

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Homework questions

If your middle schooler is stuck on a homework assignment, you can help her by asking questions. For instance, "Where could you look for more information?" or "What have you already tried?" Your prompting may be just what she needs to get back on track.

Taming paperwork

Field trip forms, sign-ups for extracurricular activities, picture orders... middle school parents sign a lot of papers. To keep paperwork moving, get two file folders or paper trays. Have your child put everything that needs your signature in one (the "inbox"). Check it daily, and move signed papers to the other (the "outbox").

Vocabulary booster

Your middle grader can learn new words just by having casual conversations with you. When you talk, agree to try to trade everyday words for more interesting ones. *Examples: mediocre instead of so-so, hysterical instead of funny.* You can both use a thesaurus to help you find words.

Worth quoting

"The secret of joy in work is contained in one word—excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it." *Pearl Buck*

Just for fun

Q: How does a farmer know when it's cold?

A: When he milks a cow and gets ice cream!



Making wise decisions

Your child is deciding whether to stay in band or to play lacrosse. It's a tough choice—but it's also a good opportunity for him to practice making decisions. Considering different possibilities and picking the best one is a skill he'll need for middle school and beyond.



Gather information. To make an informed decision, your middle grader needs all the facts. What is the time commitment for each activity? How would he get home from after-school practices? Will there be travel to band competitions or to lacrosse tournaments? Suggest that he speak to the band director and the lacrosse coach to get answers to all his questions.

Consider pros and cons. Have your youngster list the benefits and drawbacks of each choice. For example, lacrosse would be a great way to exercise

and meet new friends, but it might take time away from homework and other activities. If he stays in the band, he could become a better trombone player and be in performances, but he'd need to find a way to work out.

Rate options. Which choice has more pros? How important are the cons? Suggest that your middle grader rate each pro or con with one to five stars. The more stars he awards, the more important a pro or con is to him. Looking at how the stars add up will help make the right decision clearer. 👍

Joy in poetry

Silly or serious, poetry can motivate your child to read. Here are ideas the whole family will enjoy:

- Read poems by candlelight or flashlight. Try a volume for middle graders, like *Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems* by Kristine O'Connell George or *The Dog Ate My Homework* by Sara Holbrook.

- Surprise each other with poems. Find ones you like in a book or on a Web site, and write down a favorite verse. Tuck it into your youngster's lunch, or she might tape one to your bathroom mirror.

- Hold a poetry scavenger hunt. Take turns naming a household object (quilt, plant) or favorite animal (panda bear, leopard). Each of you can search online or in the library for a related poem and read it aloud. 👍

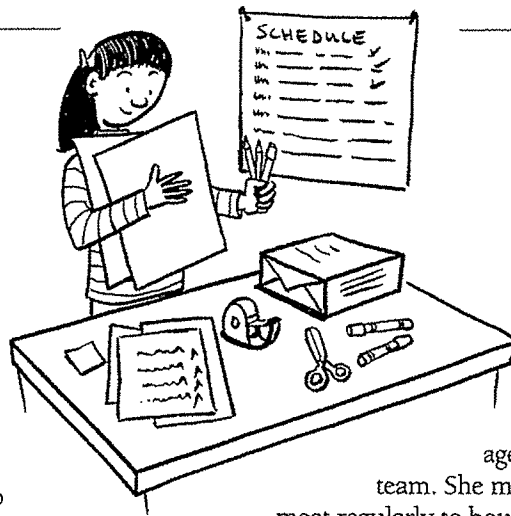


Project primer

Successful school projects start with organization and time management. Your middle grader can get off on the right foot with these tips.

Make a schedule

A project will seem more manageable if it's divided into steps. Whether your middle grader is working alone or in a group, she will need to understand what her tasks are (doing research, writing an outline) and to remember the due date for each one.



Collect supplies

Your child's work will go more smoothly when she has supplies on hand. Before she begins, she can write down everything she'll need (printer paper, poster board). She can find items around the house and ask you to help her get the rest.

