

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Waiting patiently

Does your child expect everything to happen *now*?

If a friend doesn't call back immediately or his teacher hasn't graded his project yet, encourage him to come up with possible explanations. Maybe his friend is at a movie or the teacher has 100 assignments to grade. Thinking reasonably can help him be patient.

DID YOU KNOW?

Research shows that most tweens would like to talk more with their parents about schoolwork. Ask your middle grader to share what she's learning in her classes. Be specific: "What did you work on in French today?" or "Tell me about the science experiment you did in lab today."

Keep electronics in check

Encourage face-to-face interaction by putting away devices (including yours) at set times, such as during meals, family outings, or game night. If you're using a device and your child interrupts, switch your attention to him. You'll help him see that the person in front of him is more important than what's on the screen.

Worth quoting

"The time is always right to do what is right." *Martin Luther King Jr.*

Just for fun

Q: When does Friday come before Thursday?

A: In the dictionary!



Hints for homework

Maddy has her evening planned. She'll do her math homework before dinner, then follow up dessert with English and science. Afterward, she can unwind from a busy day.

Sound impossible? It's not. Help your middle grader make homework go like clockwork with these strategies.

Think it through

Before your youngster begins, have her make a to-do list. *Example:* Write a poem, read history chapter, solve 10 math problems.

Then, suggest that she number the tasks, from toughest to easiest, and start with the hard stuff. This "save the easiest for last" strategy will help her finish on a high note, perhaps inspiring her to get in some extra studying.

Think about time

Ask your child to consider different time slots she can use to get work done. For instance, maybe she could set aside a weekend morning or Sunday night.



Also, some middle graders have time during study period or after lunch to tackle homework. Encourage your child to complete one assignment at school each day. The more she does then, the more time she'll have for fun later.

Think positive

Help your middle grader see homework as a chance to prove her independence by getting her work done on time and doing it by herself.

Boost her confidence by telling her, "Homework gives you a chance to show all that you know." And give her a thumbs-up when she does just that. 👍

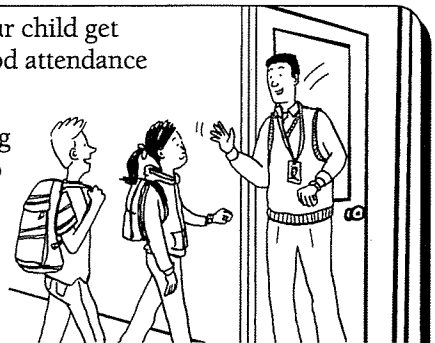
Be there!

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 for lunchtime.

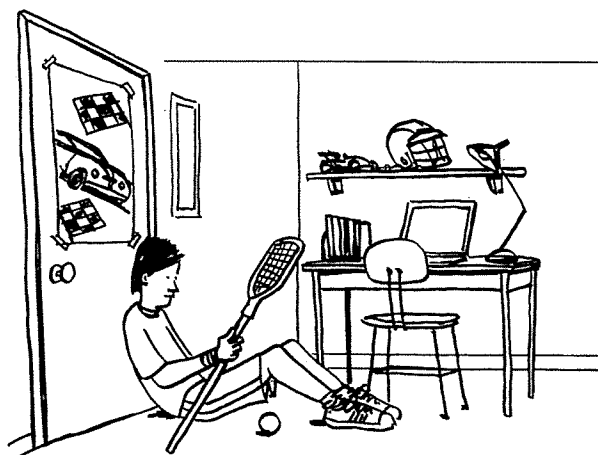
■ It will be easier for your child to get up on time for school if he has had at least nine hours of sleep. Set a reasonable bedtime, and make sure he puts away electronic devices so he isn't tempted to stay awake to read messages or play games. 👍



Emotions in the middle

Moody, private, self-conscious...if this sounds like your tween, you're not alone. At this age, his body and emotions are changing rapidly. Here are ways to help him cope.

Managing moods. Physical growth and worries about friends, sports, and schoolwork can cause moodiness. Let your child know you're available to talk. A quiet statement, such as "I remember what it feels like not to be asked to join a team," can invite him to open up about what's bothering him.



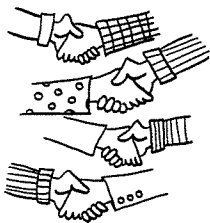
Finding privacy. It's natural for your middle grader to want some time to himself. He might close his bedroom door or walk outside to take a phone call, for example. Show him that you respect his growing need for privacy by giving him space.

