

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Up with music

Darker mornings can tempt your middle grader to sleep longer. Help her get moving by suggesting that she wake up to music. She might set her alarm to her favorite radio station or playlist and then listen while she gets ready for school.

Winter work

Does your child have homework during winter break? If so, encourage him to look over the assignments as soon as possible. That way, he can estimate how long the work will take and set aside time for it in his schedule.

Healthy traditions

Ask your tween to help you make holiday recipes more nutritious. She might search online for lighter versions of traditional favorites, like cakes and cookies made with applesauce instead of butter. Or she can look for new, healthy ideas like cranberry smoothies or mashed cauliflower.

Worth quoting

“I can’t do it’ never yet accomplished anything; ‘I will try’ has performed wonders.” *George P. Burnham*

Just for fun

Q: I’m tall in the morning, short at noon, and gone at night, but I’ll be back soon. What am I?

A: A shadow!



Paying attention in class

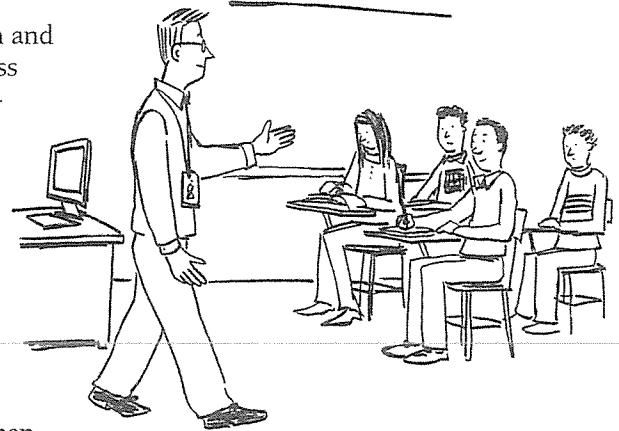
The ability to pay attention and ignore distractions during class is a key trait of successful students—and it’s something your child can learn to do. Share these tips with him.

Start before the bell

Arriving on time and organizing his materials will help your middle grader get focused. For example, he should take out his textbook, notebook, and pen or pencil. He can also glance over last night’s homework before handing it in—it will refresh his memory about the previous day’s material and help him understand new information.

Be active

The more he gets involved with what’s going on in class, the more attentive he will be. Suggest that he jot down questions he thinks of as the teacher talks. This will encourage him to listen closely to see if he answers them. If not, he can raise his hand to ask. He can stay focused



during group discussions, too, by writing down important points that others make, and by sharing his own ideas.

Avoid distractions

Remind him to tune out activities or noises that aren’t part of the lesson. Sitting in the first row can help—he won’t be distracted by people in front of him, and he’ll have a better view of the board. If he uses a computer to take notes, he will need to turn off programs and close websites that aren’t class related. Also, he should make sure his phone is silenced and put away. 👍

Our house: The place to be!

Opening your home to your child’s friends creates a win-win situation—she’s safe at home, and you get to meet her friends. Help her create a tween-friendly hangout with these ideas:

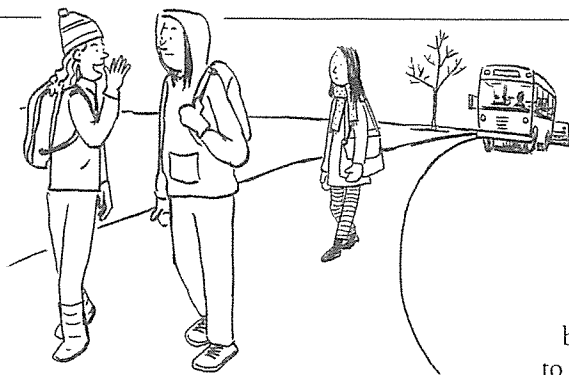
- Stock up on activities. Your youngster might fill a basket or cabinet with board games, a deck of cards, and magazines. Suggest that she add school supplies (sharpened pencils, notebook paper) so she and her friends can use the space to do homework, too.

- Set guidelines. For example, let her know that you expect her and her friends to clean up after themselves. On the flip side, you might agree to keep siblings out of the space when her friends visit. 👍



What is social bullying?

