

Middle Years

Working together for school success



Short Stops

The art of compromise

The next time your middle schooler disagrees with a friend, use the opportunity to help her learn about compromise. Encourage her to think of solutions that are acceptable to everyone. For example, she might say, "So you pick the movie this week, and I'll choose one next week."

Attention, please

Help your child get the most out of class time. How? Share the SLANT method with him: Sit up straight and near the front, Lean forward, Ask questions; Nod to show you understand, Track the teacher with your eyes.

Curbing foul language

Middle graders might think swear words make them sound cool or grown-up. But explain to your youngster that cursing gives others a bad impression of her and is not acceptable. To help stop it, consider creating a "swear jar"—it will cost a quarter each time a family member uses bad language. At the end of each month, donate the money to a charity.

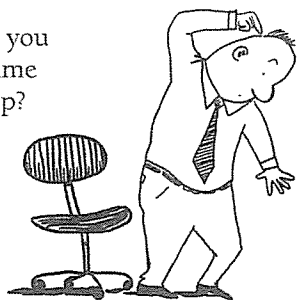
Worth quoting

"Gratitude consists of being more aware of what you have than what you don't." *Anonymous*

Just for fun

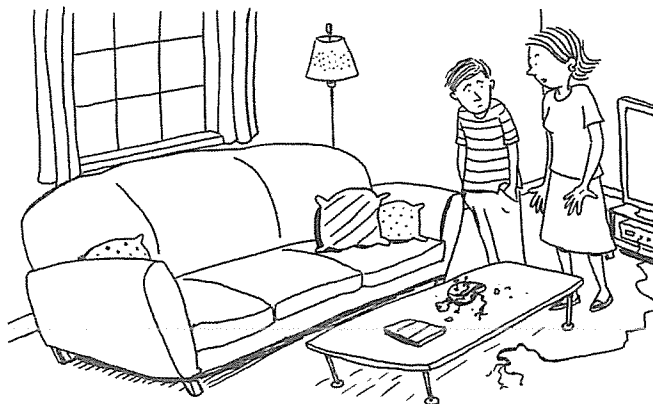
Q: What do you lose every time you stand up?

A: Your lap.



Discipline that works

Your usually pleasant middle grader kicked his brother when he got frustrated. Or he invited friends over when he was home alone. You know you need to discipline him, but what's the most effective way at this age? The right consequences can be a useful tool to help your child improve his behavior. Here's how.



Make it fit

Decide on consequences before you need them. That way, you can choose them carefully. If you wait until your child breaks a rule to announce what will happen, you're more likely to overreact and come up with something that's difficult to enforce. ("You're not going anywhere for a month!") Be sure to tell your tween about the consequences up front so he knows what to expect.

Make it matter

Tie the results of your middle grader's behavior to his actions (say, not being able to go out next weekend if he lied

about where he was last weekend). And choose consequences that matter to your child so he cares about their impact. For example, if he texts at the dinner table, he's likely to be more upset about losing cell phone privileges than being sent to his room.

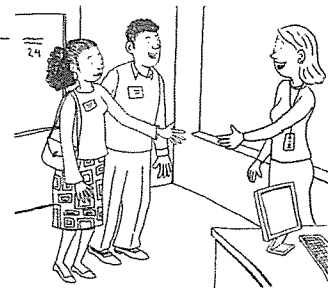
Make it right

Let your tween know that he must make up for bad behavior. If he throws and breaks the controller after losing a video game, he will have to replace it with his own money. Having to correct the situation will help him stop and think before he does the same thing again. 👍

Teaming with teachers

To support your child's education, put parent-teacher conferences high on your to-do list. Here are some tips:

- Review your middle grader's schoolwork and interim reports before the conference. If you see areas where she's falling short, ask her teachers for suggestions.
- Let teachers know about things that might be affecting your child (divorce, parent out of work, deployed family member). This can help teachers understand your child and offer support when necessary.
- If you need a translator at the conference, request one in advance. Or arrange to take along a friend or family member who can help. 👍

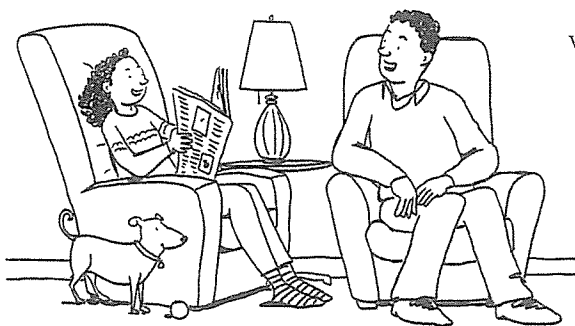


Good thinking!