Practice teamwork

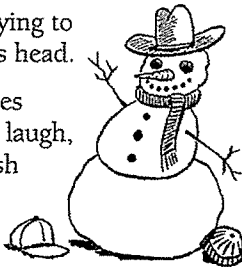
If your middle schooler is involved in a group project, encourage her to be a valuable member of the team. She might start by suggesting that the members meet regularly to bounce ideas off one another. They can also agree to touch base frequently by phone or e-mail. 👍



Laugh out loud

Laughing together can help parents and children get along better. Try these ideas:

- When you hear a funny joke, write it down. Cut out cartoons from newspapers and magazines, too. Post them on the refrigerator, and share them at dinner or in the car for a good laugh.
- Have fun in the snow together. You could play a game of catch with snowballs. Or build a snowman and take turns trying to throw a hat on its head.
- Play board games that make people laugh, such as Balderdash or Pictionary. Or get moving with a few rounds of Twister or charades. *Idea:* Try a version of charades in which you act out scenes from funny movies.



- Make up stories. One person starts with a silly sentence ("I was traveling to the jungle when..."). The next person adds a line ("...I saw an ape dressed in a tuxedo"). Continue until the story is complete. 👍

Parent to Parent

Talking about tolerance

The other day I overheard my daughter and her friends imitating their new classmate's accent. When they left, I reminded Alexis how she felt when kids made fun of her glasses. She said this was different, because the girl didn't hear them. But I explained that their attitude would affect how they treated her.

Alexis admitted that she felt bad, but she didn't want to go against her friends. So we talked about ways she could react next time, like speaking up or changing the subject.

A few days later, Alexis told me she had tried one of our ideas. When her friends started to make comments, she changed the subject and asked them if they were going to the game that night. Then, later in the day, she saw her new classmate and introduced herself.

I'm proud of my daughter—and she's happy to have made a new friend. 👍



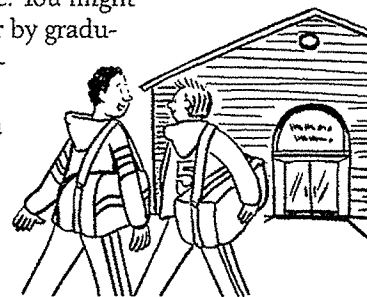
Q & A How much freedom?

Q My son wants me to drop him off at the movies. What should a seventh grader be allowed to do?

A There's no "magic age" for giving a child more independence. You might judge what he's ready for by gradually giving him more freedom. For example, you could start by taking him and a couple of his friends to the movies and sitting in a different row. Once you're both comfortable, you

might drop him off with friends at the community center or skating rink and plan to pick them up in an hour.

You can also satisfy your son's need for freedom—and help him feel independent—by giving him other privileges. Although some issues aren't negotiable (curfews, smoking), a middle grader might decide how to cut his hair or how to spend his allowance. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ideas that promote school success, parent involvement, and more effective parenting.

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Election day

Although your tween is too young to vote in this month's elections, he can still get involved. Take him to the polls with you, and talk about your choices. Then, watch the election results together. It's a great way for him to see citizens participating in government—and to prepare for voting when he's older.

The "write" word

Students sometimes think long, fancy words sound impressive. But short, simple words can have more impact if they make writing clearer. Suggest that your child replace complicated words with easier ones and then read both versions aloud ("She wore an undecorated frock" vs. "She wore a plain dress"). Which sounds better?

Thinking of others

Being thoughtful can improve your middle grader's relationships. Encourage him to work on this at home. If he gets a glass of water, he could ask his sister if she wants one, too. Or he might offer the computer to another family member when he realizes he's been on it for a while.

Worth quoting

"It's okay to make mistakes. Mistakes are our teachers—they help us to learn." *John Bradshaw*

Just for fun

Teacher: Do you know the 20th president of the United States?

Student: No. We were never introduced!



Controlling impulses

If your tween can be impulsive, blame it on science: the part of her brain that controls impulses won't be fully developed until her early 20s. In the meantime, here are some ways you can help her practice self-control.

Focus on the future

Encourage your child to think things through ahead of time. For instance, remind her to consider her schedule before making plans ("I have jazz practice Thursday afternoon, so I can't go to Andrea's that day"). Also, try having discussions that help her visualize next week, next year, or even 10 years from now. You could ask about her weekend plans, her goals for summer vacation, or her ideal career.