Pass it on: gossiping and spreading rumors are examples of social bullying. But where is the line between harmless teasing among friends and behavior that is hurtful? Here are facts about bullying, along with ways your middle grader might handle different situations.



What to do: Say your tween's popular friends gossip about a quiet classmate who sits alone at lunch. Your child could try to change the subject ("So anyway, did you watch the game last night?") or defend the person being talked about ("You guys, she's probably really nice"). She might even plan to join the other girl for lunch the following day.

Fact: When well-liked students use their social status to put down less-popular classmates, it counts as bullying.

Fact: Spreading a rumor about someone to make others think less of the person is an example of bullying.

What to do: Your tween can help stop a rumor simply by not passing it on. If she hears friends talking about another girl's behavior at a party, she could say, "I don't think that's true, so I'm not going to repeat it." She might also approach the girl and offer to help clear things up.

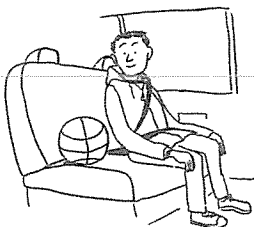
Note: If your child feels threatened by a bully, she should talk to a trusted adult (parent, counselor). 👍

Everyday science

Help your middle grader find the science in everyday life with these activities.

Physics

Exploring the laws of physics can show your child why seat belts are important. Have him place a basketball on the seat next to him. What happens when you brake? (The ball rolls onto the floor.) When a car stops, anything inside that's not restrained keeps moving. That's known as *inertia*—the tendency of a moving object to continue in the same direction unless an outside force stops it.



Chemistry

Cooking often involves chemical reactions. For example, yeast converts the starch in flour to sugar. Then, the yeast "eats" the sugar, producing carbon dioxide bubbles. This process creates the gas pockets that make bread fluffy. Your teen can see how this works by stirring 1 packet active dry yeast and 2 tbsp. sugar into 1 cup warm water. Let him pour the mixture into a plastic bottle and stretch a balloon over the opening. The gas that forms will inflate the balloon! 👍



Q & A

Thumbs up for learning

Q Now that my son is in middle school, he says it's not cool to be smart. How can I change his mind?

A Try reminding your son of how good it feels to be successful. You might dig up an old test or paper that has a good grade or nice comments from the teacher. Post it on the refrigerator so he'll remember the sense of accomplishment that comes from doing well.

You can also show him that learning makes life more interesting. Tell him about a friend's teenager who is enjoying college or who landed a cool job. Explain that working hard now will prepare him for tougher classes in high school, which can lead to getting into college or finding a career he enjoys.

Finally, let him know that you expect him to study and do his best—even if he doesn't think it's cool right now. 👍



Parent to Parent

A special blend

Last winter, my daughter, Tamara, and I celebrated our first holidays with my new husband and stepson, Blake. I was a little nervous about how to make everyone feel included. Luckily, I got some good advice from a friend who has been remarried for several years.

My friend said that her family made it a point to keep old traditions while introducing new ones. So we asked our children to name favorite pastimes that they wanted to

continue. Tamara mentioned our annual brunch with all of her cousins. And Blake wanted to attend our town's winter carnival. Then, we came up with some new ideas, like sharing the highlights of our year on New Year's Eve.

Our holidays still had a few wrinkles, but the children seemed more comfortable with the changes since they got to have a say. And I think we're all looking forward to creating more memories this season. 👍



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Short Stops

A new language

If your middle grader is studying a foreign language, consider learning it along with her. Watch foreign films together, listen to language CDs in the car, and ask her to teach you greetings and other vocabulary. She'll enjoy having conversations with you, and she'll probably pick up the language faster.

Texting manners

Good texting habits can help your tween get along with friends and develop communication skills. Have him reread texts to make sure they sound polite, don't contain autocorrect errors, and are being sent to the right person. *Note:* Remind your child to put his phone away and not text in school.

Handling nerves

Your youngster may feel anxious about new teachers and classes. If so, reassure her that it's normal—and that she's not alone. As she adjusts, suggest ways to cope with her feelings. She might get more exercise, write in a journal, or talk to you or another trusted adult.

