

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Map it out

GPS can give your tween the impression that people don't need to know their way around. But a good sense of direction can help her use maps and globes for geography assignments—and it will come in handy in real life when GPS is unavailable or inaccurate. The next time you go somewhere new, give her a map, and have her help you navigate.

### Autumn picnics

Take advantage of a sunny fall day by having a family picnic. You might tell your child he can invite a friend, and put him in charge of finding a nice picnic spot. Pack autumn-themed foods such as turkey sandwiches and apples. Also, tuck in a Frisbee or a volleyball so everyone gets some fun exercise.

### A hard habit to break

If your child thinks cigarettes are cool, she might be surprised to hear that most smokers would rather be non-smokers. In fact, more than half of American smokers tried to quit last year. Consider having a former smoker tell her how hard it is to stop. That person can also talk about negative consequences like having bad breath or spending money on cigarettes.

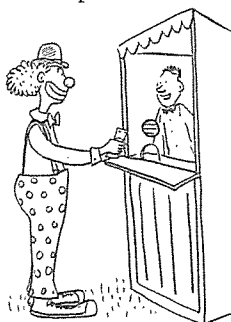
### Worth quoting

"Of all the things you wear, your expression is the most important."  
Janet Lane

### Just for fun

**Q:** What's a sure way to get into the circus?

**A:** Buy a ticket.



## Getting the most from study time

How can your child improve his odds of remembering what he studies? One way is by learning strategies that will store information in his long-term memory. Share these "brain friendly" study methods with your middle grader.



### Remember feelings

Paying attention to how information makes him feel can help him remember it. If he's studying the Middle Ages, for example, he can ask himself what surprises him or what he finds sad. He might add words or emoticons ("smileys") to his notes. He could draw sad faces beside facts about war and famine or happy faces where his notes mention achievements in technology.

### Get moving

Making up a hand motion to go with a fact or definition can help your youngster recall it. Say he needs to know the difference between *potential* (stored) energy and *kinetic* (moving) energy. Each time he sees the words in his textbook or notes,

he might hold one hand as if he's about to throw a ball (for potential energy) or make a throwing motion (for kinetic energy).

### Make connections

Seeing how learning relates to the real world can help your child process information and retain it. Suggest that he look for news articles on topics that he's studying. If he has a math quiz on ratios coming up, he might find an article about farmers using proportions to plant fields. Then, he could draw a diagram of a field to help him visualize a ratio problem. Or if he's studying for an art test, he can browse magazines for images that remind him of different styles (impressionism, cubism). 👍

## Responsible for myself

Giving your middle grader new responsibilities can boost her self-esteem and teach her to take care of herself. Try these ideas:

- Let her make appointments. She might call to schedule dental checkups, haircuts, or sports physicals. *Tip:* Show her your calendar so she'll know which days you can take her.
- Add to her chores. Before she takes on a new task, walk her through it. You might show her how to clean the bathroom, including which supplies to use for the shower, sink, and mirror.
- Have her keep track of personal items. If she's running low on toothpaste and soap, she can add them to the grocery list. 👍



# Parent participation

You want to support your child's middle school, but she's worried you'll embarrass her by showing up there. Try not to let her hesitation stop you from getting involved. Consider the following suggestions.

**Adapt.** Learn about volunteer opportunities outside your tween's classrooms by asking in the school office and checking with activity advisors. You might work a



shift in the school store, provide snacks for an athletic team, or staff a PTO recycling event.

**Assemble.** Seeing other parents at school might make your child feel better about having you there. Contact friends or neighbors who volunteered in elementary school to see if they want to help out, too. Or post an announcement on Facebook or start a Twitter feed encouraging other parents to volunteer.

**Attend.** Put evening events like band concerts and soccer games on your calendar, and tell your tween that you plan to go. Let her know that she can still sit with her friends, but you just want to be there. Even if she rides with a friend's family, the fact that you're there will show her that she—and her school—are important to you. 👍

## Activity Corner

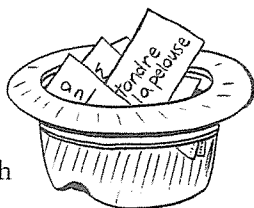
### Foreign-language fun

If your middle grader is taking a foreign language, he can practice vocabulary by playing games he's used to playing in English. Here are two.