Fitting in. Many middle graders feel self-conscious. Being part of a group of people who share his interests can help your youngster focus on his strengths and feel more confident. Encourage him to participate in at least one activity, perhaps basketball, student government, or STEM club. 🙌

Tease your brain

Stretch your middle grader's math skills with brainteasers like these. She'll think they feel more like fun than work!

1. At a party, each person shakes hands with everyone else once. There are 45 handshakes. How many people are at the party?



2. Sam added eight 8s and got the number 1,000. How did he do that?

3. Think about a digital clock. In a 12-hour period of time, what's the shortest break between two times that are palindromes (the numbers read the same forward and backward)?

4. Carol spent $\frac{1}{5}$ of the money in her purse. Then she spent $\frac{1}{5}$ of what was left. She spent \$36 total. How much did she start with?

Turn upside down for the answers. 🙌

4. \$100
3. Two minutes, between 9:59 and 10:01
2. $1,000 = 8 + 8 + 8 + 8 + 88 + 888$
1. 10

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Parent to Parent

More nonfiction reading

My son, Kevin, reads mostly fiction. But at back-to-school night, his teachers said the students will read lots of nonfiction this year—in addition to fiction. This is to prepare students for high school, college, and careers, where informational text is important.

Kevin's English teacher suggested a few ways to help kids enjoy nonfiction at home. First, she said, we could leave the newspaper out and mention articles about topics that affect them. For instance, I pointed out stories on road construction where he rides his bike and on festivals we might attend.

Also, the teacher said to encourage our middle graders to read nonfiction books about things they're interested in. The next time I went to the library, I brought home books about car racing and a biography of one of Kevin's favorite drivers. I was happy to see him reading one, and he even asked to go to the library to get a book about another driver. When we were there, he checked out a new novel—plus a few books on speed records and breaking the sound barrier. 🙌



Q & A Bully-proof your child

Q I've heard bullying peaks in middle school. How can I make sure my daughter isn't targeted?

A There is no way to guarantee a child will never be bullied. But there are things you can do to help.

Since people who bully are less likely to pick on someone who has friends, encourage your child to get to know other students. Suggest that she join a club, and have her invite classmates over. Not only is there safety

in numbers, but having friends will build her self-esteem, which in turn can reduce her chances of being targeted.

Also, talk to your daughter about bullying. Tell her that if she is bullied or witnesses bullying, she should seek help immediately from an adult, whether it's you, a teacher, an administrator, or a coach. Let her know that she's not expected to handle this problem alone. 🙌



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Short Stops

Listening and learning

At the library, choose a book on tape or DVD to listen to with your middle grader. Then, when you're in the car together (going to practice, picking up dinner), pop in the next installment. Talking about what you've heard will build your child's listening and conversation skills—and you'll enjoy the time together.

Recognize respect

When your child shows respect, let her know you appreciate it. For example, if she speaks politely to you even though she disagrees with what you say, you might tell her, "Thank you for talking to me with respect." You'll encourage more of the same.

Smoking stinks

Does your middle grader want bad breath or yellow teeth? Probably not. Tell him that's what he'll get from smoking, and you'll give him two big reasons for saying no to cigarettes. While parents worry about future health issues, middle graders may be more afraid of what can happen right now.

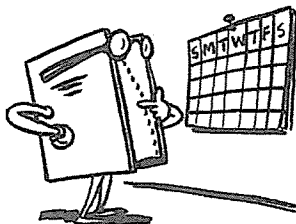
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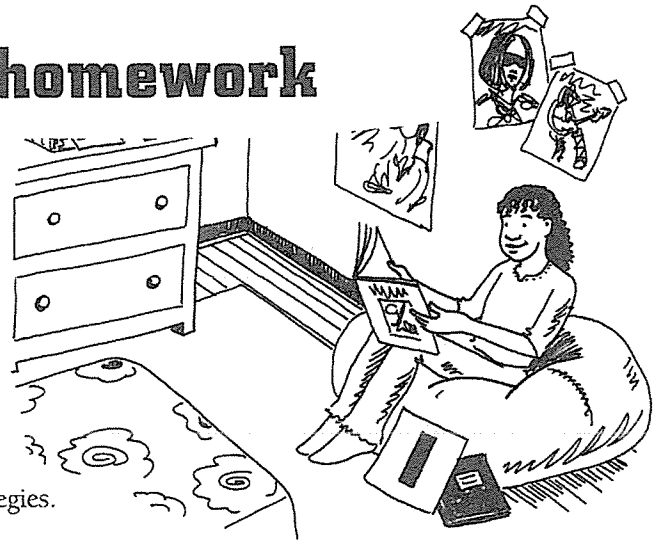
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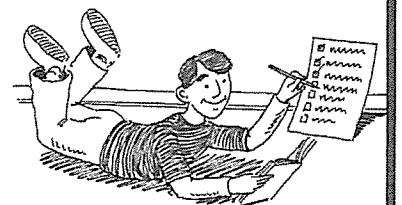
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Keys to success