Can your middle grader come up with more than one solution for a problem? Determine whether something she reads is valid? Draw conclusions based on what she reads? These are all critical-thinking skills—and your child needs them to thrive in middle school and beyond.

Solving problems

Share issues that you're trying to address ("I need to save money on gasoline"). Let your youngster hear you brainstorm solutions: "I could carpool with a coworker, combine errands, or drive the smaller car that gets better gas mileage." Then,



when she has a problem to solve, encourage her to think of several ways to handle it.

Evaluating information

Have your middle grader read an editorial in the newspaper. Ask questions to help her analyze what she has read. *Examples:* What are the writer's credentials? Does he use facts and statistics to back up his views? Are they logical? She'll need to distinguish between facts and opinions and may have to do some research to answer those questions.

Drawing conclusions

Let your child choose a paragraph from a mystery and read it out loud. What does she think is going on? Suggest that she use what she has read to draw conclusions. For instance, if it says, "His hands shaking, Mark turned the key," she can conclude that Mark is scared or nervous. 👍

Clever cards

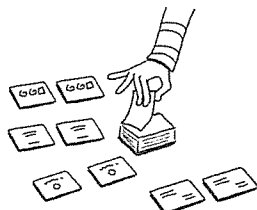
Here's a study technique that can help your middle grader remember facts and formulas.

Sequencing

Sometimes information needs to be remembered in a certain sequence, such as steps in a scientific process or events in history. Suggest that your child write each step or event on a separate index card (without numbering the cards). To study, he can shuffle and reshuffle the cards, putting them back in order until he consistently gets it right.

Matching

Your youngster can also use cards to study facts. Have him write each term and its matching fact on separate cards. *Examples:* vocabulary words and definitions, countries and their capitals. Then, he can shuffle the cards, spread them out facedown, and try to match up pairs.



Idea: Suggest that he make studying into a game by playing with a classmate or family member. Each person could create a set of cards for the other one to put in order or match. 👍



Q & A

Help for ADHD

Q My son was just diagnosed with ADHD. How can I help him be successful in middle school?

A If your child doesn't already have an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) or a Section 504 plan, ask the school to create one. The plan should spell out what he needs academically (extra copies of textbooks at home, more time to complete tests, less homework).

Also, it's more important than ever for your son to be organized. Having a daily planner or to-do list can be helpful. He should also sort through his backpack and locker on a weekly basis.

At this age, your child needs to be involved in managing his ADHD. Together, discuss strategies he can use 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. Suggest that he experiment with ideas and see what works best for him. 👍



Parent to Parent

Cooking up healthy meals

Our family had a habit of grabbing fast food because it was convenient. After reading several articles that said home-cooked meals are healthier than most fast food, I decided to make a change.

I started with a goal of three home-cooked dinners a week. I made a list of the items I needed for each meal and went shopping.

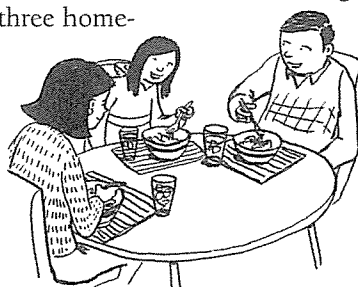
One night, I made a tossed salad and salmon and added a loaf of hot, crusty

bread. For another meal, I put chuck roast, potatoes, carrots, and onions in a slow cooker before I went to work, and dinner was ready when I got home.

We still get takeout sometimes, but we're making healthier choices. Last

week, we ordered a thin-crust pizza with light cheese and vegetables.

Eating at home is a lot easier than I expected. And my family is eating foods that are more nutritious. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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Short Stops

Create a poem

Encourage your child to experiment with language

by writing a family poem. Together, make up a title about something your family loves (*Tasty Tortilla Soup*). Then, write your last name down the side of a piece of paper, and take turns writing a line of the poem that begins with each letter. Let your tween read your poem aloud when you're done.