Worth quoting

"Little by little, one walks far."
Peruvian proverb

Just for fun

Teacher: Where was the Declaration of Independence signed?

Student: At the bottom!



Strategies for success

With a simple plan to get off on the right foot, your middle grader can have a great year. Share these ideas for making this year one he can be proud of.

Give your all. What is your child looking forward to learning this year? Maybe he will study an interesting period in history or do more science experiments. Have him name ways he can learn more and do well. For instance, he might promise himself that he'll review notes every day, start long-term assignments right away, or earn extra credit when it's available. He could write down these commitments where he'll see them—inside his binder or on sticky notes by his desk at home.

Find resources. To navigate middle school, your tween needs to know where he can get information and support. Let him bookmark school and class websites on your family's laptop and add teachers'



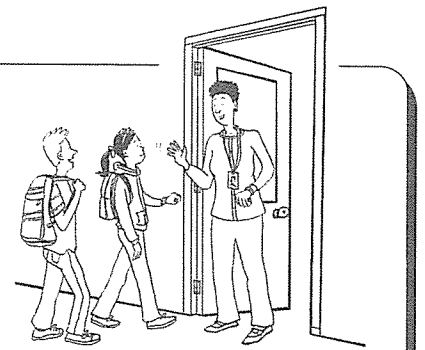
email addresses to his contacts. He might also explore ways to get extra help, like joining an after-school study group or making an appointment with a teacher or counselor.

Stay on top of grades. Tell your child he should pay attention to how grades are determined. You could explain that homework, tests, and projects may count for different percentages in each class. He can check his grades online or make his own spreadsheet for tracking them. 👍

Be there!

Being in school all day, every day, helps your child get the most out of middle school. Encourage good attendance with these ideas:

- Point out that there is no substitute for being in class. Your youngster needs to be present to hear teachers explain concepts, to participate in group projects and class discussions, and to ask questions.
- Schedule doctor, dentist, and orthodontist appointments for before or after school hours whenever possible. If you can't, try to arrange them during lunch or study hall.
- It will be easier for your child to get up on time for school if she's had at least nine hours of sleep. Set a reasonable bedtime, and make sure she puts away electronic devices so she isn't tempted to stay awake to play with them. 👍



Setting high expectations

Your middle grader wants to know you care about her and believe in her abilities. Having high expectations can show her that you do. Here's how to set expectations that work.

Talk about it

Be clear about what your expectations are. If you expect your child to take certain classes (say, algebra in eighth grade) or to behave well in class, communicate those points to her. Then, weave your expectations into regular conversations. ("Good job on your math test—doing well this year will mean you'll be recommended for algebra next year.")



Stay realistic

Make sure what you expect is realistic so your tween can achieve it without becoming discouraged. If she's in a spelling bee, you might expect her to study her words and try to make it through as many rounds as possible, but avoid pressuring her to win first place.

Celebrate accomplishments

Your middle schooler needs to see herself as capable of meeting expectations. Watch for opportunities to point out times that she reached high. For instance, you might say, "You got frustrated learning the songs for your strings concert, but you kept practicing. Look how much you've improved!"



Questions to ask after school

When you hear "parent involvement," you may think of volunteering in school. But talking to your tween about school counts as parent involvement, too! Here are 10 questions to ask your child—you could choose one or two each day.

1. What's the most interesting thing you learned today?
2. What was the best part of your day?
3. What was on your math quiz?
4. Who did you sit with at lunch?
5. What book are you reading in English?
6. What made you laugh today?
7. What have you done so far for your science project?
8. What are you learning about in history this month?
9. Is this school year what you expected so far? Why or why not?
10. What was your least favorite part of the day, and what would you change about it?

Tip: Encourage your middle grader to ask questions about your day, too.



Q & A Right-fit activities

Q My son wishes he could be more involved at school, but he hasn't discovered his "niche." How can he find a group to participate in?

A Extracurricular activities help your child explore interests, socialize, and feel like part of a group.

Tell your son to listen carefully to morning announcements about activities like intramurals, yearbook, and academic teams. Together, look over information that comes home, or check the school website for an activity list.



If he has a favorite subject, he could ask his teacher if there is a club for it, such as a French club or a history club. Your tween might also talk to friends to see what they're doing. At this age, being with friends provides a major incentive for joining an activity.