You can set your middle grader up for success this school year with some basic pointers. Suggest that he try to follow this checklist, and you'll help him get off on the right foot:

- I attend school every day unless I'm sick, and I get there on time.
- I get 8–10 hours of sleep each night.
- I eat a healthy breakfast in the morning.
- I pay attention in class.
- I write down my assignments for each subject.
- I start my projects when I get them.
- I complete my homework on time.
- I read for pleasure each day. 👍



Deciding on discipline

Disciplining middle graders can be difficult. Try these strategies to set rules that work—and help your child learn right from wrong.

● **Be clear.** Explain the rules and the consequences for breaking them in advance. *Example:* “Your curfew is at 10:00. If you come in late, it will be 9:00 for a month.” This system lets your middle grader know that he’s in charge of his behavior.



● **Be fair.** Link the consequence to the action. For instance, if he listens to music and ignores his chores, you might put away his MP3 player for the night. This makes more sense to your middle grader than, say, taking away his allowance.

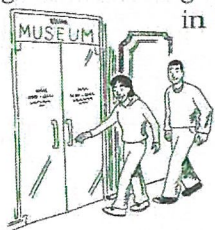
● **Be direct.** Limit your comments to the situation at hand. Try not to bring up things your child did last week or to use negative labels (“lazy,” “forgetful”). Staying focused will keep arguments from flaring. Plus, being calm and direct sends the message that you still love him, no matter what. 👍

Stay involved

Your child may act like she wishes you would disappear sometimes. But when it comes to school success, middle graders still need their parents around.

Why?

When parents get involved in learning, student achievement soars. Middle graders score higher on tests, turn in better projects, and participate more in class if they know their parents care.



When?

You can be involved in your child’s learning at any time of day. Talk about homework while you’re making dinner. Watch a documentary together at night. Visit a museum on the weekend. You’ll show your child that you think learning is important.

Where?

Teachers will welcome your commitment, whether you help in the classroom, volunteer at evening events, or simply support your own child at home. Call or email your middle grader’s teachers to see what you can do—in or out of school—to help. 👍



Parent to Parent

A reading habit

The older my son Jonathan got, the less he read. I was concerned, so I asked the school librarian for ideas.

First, Mrs. Cruz said we should leave lots of reading material—books, magazines, newspapers, even comic books—all around the house. “If they’re lying there, he’ll pick them up,” she advised.

Second, she suggested that I stop at the library to return books when we’re out together. Once inside, she said, steer him toward sections he might like. Since Jonathan loves cars, I showed him books on NASCAR races and drivers. I was happy when he picked a few to check out.

Finally, Mrs. Cruz told me to discuss the books I’m reading with Jonathan. That will give him a chance to talk about what he has read that day—and give us a reading habit to share! 👍



Q & A

Cyberbullying

Q I’m worried about cyberbullying. How can I protect my middle grader from this kind of bullying?

A Cyberbullying occurs when someone sends hurtful messages online or by cell phone. It can take many forms, such as writing rude comments, spreading rumors, and posting embarrassing pictures.

Your child can discourage cyberbullying by giving personal information (name, email address, cell

phone number) only to friends. If she receives nasty emails or text messages, she should not respond. Explain that replying just gives the person the satisfaction of having upset her. A good thing to do is simply to log off the computer or turn off the cell phone.

Let your youngster know she should tell an adult if she experiences cyberbullying. You can report problems to your Internet provider, school authorities, or even the police. 👍



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Short Stops

Engage your audience

The next time your child has to give a speech in school, suggest that she start with a question. For example, if her speech is about animals in Australia, she might say, "Did you know that a platypus is poisonous?" She'll grab her classmates'—and her teacher's—attention.