Keep passwords private

Middle graders sometimes share phone and computer passwords with friends. Explain to your child that people who access her accounts can read personal messages or even send emails or post items in her name. If friends ask, she could simply say, "I don't tell anyone my password." If she has shared passwords already, tell her to change them.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that most tweens would like to talk more with their parents about schoolwork. Ask your child to share what he's learning in his classes. Be specific: "What kind of math problems did you do today?" or "Tell me about the science experiment you did in lab today."

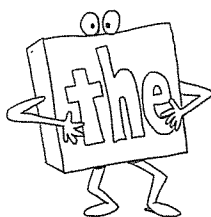
Worth quoting

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it." *Pablo Picasso*

Just for fun

Q: What do Catherine the Great and Kermit the Frog have in common?

A: The same middle name!



Discipline for tweens

When your middle grader was younger, you may have put her in time-out when she broke a rule. Now that she's older, discipline might not seem as clear-cut. Consider these tips for encouraging good behavior as she grows.

Get her input. Taking your tween's opinion into account will make her more likely to follow rules. Work together to put rules in writing, and compromise where you can to show that you recognize her increasing maturity and independence. For example, you might agree that she can wear lip gloss but not lipstick. Let her know you won't budge on some rules, like meeting her curfew and not drinking alcohol.

Put her in charge. Tell your middle grader that she's responsible for finding ways to stick to the rules. Say one rule is that you need to know where she is at all times. If her plans change, she must tell you or get a message to you *and* make sure you received it—otherwise,

she needs to stay put. Or if she tends to forget the rule about picking up after herself, she could post clean-up checklists around the house.

Keep it logical. When you need to discipline your tween, choose a consequence that makes sense and is directly related to the rule she broke. If she sneaks on more makeup, maybe she can't wear lip gloss for a certain period of time. Or perhaps she can't go out with friends because she has to stay home to clean up. 👍



Prepared for standardized tests

Does your middle schooler have state tests coming up? Review these strategies before testing begins:

■ Knowing how to approach different kinds of questions will help him score higher. For instance, on multiple-choice sections, he could cover up the answers while he reads the question. If the answer he thought of is listed and the other options don't make more sense, he can be pretty confident he's right.

■ Have your child find out whether he'll lose points for wrong answers. If not, it's best to guess. Also, if scrap paper is allowed, he can use it to work out problems and to keep his place on the answer sheet. 👍



I knew that!

Each time we learn something new, our brains automatically try to relate it to what we already know. That means the more we learn, the easier it is to learn! Try these ideas to help your tween collect “background knowledge” that he can access when he encounters new information.

Read

Reading a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction is a sure ticket to building a large knowledge base. Make sure your middle schooler has a library card—and visits the library often.

As he reads books set in different lands or time periods, he will learn facts about geography and history. Science fiction



can teach about outer space, while biographies give him information on specific people and accomplishments. Ask him to tell you about things he’s studying in school that relate to a book he has read.

Travel

If you take a vacation or visit out-of-town relatives, encourage your tween to notice his new surroundings. Is the land flat or hilly in South Carolina? What do the trees look like in Northern California?

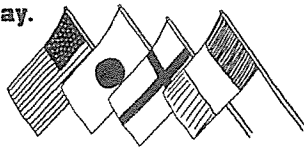
Whether you’re away or at home, take time to see local attractions. Going to museums, historical sites, or nature centers will give him all kinds of background knowledge. Your child can even take a “trip” without leaving home. Suggest a virtual field trip to a volcano (vulcan.wr.usgs.gov/Volcanoes), for example, or have him search for videos that take him inside an atom or a cell. 👍

Teach tolerance

Your child probably comes into contact with people from different cultures regularly. Here are ways you can teach her about tolerance:

Lead the way.

Your middle grader learns how to treat others by watching you. If she sees you showing respect for people who are different from you, she probably will, too.



■ **Appreciate diversity.** Tell your tween to imagine how boring dinner would be if everything tasted the same. Similarly, you can say, the world would be far less interesting if everyone looked alike or believed the same things.

■ **Talk about feelings.** If your child puts people down because of how they speak or act, ask her how she’d feel if someone insulted her language or clothing. Discuss your family’s culture and why it’s important to you. Then, have her compare her feelings to the way she imagines others feel about their traditions and customs. 👍



Q & A

Friendships: A revolving door

Q My daughter seems to have a different “best friend” every week. Is this normal?