**1. I Spy.** Your child and a friend take turns secretly choosing an item in the room and describing it in the language they're studying. For example, if they're learning Spanish, your youngster could say, "Veo algo de plata" ("I spy something silver"). His friend gets three chances to guess the object. He might ask, "Es la tostadora?" ("Is it the toaster?") The winner is the person who guesses the most items correctly.

**2. Charades.**

Divide into two teams of at least two players each. Each team writes 10 words or phrases in the foreign language (such as "tondre la pelouse," which is "mowing the lawn" in French) on separate slips of paper and puts them in a hat for the other team to draw from. Teams take turns having one member pick a slip and act it out. His teammates have two minutes to guess what he is doing. 👍



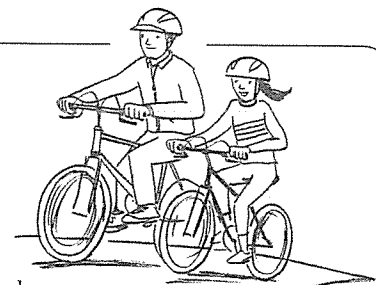
## Parent to Parent

### On the move

When my daughter Roya was younger, she'd spend hours playing outside with her friends. Now that she's older, she and her friends would rather experiment with makeup or watch YouTube videos. At her annual checkup, I asked the pediatrician how much exercise she needs.

The doctor said children—and adults—should be active at least an hour a day. He suggested that when Roya has a friend over, I encourage them to play a backyard game like badminton or Frisbee before they get out the makeup or turn on the computer. And he recommended that we take regular family walks or bike rides.

Roya must have been paying attention to the doctor, because she recently invited a friend to go Rollerblading. Afterward, they watched skating videos online. And this Sunday after dinner, we're going to ride our bikes around the neighborhood. I'm looking forward to being more active, too! 👍



## Q & A

### Attending every class

**Q** When I was driving carpool the other day, I overheard my son mention that one of his friends skips classes. How can I make sure my child doesn't try this?

**A** Your son knows that skipping class is against the rules—but he might not have considered other reasons why it's a bad idea. Explain that his friend gets zeroes for work he misses. And homework assignments probably take twice as long when his friend doesn't hear the lessons

that they're based on. Skipping class also means missing class discussions, science experiments, and group project work.

Set clear guidelines about when your son is allowed to stay home or leave school early, such as for illness, a family emergency, or a doctor's appointment that couldn't be made for any other time. Let him know that, beyond that, you expect him to be in school all day, every day. Then, explain the consequences for skipping, like being grounded after school or on weekends or losing his phone or computer privileges. 👍



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## Short Stops

### On course

The classes your child takes now will help determine what he can sign up for in high school. For example, if he chooses introduction to computing in eighth grade, he could take a more advanced computer course as a freshman. Suggest that he ask his school counselor about prerequisites as he picks next year's classes.

### Winter weather plans

As winter gets under way, stay informed about weather-related delays and closings. Sign up for phone, text, or email alerts, or follow your school district on Facebook or Twitter to see emergency announcements. Also, give your middle grader a backup plan, like riding the bus home if after-school activities are canceled.

### Look for good character

Good character can be taught and caught. Find examples of values you consider important, and point them out to your tween. *Example:* "I gave a customer too much change, but she was honest and gave it back." Discussing others' good deeds can inspire him to do the same.

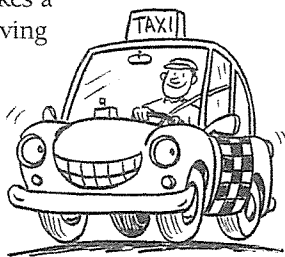
### Worth quoting

"Learning is not a spectator sport."  
*Anonymous*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Who makes a living by driving customers away?

**A:** A taxi driver.



## Goal-getters!

You can motivate your child to aim higher and accomplish more this year by having her set goals that she can really achieve. Here are some characteristics of effective goals.