Pumpkin delight

Autumn is the perfect time to try pumpkin recipes with your middle grader. You can roast the seeds or look online for other ideas. Pick out recipes you'd both like to try (pumpkin soup, pumpkin pancakes). Then, spend time together in the kitchen preparing a healthy dish.

Tracking progress

Remind your child to keep tabs on his grades throughout the semester. As he receives grades (tests, essays, projects, classwork, homework), he can calculate his average based on the percentage that each one counts toward his grade. That way, he'll know where he stands and be able to focus on areas of concern.

Worth quoting

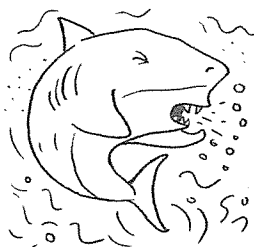
"The quieter you become, the more you can hear."

Ram Dass

Just for fun

Q: Why do sharks live in saltwater?

A: Because pepper water makes them sneeze!



Homework: A change of pace

Keep homework from becoming a daily grind for your middle grader by suggesting new approaches. These ideas can add variety to study time—and keep her motivated to do her best.

Make it social

Encourage your youngster to invite friends over to do homework together. Working with a friend or in groups could boost her interest and learning. Classmates can share information and explain ideas to each other—and your child will get to spend time with her peers. *Note:* Suggest that she choose study buddies who work hard and take school seriously.

Make it scenic

Doing homework in a different spot can add a refreshing twist. Your middle schooler might read an assignment while sitting on a pile of autumn leaves outside or head to the library and look for a cozy corner. Even moving to a porch or patio can provide a welcome change.



Make it a contest

Suggest that your child compete with herself to make her work more exciting. For instance, she could time how long it takes her to finish a set of math problems and then try to beat her time on the next set. Or she could see how many problems she can solve in 10 minutes—and then how many she can answer in the next 10 minutes.

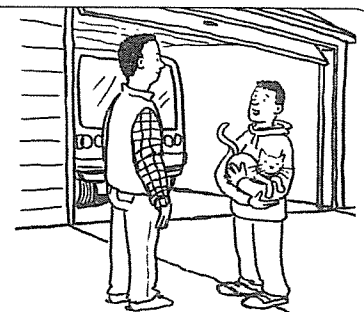
Idea: Suggest that your youngster give herself an incentive for finishing her work. For example, she might plan to go for a bike ride, give herself a manicure, or read a magazine. 👍

Give respect, get respect

Show respect to your child, and chances are you'll get respect in return. Try these tips:

- Don't embarrass or make fun of your youngster—at home or in front of other people. Instead, treat him the way you treat your friends and coworkers and the way you want to be treated. He will be more likely to follow your lead and not embarrass you in front of *your* friends.

- When your child does something that angers or annoys you, give him the benefit of the doubt by listening politely to his side. Perhaps he forgot to close the garage door because your cat got out and he went to catch her. Listening respectfully to his explanation and not jumping to conclusions may teach him to behave that way, too. 👍

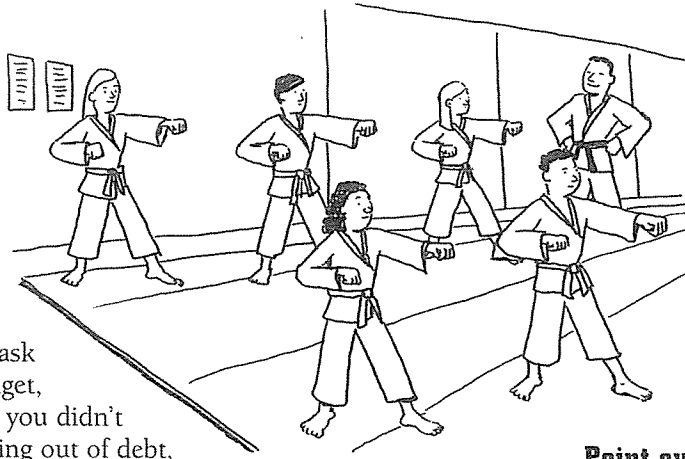


Stick with it

It's not uncommon for children to start something they don't want to finish. But learning to stick with an activity will help your middle grader later in life. Here are some ways you can teach him to persevere.