Practice patience

Learning to wait for what she wants will help your middle grader build self-discipline. Talk about how you avoid acting on impulse when it comes to things such as shopping or eating. You might say, "I would like to buy this outfit, but I'm going to save the money toward a

new couch" or "Ice cream sounds so good right now, but let's enjoy it after dinner."

Encourage cooling down

If your youngster gets angry or upset, she needs self-control to avoid saying or doing something she will regret. Help her recognize signs that her feelings are escalating, and brainstorm ways she can handle them before they spiral out of control. For example, if her face is flushed and she feels like screaming during a disagreement, she could say, "Let's discuss this another time," and then walk away. 👍

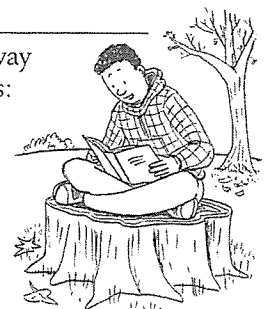


Read for pleasure

How can you get your child to read more often? One way is to help him find books he enjoys. Try these suggestions:

- Surround him with reading materials. When you see books you think he'd like, try leaving them on his nightstand or in the car. You can also scatter comic books, fact books, and joke books around the house. This may encourage him to read when he has a few minutes.

- Help your middle grader find new favorites. He might ask a librarian what's popular with kids his age. Or he could type titles he enjoyed into an online bookstore—the site will list other books by the same author and suggest similar titles by other writers. 👍



Ways to prevent plagiarism

Your middle grader knows he's not supposed to copy others' work when he writes a paper. But he might not always be sure how to use information without passing it off as his own. Share these tips to help him avoid plagiarism.

Cite sources. Your child should list each book or website that he uses for a research paper. Depending on his teacher's guidelines, sources might go in the body of the paper or in a footnote or bibliography. Quotation marks go around exact quotes.



Use multiple references. Relying too heavily on one source can lead to presenting the information as original work. Instead, your youngster should use facts and ideas from several places, summarize information, and draw his own conclusions.

Write from scratch. Remind him to craft his own sentences and paragraphs. Let him know that replacing a few words or moving sentences around is not enough.

Note: Facts that are common knowledge don't need to be cited. When your child is in doubt, he can check with his teacher. 👍

Discover the past



Exploring your family's heritage can make history come alive for your child. These fun activities will let her investigate the past.

Places

Suggest that your middle grader research the countries or states that her relatives came from. She can look at a map to find the capital city or learn which mountain ranges are nearby. Then, have her look for more information in library books or on websites. For example, she might read a novel set in 1900s China to learn about life for her great-grandparents.

Artifacts

Encourage your tween to explore *artifacts* (objects that give us information about the past). She might ask relatives to share pictures, documents, and keepsakes. Perhaps she'll notice that some are related to what she's studying in school (say, letters her grandfather received while serving in the Vietnam War). 👍



Q & A

Ready for conferences

Q I want to be prepared for my upcoming parent-teacher conferences. What should I expect now that my daughter is in middle school?

A Try talking to your daughter ahead of time about the conference. Ask her what she wants her teachers to know, such as what she likes and dislikes about each class. During the conference, share her excitement ("Jenna really enjoys the science experiments") and bring up concerns ("Jenna said she's having trouble with the group project").

Also, carry a pen and paper so you can take notes. Before you leave the conference, go over what you and the teacher decided ("So I'll sign off on her homework each night, and you'll let me know if she doesn't turn in Spanish assignments"). At home, follow up with your child so she knows what you discussed. 👍



Parent to Parent

Someone to look up to

My son Elias loves sports, and he really admires his favorite players. When one was arrested recently, Elias shrugged and said, "He's still a great player, and he's not the only one to get in trouble."

My first instinct was to lecture Elias, but instead I said he was right: the player is talented, and too many celebrities are getting in trouble. But I asked, "Why do you think that is?" Eventually, he said maybe they feel they're

above the law because they're talented and famous.

Now I show Elias articles about people who are truly worth looking up to, like firefighters who save lives and folks who are cleaning up our town creek. And when a teenage neighbor helped organize a canned-food drive, I introduced him to my son. I think it made an impact—Elias said he never realized how many local families don't have enough to eat.

He still admires athletes for winning games and setting records, but he has discovered heroes off the field, too. 👍



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