### Positive

Framing goals this way can help your middle schooler have a good attitude toward them and encourage her to get started right away. She might say, "I will bring assignments home every night" instead of "I won't forget my books at school" or "I will eat healthy on a regular basis" instead of "I won't eat junk food."

### Realistic

Your tween will be more motivated if she comes up with her own goals that she feels are doable. You might want her to get an A in English, but she may decide that aiming for a B will keep her from feeling discouraged.



### Specific

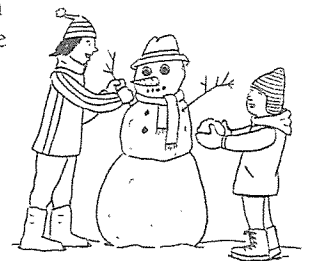
Have your youngster list the steps that will help her reach a goal and give herself a deadline for each step. For example, she might want to be in two plays this year. She can put audition dates on her calendar and set aside time to practice her lines.

*Tip:* Suggest that your middle grader write down her goals and keep the list where she'll be reminded of them. She might put them inside the cover of her planner or post them on the ceiling above her bed. 👍

## Time to disconnect

Too much technology can prevent your tween from interacting with people in real life. It can also interfere with sleep and physical activity. Consider these suggestions for keeping his tech time in balance:

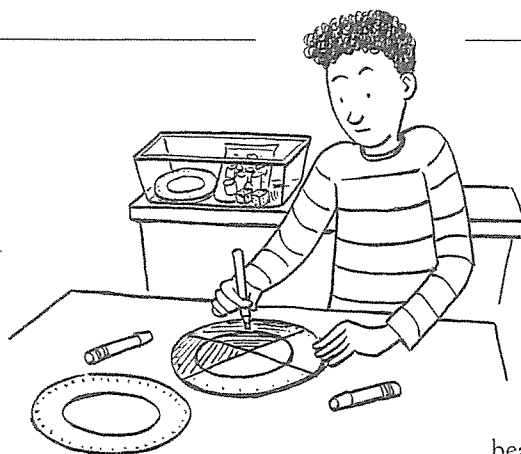
- Make a ratio rule. For example, you could say for every half hour your child spends on the computer, he should spend an hour doing something else, such as playing in the snow with a friend or sibling.
- Create digital-free zones. You might say no cell phones or tablets at the dinner table or in restaurants.
- Insist that devices go off at bedtime. Children could stay up for hours playing games or watching videos. They can also be awakened by texts or sleep lightly in anticipation of them. *Idea:* Try setting up a family charging station where everyone must leave their devices. 👍



# Be a better problem-solver

From addition to algebra, math is full of problems! Your middle grader can solve them more easily with strategies like these.

**Speak the language.** Understanding math vocabulary makes problem solving easier. For instance, your child needs to know what *congruent* triangles are in order to draw them. Suggest that he keep a list of words and their meanings above his desk or in his math notebook. For each word, he can add a picture or real-life



example that will help him remember it. Examples: “The ratio of boys to girls in our family is 2:1.” “The floor is like the *x* axis and the wall is like the *y* axis.”

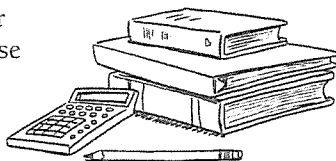
**Make it real.** Using objects to solve math problems can help your tween visualize solutions. Encourage him to make a math toolbox.

In a shoe box or plastic bin, he can store items like paper plates, dice, dry beans, toothpicks, and marshmallows. He can use them to “see” the math as he works it out. For example, he might use plates to draw fractions, dice to test probability, beans to represent variables in equations, and toothpicks and marshmallows to find the surface area of solid shapes. 👍

## Helping with homework

Middle graders should do their own homework—but they also need their parents to play a supporting role. Here’s how:

- Have your tween choose a regular study time so she gets into a routine.



She might prefer to work after school or after dinner. You could help by working quietly nearby (paying bills, preparing for a meeting the next day).

- Let her know when you’re available to quiz her for a test, proofread papers, or sign off on her planner. Choose a time that works for both of you, like when you get home from work or in the evening before bed.