Parent to Parent

What I believe in

Now that my daughter, Molly, is in middle school, I know it's even more important for her to be able to stand up for herself and her beliefs. But first, she has to be sure what her own values are. I remembered an exercise she did in elementary school during a "Say no to drugs" program and thought it might work at this age.

I asked her to write a letter to herself about what's important to her—and I told her I would write one to

myself, too. To help her get started, I mentioned things I would include, such as making time for our family and being a team player at work.

Molly came up with her own ideas. For instance, she wrote that she values being a loyal friend and wants to stay healthy so she can play lacrosse.

When she finished her letter, she put it in her desk to reread from time to time. I'm hoping it will help remind her of what's important to her when she faces challenges this year.



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Advance notice

Does your middle grader wait until the last minute to tell you that he needs a poster board for his project or a ride to a friend's party? Have him put requests like these in writing a few days ahead of time. For instance, he could add school supplies to your grocery list or email you about upcoming events.

What is "cutting"?

Some tweens and teens turn to "cutting"—injuring themselves with scissors or razors—to cope with anger, sadness, or stress. If you notice unusual marks on your child, ask her where they came from. Talk to her doctor or school counselor immediately if you suspect she is harming herself.

In the news

Sharing the news with your middle grader is a great way to spark discussions about everything from politics to the weather. Watch the national news together on TV, or listen to public radio in the car. Many kids find news events interesting because they're happening right now.

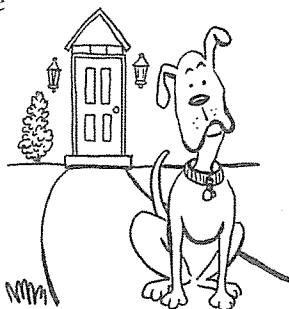
Worth quoting

"Why fit in when you were born to stand out?" *Dr. Seuss*

Just for fun

Q: What's the best way to stop a dog from barking in the backyard?

A: Put him in the front yard.



New ways to study

Trying different study techniques can keep your child motivated and help her learn more effectively. Here are ideas for adding variety—and a touch of fun—to her routine.

Phone a friend

Suggest that your middle grader list 10 questions about the chapter or notes she is studying and have a friend do the same. Then, they can quiz each other over the phone. Coming up with questions is an effective study method, and answering her friend's questions is good practice for taking a test. *Tip:* Encourage them to decide ahead of time when to call—it will give them a deadline for studying.

Talk to yourself

Reciting information out loud will help your child learn and remember it. Every few minutes, she should look away from her notes or textbook and state a fact she just read or define a vocabulary



word. Or she could tape herself studying aloud and play back the recording—speaking *and* listening will help cement the information in her mind.

Play games

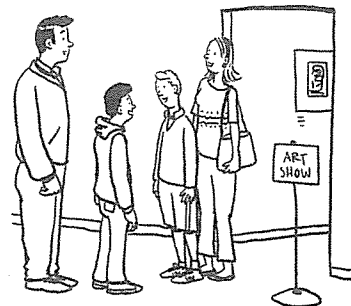
Together, play a word game like Scrabble or Boggle with spelling words from the foreign language your tween is taking. Or use her study material for charades. She can write historical events or science terms on index cards for players to act out. 👍

You're invited

Show your middle grader you think his school is important by attending events there. Try these tips:

- Check papers your child brings home for information about a school musical, a baseball game, or a math fair. Ask him which ones he plans to attend, and offer to go along. If he wants to go with friends, mention that you'll be there, too (alone, with your spouse, or with a friend).
- Consider going with your tween to a school event he's not part of, such as an art show or a poetry reading. You can meet other parents, and your youngster may discover a new activity or interest.