A Friendships can change frequently in middle school. It’s normal for kids to outgrow relationships and to sometimes feel closer to one friend than to another.

You might let your daughter know that no matter who her “best” friend is, she can still remain friends with many people. Mention the various social circles in your own life, such as your book club friends and your work buddies.

Also, remind your child to treat everyone kindly, including classmates she may have grown apart from. Remaining friendly will leave the door open for them to spend more time together in the future. 👍



Parent to Parent

Bringing up grades

My son Tyler has always done pretty well in school. So when he started bringing home papers and quizzes with low grades, I knew something was wrong.

I asked him what was going on, and he admitted that he didn’t have enough time to study and do all of his work. After we looked at his schedule, I told him he needed to drop one activity.

He was disappointed, but he decided that he would take a break from the student events committee and use the time for homework instead.

Also, we agreed that if the extra time working on his own doesn’t help, he can ask his teachers about study groups that he could join.

We both feel better now that he has a plan—and hopefully, his grades will soon be on their way back up. 👍



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Short Stops

Get going with breakfast

Eating breakfast will help your tween start the day ready to learn. Together, come up with quick and nutritious breakfasts to make at home. Or encourage her to eat a healthy meal in the cafeteria with friends. *Note:* If she receives school lunch at a reduced price or for free, her breakfast will be reduced cost or free, too.

Walk this way

Let your middle grader know it's important to keep his eyes on his surroundings as he walks. He'll avoid serious injury from falling, running into objects, or stepping into traffic. Explain that he shouldn't play electronic games, listen to music, or text while walking—including to and from the bus stop or school.

Conserve resources

Ask your youngster to help your family be more environmentally friendly. Have her research ways you can conserve resources (switch to low-energy light bulbs, recycle more items, take reusable bags when you shop). Then, try to adopt one of her ideas each month.

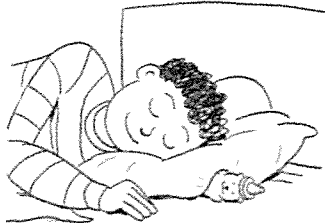
Worth quoting

"Every strike brings me closer to the next home run." *Babe Ruth*

Just for fun

Q: Why did the boy put honey under his pillow?

A: He wanted to have sweet dreams.



Tween discipline that works

Your middle schooler wants more freedom. You want to keep him safe and set age-appropriate limits. How do you balance his need for independence with the need for rules and consequences? Try these strategies.

Let's review

Go over the rules you have in place and get his input. He'll be happier to comply if he has a say in them. Perhaps he thinks he should be able to go to friends' houses on school nights, and you agree to that for one night a week. Explain your reasons, and be clear you have the final word. Also, lay out consequences so he knows what will happen if he breaks the rules.

Expect to be tested

Tweens tend to push the limits to see how serious parents are and may argue to get out of consequences. Stay calm and on point ("Nevertheless, we agreed you wouldn't eat in your bedroom"). Stick to the consequence you set (having him wash his bedding to get rid of food



stains). He'll see he can't slide by and will be more likely to follow the rules in the future.

Reflect on actions

The goal of discipline is to teach your child good judgment. He can learn a lot by reflecting on his actions. Say he breaks a rule, like heading to a social outing without finishing his homework first. Ask what he *thought* would happen. Maybe he didn't think you'd notice. What happened instead? He has to miss an event this weekend as a result. How could he avoid this situation next time? 👍

Speak up!

Participating in class can help your tween get more value out of school and learn to express herself. Encourage her to contribute with these tips.

■ **Find your zone.** Suggest that she participate in ways she feels comfortable with and then expand her "toolbox." She might start off commenting on assigned readings she enjoyed. Eventually, she may speak up when she agrees with someone's viewpoint or to offer a different one.