- Ask to see her finished work. Avoid correcting it, since her teacher needs to know where she needs help. But you can check that it’s neat and complete, and you might suggest that she look it over again if you find careless errors. 👍



### Q & A

## Try drugs? No way!

**Q** I know that some children experiment with drugs in middle school. How can I keep my daughter from trying them?

**A** Children whose parents talk to them about drugs are about half as likely to use them. So bring up the topic with your daughter—not just once, but again and again.

You might point out that some tweens believe trying drugs is a normal part of growing up. Make it clear that it *isn’t* normal (most people don’t use drugs) and that drugs can cause serious harm to her health and even lead to being arrested. Instead, help her understand that growing up is about learning to make good choices, like saying no to drugs.

Also, look up information together online (try [girlhealth.gov/substance/drugs/sayno.cfm](http://girlhealth.gov/substance/drugs/sayno.cfm) or [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org)) or at the library. And remind her that she can come to you with questions or concerns, especially if a friend gets involved with drugs. 👍



### Parent to Parent

## Learning to lead

I had always believed the saying “Leaders are born, not made.” So at a recent work seminar, I was surprised to discover that leadership can be learned.

My son Jack has been wanting to start a neighborhood softball team, and I realized it would be a good way for him to practice leadership skills. I suggested he call the local league and ask what to do.

They told him that he needed to find players and a coach and

then get a local business to pay the league fees (in exchange for putting the company logo on the players’ jerseys). When I explained that a good leader delegates tasks, he asked three other neighborhood kids to help him hang flyers and recruit players.

Jack has been working hard on this project, and he has enough kids for a team now. Next, he is calling a players’ meeting to work on finding a coach and a sponsor. 👍



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## Short Stops

### Get to know teachers

For many middle schoolers, a new year means some different classes and new teachers. Stay in the loop from the beginning by asking your child about her classes, attending parent nights or a second-semester back-to-school night, and emailing teachers to introduce yourself.

### Prevent shoplifting

Unfortunately, some children start to shoplift in the tween years when they begin shopping with friends rather than their parents. Discuss this serious issue with your middle grader. Make sure he understands that shoplifting is a crime and that stores may call police and press charges—even for a youngster.

### Great debate

Does your child tend to argue with your opinions? Here's the good news: You can use the opportunity to improve her critical thinking. Say she disagrees with you about whether a movie should be rated PG-13. Ask her to back up her opinion with three facts, and tell her you'll do the same. Then, pick a time for your "debate."

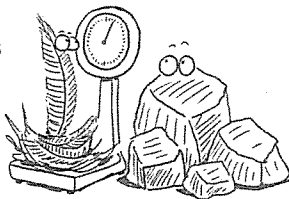
### Worth quoting

"Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness."  
*Seneca*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Which weighs more—a pound of feathers or a pound of rocks?

**A:** Neither. Each weighs a pound!



## Make the most of class time

How your child spends his time in class can make a big difference in how much he learns and what grades he gets. Share these practical ways for getting the most out of each class.

### Be ready

Your tween should walk into class prepared. If his English class will be discussing a novel, he'll be able to join in only if he has done the assigned reading. And if he has a rehearsal in band, he will need to practice the night before and bring his instrument to school.

### Stay alert

Share strategies your middle grader can use to keep his mind from wandering. For instance, as the teacher talks, he could follow along in his book by putting his finger under each step of a math problem or each line of a poem. He can also use different techniques to stay focused as he takes notes. If his teacher says she will list



"three factors," your middle grader could write "1, 2, 3" in a column and fill in the items as she talks. That way, it will be clear if he missed one.

### Learn with classmates

Students can serve as great teachers for each other. Encourage your tween to listen carefully to peers' questions during discussions—there may be some he hasn't thought of. Or if his lab partner doesn't understand a science experiment, your child could explain it. They'll both learn more by discussing the experiment and dividing up the work. 👍

## On target in 2014

Having goals can keep your middle schooler motivated. Encourage her to pick resolutions that she'll keep with these suggestions.

■ **Choose carefully.** Your tween could set a goal for each area of her life, such as academic (start long-term projects early), social (avoid gossip), and personal (save allowance). Or she might name a resolution for each class, such as memorizing formulas in math or spending more time studying Spanish verbs.