Set an example. Talk with your youngster about times when you completed a task or an activity (worked out a monthly budget, kept up an exercise routine) even though you didn't feel like it. Explain that the rewards (staying out of debt, being healthy) are worth the effort.

Be encouraging. If your child talks about quitting an activity that's difficult for him, suggest that he try a little longer.



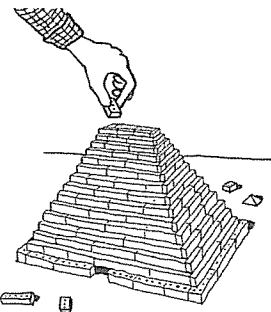
You might say, "You've only been doing martial arts for a month. Stay with it for another month and see how you feel. Then, we'll talk again." *Idea:* Your middle grader can ask for help—perhaps his instructor has suggestions for improvement.

Point out progress. When your youngster does persevere, let him know that you notice ("I understand that project was tough for you—great job getting it done"). Praising his persistence will help him make it a habit. 👍

Spotlight on history

What ties intriguing characters, fascinating events, and important lessons together? History! Bring the past to life in your living room with these ideas:

■ Create something that represents a time period. Each person can choose her own project, or your family could work on one together. For instance, you might use Legos to make a model of an Egyptian pyramid or tape large sheets of paper on a wall and draw or paint an Aztec mural.



■ Have each family member pick a "secret identity" (Amelia Earhart, Ben Franklin) to research using the Internet or books. Then, host a game show where everyone asks yes-or-no questions and tries to guess each other's character. The winner is the person who guesses the correct answer with the fewest number of questions. 👍



Q & A

Handling stress

Q My seventh grader seems overwhelmed—I've noticed that she's been biting her nails almost constantly. How can I help her manage her stress?

A A little stress is normal for children this age. They're coping with puberty and greater responsibility at home and school.

Besides having your daughter eat well and get plenty of sleep, you can help her pinpoint what's worrying her. Is she concerned about friendships or the number of things she has to do? The two of you can discuss ways to handle problems (talk to her friends, cut back on activities). Having a plan will help her feel calmer.

Also, encourage your middle grader to spend time each day doing something she enjoys, such as playing guitar or rollerblading. Finally, if she feels herself becoming anxious, she can try closing her eyes and taking a few deep breaths. And as she becomes less stressed, hopefully she'll bite her nails less. 👍



Parent to Parent

A touchdown for school success

Fall means one thing to my son: football! I thought there must be a way to use this excitement to help Austin with school subjects, so I emailed his teachers for ideas.

His English teacher suggested that we get him reading more by checking out library books about football. She also said he could keep a journal for writing game summaries or making up his own football stories.

Next, Austin's algebra teacher recommended using football statistics for math practice. For example,

he might graph wins and losses or figure out the probability of each team making the Super Bowl.

Finally, his social studies teacher suggested hanging a U.S. map on the wall. She said Austin could mark each team's location and think about how the team name and mascot relate to the city.

Now that football season is in full swing, I'm happy to see Austin following his favorite team—and enjoying some new football activities! 👍



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Homework 101

Middle school means more classes to juggle—and more homework assignments to manage. Help your youngster learn more and be successful in school by getting into a good homework routine from the start. Here's how.

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1. Make homework a habit

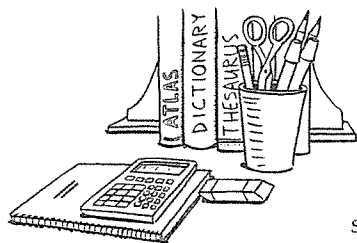
One of the best ways to make something a habit is to do it at the same time every day. Help your middle grader pick a homework time slot that works for him. It could be after dinner or right after he gets home from school. Have him experiment to find the best time and then stick with it daily—even if he has no assignments due the next day. He can use the time to review notes or textbook chapters for a test or to work on a long-term project.

2. Get focused

Encourage your youngster to pick a homework spot where she won't be distracted by siblings or television. She might work best sitting at a desk, spreading her work out on the kitchen table, or lying on her bedroom floor. Being comfortable with her work environment will let her focus on her assignments. *Idea:* Consider making homework time a “quiet period” in your house. If you're reading or doing paperwork and your other children are doing their homework or playing quietly, it will be easier for your middle grader to concentrate.

