to go during the winter? Here are a few free or low-cost outings to enjoy together.

■ **Stay fit.** Head to a local park and take advantage of hiking trails or sledding hills, or look for indoor activities like bowling and ice-skating. You might also consider taking a family class (martial arts, yoga).



■ **Plan a day trip.** Check out websites or call tourism offices in nearby towns for new ideas. Perhaps you'll discover a pet show at a convention center, a winter festival in a historic district, or a factory that offers behind-the-scenes tours.

■ **Watch sports.** Attend winter events at a local high school or college. Try gymnastics meets, basketball games, or wrestling matches. 🍌



## Q & A Still creative

**Q** My daughter used to love arts and crafts, but she seems to have lost interest. How can I encourage creativity at this age?

**A** Creativity helps children express feelings and improves thinking skills. To rekindle your daughter's creative side, try suggesting projects that appeal to her age and interests.

For example, your youngster might enjoy making music videos with friends. Let them use a cell phone camera or laptop webcam to record themselves lip-synching to favorite songs. They can design different backgrounds or experiment with special effects on the computer.

If your middle schooler likes to take pictures, she could make a slide show of her favorite photos and set it to music on a laptop or tablet.

Or if cooking is her thing, suggest that she try cupcake decorating. She can use food coloring, toppings, and cake decorating tools to add creative touches to treats—and share them with the family when she's finished. 🍌



## Parent to Parent Stand up to bullying

My son Lance came home laughing because some classmates shoved a student into a locker. When I asked Lance what he did about it, he looked surprised and said, "Nothing."

I told him what I had read in an article recently: when kids laugh or do nothing, they encourage bullies to keep bullying. Lance said he hadn't thought of it that way. So we talked about how he can respond when kids are picked on. If he feels

like he can help the victim without getting hurt, he should step in and then walk away with the victim to the nearest adult. If he's afraid, he should get an adult immediately.

Although this incident was unfortunate, I'm glad the topic came up. The next time Lance sees bullying, I hope he'll think twice. And if he has the courage to speak up, maybe he'll inspire other kids to show bullies that their behavior isn't acceptable. 🍌



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### Stay focused online

As your child does Internet research, she may end up on sites that aren't related to her search—and forget what she was looking for in the first place! She can prevent this by opening every link in a new tab so she can easily return to the original search page.

### What's in my future?

It's never too early to help your tween imagine what his future will hold. Suggest that he talk to friends' older siblings to learn about their colleges, trade schools, jobs, or military careers. If there's a college nearby, you might walk around campus together or attend a basketball game to give him a glimpse of college life.

### Lead the way

Middle graders can be passionate about causes. Encourage yours to pick an issue she cares about, like animal rights or diabetes research. Then, she could look for ways to help. For example, she might volunteer at an animal adoption fair or write a letter to the newspaper about the need to cure diabetes.

### Worth quoting

"Spring has returned. The earth is like a child that knows poems."

Rainer Maria Rilke

### Just for fun

**Q:** What has a neck but no head?

**A:** A bottle.



## I can cope

When your tween loses a soccer game, feels rejected by the girl he likes, or gets a bad grade on a test, how does he react? Encourage him to handle the curve balls life throws his way with positive strategies like these.

### Unwind the healthy way

Explain that everyone faces problems—it's how they deal with them that matters. Point out ways you manage setbacks. You might say, "I'm going to relax with a good book tonight and start my job search again tomorrow." Ask your middle grader to come up with activities he could do when he is upset or stressed out, such as going for a run, playing with a pet, or watching a funny movie.

### Build support circles

Discussing problems can help your child solve them and prevent bad feelings from building up. Suggest that he think of adults he could talk to if he's worried or overwhelmed. He should



include people who will listen and offer guidance, such as parents, a favorite aunt or uncle, supportive teachers or coaches, or his school counselor.

### Take care of yourself

Your youngster will cope better if his basic needs are met. Remind him that kids his age need nine or more hours of sleep each night. Also, explain that he should eat a healthy diet, drink plenty of water, and get at least an hour of exercise every day. *Note:* If your tween is frequently upset or seems withdrawn, talk to his pediatrician. 👍

## Geography games

Where in the world is Montenegro? Which states would you drive through from Texas to Maine? Play these two games to help your child learn more about geography.

**1. Map race.** Find a world map in an atlas or online. Then, read the newspaper with your tween, and have her list 10 countries that are mentioned. Together, use a timer to see how fast you can find all 10 on the map. *Idea:* Ask her how countries' locations might be related to current events.