■ **Get advice.** Encourage your middle grader to talk to people she respects about how they keep their resolutions. She might ask relatives, neighbors, teachers, or coaches about goals that they set now or when they were her age. 👍



# Better ways to talk to tweens

“You don’t understand me!” When you talk with your middle grader, do you ever feel like you say one thing and she hears another? Help prevent miscommunication with these tips.

**You say:** “Here’s what you should do.”  
**Your child may hear:** “You can’t handle this by yourself.”

Your tween may be more open to your advice if you present it as a suggestion. When she’s dealing with a problem (a disagreement with a friend, a grade she feels is unfair), start by listening and trying to understand her feelings. Then, you



could offer a solution by saying, “One idea might be...” or “Sometimes it works to...”

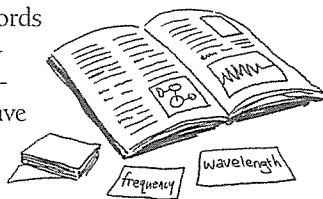
**You say:** “I can’t believe you did that.”  
**Your child may hear:** “You’re so dumb.”

If your middle schooler makes a mistake or gets into trouble, she is probably feeling bad about herself already. Try to hold back criticism, or she may shut down. Instead, you might start by asking, “Can you explain what happened?” Together, talk about ways she can learn from the mistake or make a better decision next time. 👍

## Building a vocabulary

Hearing and using new words frequently can make them a permanent part of your child’s vocabulary. Try these ideas for helping him learn new words.

**Play.** Use words from his textbooks in family games. Have your tween write each word on a



separate index card. For example, if he’s studying sound and light in science, you could play Pictionary with words like *wavelength* and *prism* or act out *frequency* and *reflection* in a game of charades. Or players could earn an extra point per letter for using one of the words in Scrabble.

**Search.** When your middle grader comes across a new word in a novel, suggest that he jot it down. Then, he can be on the lookout for the word in magazines and newspapers. He can also listen for it in conversations, on TV, and on the radio—he’ll learn to understand the word in a variety of contexts. 👍

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### Q & A

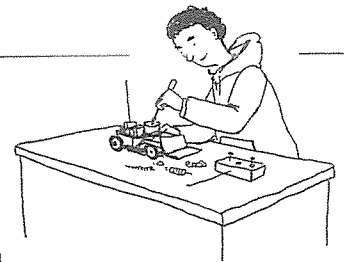
#### Think for yourself

**Q** My son wants to join the robotics club, but his friends are telling him it’s not cool. How should he handle this?

**A** Friends’ opinions matter a lot to middle graders. It’s not always easy to go against the crowd, but this is a good opportunity for your child to practice thinking for himself.

Encourage him to keep an upbeat attitude, since his friends may tease him if he gets upset. He could respond by smiling, shrugging, and changing the subject. Or he might simply tell them, “Robotics is a lot of fun. You should try it.”

If his friends see they can’t bother him, they’ll probably back off. You can also point out that if he joins the club, he’ll meet new friends who enjoy robotics as much as he does. 👍

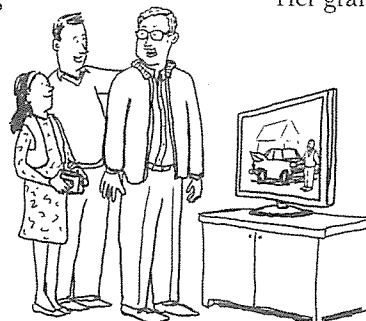


### Parent to Parent

#### Year in review

For my dad’s 70th birthday last month, our daughter Lisa had a great idea. She suggested making a video about the year he was born to surprise him with at the party.

She started by getting old almanacs from a used bookstore and searching websites for facts about that year. For instance, she found that in 1943, a postage stamp cost 3 cents, construction on the Pentagon was



completed, the New York Yankees won the World Series, and the musical *Okla-homa!* opened. When she finished her research, we videotaped her pretending to be a newscaster from that year.

Her grandfather loved the video, and afterward, he talked to Lisa more about life in the 1940s and 1950s. Now she seems more interested in studying history since she knows someone who remembers the events she’s learning about! 👍