3. Keep supplies nearby

A handy stash of school supplies will keep homework time moving along smoothly. Have your child fill a box or basket with everything he needs (paper, pencils, scissors, glue, ruler, graph paper, colored pencils, calculator). He might also keep poster board and other materials for projects nearby, as well as reference books like a dictionary, a thesaurus, and an atlas. Remind him to monitor supplies and arrange a time to shop with you for ones that are running low.



4. Stay organized

In middle school, your youngster has a lot more books and papers to keep straight, so she needs good organization skills.



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Encourage her to use her student planner to keep track of homework due dates, quizzes and tests, and meetings for group projects. She can check her planner at the end of the day and quickly spot the items she needs to bring home for each assignment. Using a different-colored folder or binder for every subject is another way to make it easy for her to find what she needs.



5. Manage assignments

Your youngster's workload might be easier to handle if he starts homework time by putting assignments in order. Some children do better knocking out the easiest assignment first and feeling like they have gotten something done. Others manage better by tackling the hardest work first, when they are most alert. Have your youngster try both ways to see which is more successful. Then, suggest that he put each assignment in his planner in the order he will do it. As he completes a task, he can mark it off—and enjoy a sense of accomplishment.

continued

6. Create study guides

Worksheets, textbook questions, and other assignments contain information your youngster will need to know for tests. He can stay ahead of the game by making study guides as he does his homework, instead of waiting until just before an exam to study. While working on history, he might keep a running time line that shows dates of important events like battles or presidential elections. For algebra, he could write step-by-step instructions for solving different kinds of equations. Suggest that he keep the guides in a binder or computer folder.

7. Build in breaks

Avoid homework burnout by having your middle schooler take regular breaks. For example, she might spend 45 minutes



reading her novel for English class and then stop for a 10-minute break before studying for her science quiz. She'll get a chance to step away from her assignments while she walks around the

block, strums her guitar, or eats a healthy snack. And clearing her head can help her feel refreshed when she sits back down to work.

8. Plan ahead for projects

Teach your child to tackle a large project by breaking it down into individual steps. For a science fair, tasks might include coming up with an experiment, writing a hypothesis,

conducting the experiment, tabulating results, and making a display board. He can spread the steps out over several weeks in his planner or on a calendar. The project will get done on time—and it won't seem as overwhelming.

9. Be creative

Your child can add some fun to homework time by finding creative ways to complete assignments.



For instance, instead of using flash cards, she might replace the question cards in a game of Trivial Pursuit with questions from her history textbook. Then, she can play the game with you to study for her test. Or if she's allowed to approach a book report any way she wants, she could make a scrapbook based on the characters.

10. Turn it in

Homework is not complete until it's handed in! Encourage your youngster to develop a routine for getting assignments to school and turning them in on the day they're due. While he does homework, he might keep everything in his backpack except the assignment he's working on. When he finishes, and before taking out the next one, he should put the finished work in his bag. If it's big (a poster or a model that he built), he might put it right by the front door. Or he could tape a sign to the inside of the front door saying, "Take Spanish project!"

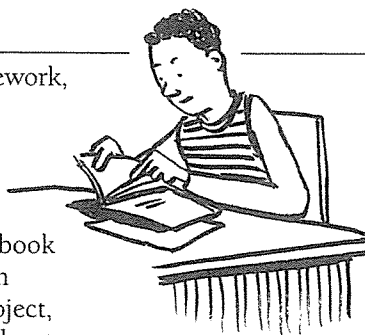
Tip: Be supportive of your child's efforts. Let him know that you expect him to do his homework and that you're proud of him for working hard and finishing.

"Help! I'm stuck!"

When your child asks you for help with homework, what should you do? Instead of finding the answer for him, suggest these ideas that may help him get "unstuck."

- **Look it up.** If he needs help in math, he can work sample problems or flip to the back of the book to see if there are extra practice problems with an answer key. When he's doing a social studies project, he might look through old worksheets to remember terms or facts.

- **Skip ahead.** Have him try the next problem or question. Sometimes, moving forward is enough to help him to remember



forgotten instructions or to find an answer that he overlooked. Then, he can go back and finish the item he skipped.

- **Get outside help.** He could call his school homework line or a friend who is strong in the subject. Also, encourage him to keep a list of helpful websites such as discoveryeducation.com/students and bjpinchbeck.com. The school or public library website might have homework resources, too.

Note: If your middle grader regularly struggles with assignments, contact his teacher for advice.

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