**2. State dominoes.** Get a U.S. map, and tell your middle grader to write all 50 state names on separate slips of paper. Mix up the slips, and deal 25 to each player. Take turns laying slips end-to-end—like dominoes, except states on touching slips must share a border on the map (Alaska and Hawaii can each touch the two closest states). The winner is the last person who can make a play. 👍

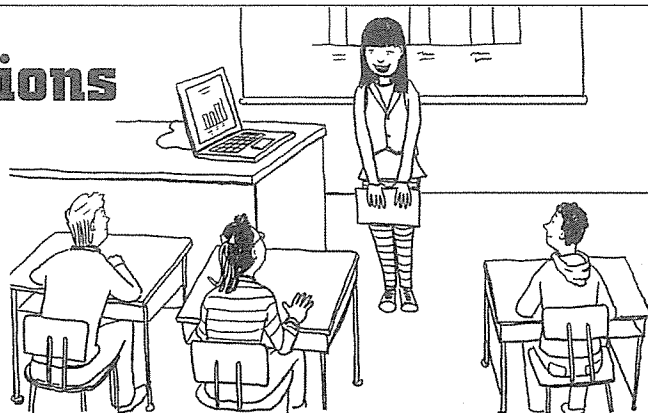


# Better presentations

Class presentations let your middle grader practice public speaking skills that she'll use throughout school and on the job. Share the following tips for success.

**Start and finish strong.** Your child should use an attention-grabbing introduction and a memorable conclusion. If she's doing a report on Colonial America, for instance, she might begin with a quote from a colonist. She could wrap up with a lesson that she learned from early settlers' experiences.

**Choose visual aids carefully.** Visuals should add to or support what your middle grader says. She might create a



graph that shows the colonies' populations or find a political cartoon from the time period.

**Practice thoroughly.** Encourage your tween to rehearse until she can speak without constantly looking at her notes or PowerPoint slides. Suggest that she

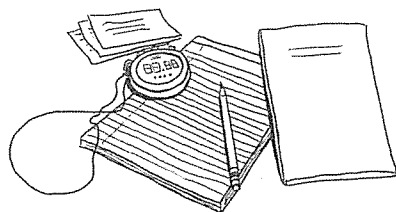
practice in front of family or friends or videotape herself to see how she could improve. For instance, she may need to fidget less, speak more slowly, or avoid saying "like" or "um." 👍



## Q & A

### Statewide tests

**Q** My son has standardized tests coming up. How should he get ready?



**A** Your child will feel more prepared if he knows what the tests cover and what the formats will be. For instance, a reading test might contain short articles and stories with multiple-choice questions. Encourage him to listen carefully during test reviews and ask his teacher if he needs more information.

To get used to working under time constraints, suggest that your son do practice problems or test reviews with a stopwatch. He could also look over old tests to jog his memory of what he has learned this year.

Finally, the week of the tests, talk to him about how it's going. He'll know you're interested, and you'll show him that the tests are important. 👍

## Parent to Parent

### Friendship drama

My daughter Maggie came home confused when her friend Sarah got mad at the rest of their group of friends. Sarah didn't want to sit with them at lunch anymore, and she asked Maggie to start eating with her.

Maggie felt torn—she wanted to be friends with everyone, and she didn't want anyone to be upset. So we discussed ways to handle the situation. She decided to tell the group that she'd sit with them a couple days a week and with Sarah the other days.

She still hangs out with the other girls outside of school and invites Sarah to do things separately. Sarah hasn't made up with the others, but she and Maggie have remained friends. I'm glad my daughter found a way to compromise, and I hope the experience will help her the next time there is a problem with her friends. 👍



## Adapting rules for tweens

As tweens grow and change, household rules often need to change, too. Try these ideas.

■ **Meet in the middle.** You may decide that some things can be handled on a case-by-case basis. Rather than saying "No going out on school nights," for example, you might consider each instance. Maybe your child can hang out with friends if he doesn't have much homework and finishes it after school.

■ **Talk about why.** When your middle grader asks why you've

made a decision, explain your reasoning, and stand firm. "You can't go because your chores aren't finished" is better than "Because I said so."

■ **Expand privileges gradually.** Give freedom little by little to see how your youngster handles it. If he wants to walk around the mall with friends, you could take him, stay there, and meet an hour later. If all goes well and he shows up when you agreed, you might drop him off or let him stay longer next time. 👍



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