■ **Mix it up.** Class-wide discussions aren't the only opportunity to participate. When your middle schooler works in smaller groups, she could ask and answer questions, make observations, or give opinions. These steps can build confidence for talking in front of the whole class. 👍



Real-world reading

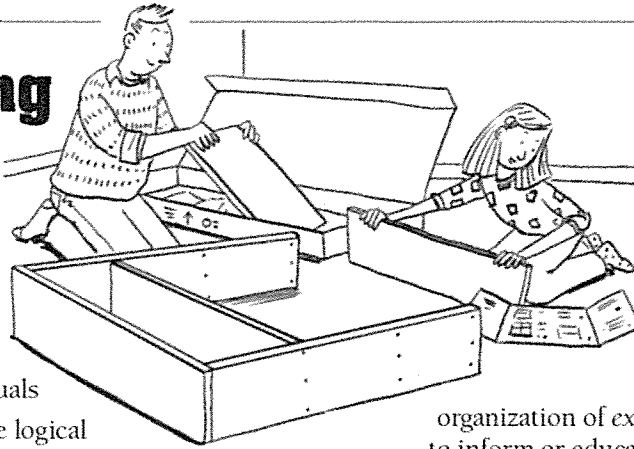
Nonfiction reading is a big part of everyday adult life—at work and home. To help your middle grader learn to pick out and analyze important information, encourage her to read more nonfiction texts now. Here are some easy ideas.

Follow a process

What: Recipes, game directions, how-to manuals

Why: These texts teach youngsters to navigate logical sequences of steps and identify key details.

How: Let your tween read and share directions as family members cook or play a game. Or have her read instructions



as you put together a bookcase or figure out how to operate a new phone or microwave.

Follow the facts

What: News articles, menus, travel guidebooks

Why: Your child will get familiar with the organization of *expository text*, which seeks to inform or educate readers.

How: Talk about news articles you read and what you learn, and inspire her to do the same. If you order carryout food, have her read menus and place the order. When you visit new places, ask her to scan guidebooks and share facts. She can play tour leader, suggesting sights and activities your family will enjoy. 👍

Notable notes

Good notes can help your tween remember what was taught in class, create study guides, and review for tests. Share these steps for being an excellent note taker.

1. Prepare beforehand. Your child will have an easier time keeping up with the teacher if he has read the assigned handouts or chapters. Why? He'll be familiar with the material and vocabulary.

2. Learn each teacher's style. To emphasize crucial material, one teacher may use hand gestures, while another may write phrases on the board. Your middle grader should write that information down and star or circle it.

3. Ask questions. If your child doesn't understand something, he could jot a question mark in the margin of his notes. Then, he can ask about it when the teacher invites questions. Most likely someone else has the same question and will be glad he spoke up. 👍



Q & A

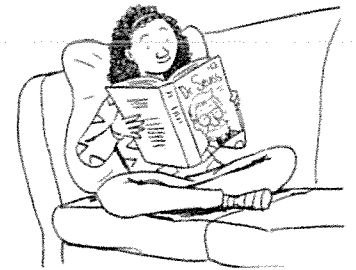
Learning to have grit

Q I've heard that kids need "grit" to be successful. What is it, and how can I teach it to my 12-year-old?

A Grit involves perseverance, courage, and resilience—basically sticking with tasks or goals until you see them through. Having passion will help your child to develop grit, enabling her to stay with something when the going gets tough and to overcome problems along the way.

You can foster grit in your middle grader by explaining it and pointing out examples, such as a coworker who learned to read as an adult. Or bring home library books about famous people who persevered. For instance, Dr. Seuss had his first book rejected by 27 publishers before it was accepted.

Setting up a family challenge can give everyone a chance to be "gritty." Have each person choose something they want to do that might be difficult but is possible. The key? No one is allowed to quit! 👍



Parent to Parent

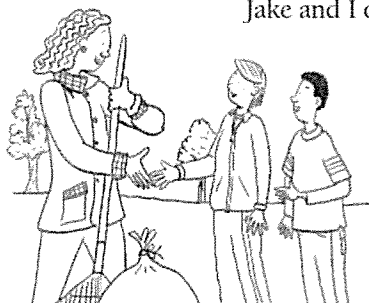
Get to know new friends

When my son was in elementary school, I always knew his friends. Once he got to middle school, he started hanging out with classmates I'd never heard of.

It worried me to let Jake spend time with kids I didn't know. I asked him to invite them over, and meeting them in person helped put me at ease and gave me a

way to connect faces with names. I asked for their phone numbers and their parents' numbers as well. That way, I could contact them if they were with Jake and I couldn't reach him. Calling the parents to say hello opened the door in case we ever need to get in touch.

I'm still getting to know Jake's pals. But at least I'm feeling more relaxed about his new middle school social scene. 👍



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