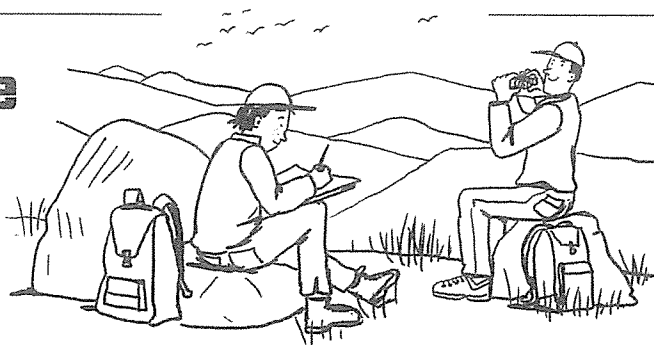
Idea: Carpool with other families. It's fun to have company, and sharing transportation helps those who might not have a ride. 👍



Inspired to write

Keeping a journal can improve your tween's writing skills and stretch his creativity. But many kids don't know what to write about. Share these questions to help him along.

Where am I? It's amazing the ideas your youngster might come up with if he carries a journal in his hip pocket. He could pull out his notebook on the train and imagine the life of another passenger. Or when he reaches a peak during a hike, he can rest and write a description of the mountain.



What are my favorites? Encourage your child to list favorites (bands, foods, sports teams) in his journal. Then, he might pretend he is nominating something from his list for an award and explain why it deserves to win.

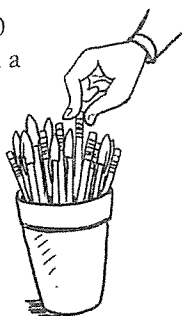
What if? Together, think of fun, thoughtful, or crazy questions that he could use as jumping-off points. He can write each one at the top of a blank page. *Examples:* "If only I lived in the 24th century, then I would..."; "One day that I'd really like to forget is when..."; or "I woke up to find that everyone had turned into an animal except for me..."



Activity Corner Chances are...

The whole family can enjoy this probability challenge—and it only *seems* simple.

Problem: Maria has 10 pens and 10 pencils in a cup. She pulls out a pen. Without looking, she reaches into the cup again. What is the probability that she will pull out a second pen? Is it 50 percent, more than 50 percent, or less than 50? (Most people will say 50 percent.)



Solution: Before Maria pulled out the first pen, 10 of the items—or 50 percent—were pens. But when she pulled out the second item, there were only 9 pens and 10 pencils. Since there were more pencils, her chance of getting a second pen was less than 50 percent.

Encourage your child to try this with her own pens and pencils. Then, take turns making up more probability challenges for each other to solve, and act them out to check the results!

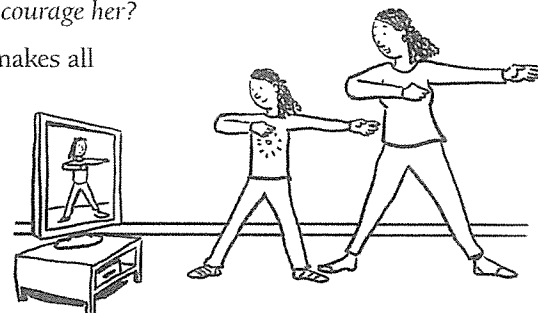
Q & A "I give up!"

Q *If something doesn't come easily to my daughter, she stops trying. The other day when she was struggling to finish a workout video, she said, "I'm just not an exercise person." How can I encourage her?*

A With many things in life, effort makes all the difference. You can explain that there's no such thing as an "exercise person," but there *is* such a thing as a "stick-to-it" person. If she keeps trying to do the workout video, she'll eventually be able to do the whole thing.

You can also tell her about a time you struggled with something, like learning to use specialized software for your job, but worked hard and figured it out.

Suggest that your daughter use this advice in school, too. Some subjects will be harder for her than others, but if she keeps at it, she will increase her chances of success in every class.



Parent to Parent Begin to volunteer

I volunteer in our community, and I mentioned to my son Owen how good it makes me feel. He said he'd like to try volunteering, too, so we looked into what he could do.

We quickly discovered that most places, like shelters, food banks, and senior centers, require a parent to participate with children. I was happy to accompany him, so Owen and I discussed the options and decided on helping out at a homeless shelter.

Owen has been reading aloud to children there for a few months now, and sometimes he plays games with them. He feels great about what he's doing, and I think he looks forward to the visits as much as the children do!

Plus, we're both happy that he's getting volunteer experience—and a taste of responsibility—before he's old enough to have a full-time job.



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