

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



TV teaching

Your child can use TV time to practice thinking skills. Pose questions to each other when watching shows together. For example, you might ask how two characters are alike or different. Or she might wonder how else a character could have handled a situation. (Note: Experts recommend limiting screen time to one to two hours a day.)

Preventing illness

What's the single best way to keep you and your family from getting sick? Make sure that family members wash their hands. Suggest that they wash hands for at least 15 seconds before eating, after coughing or sneezing, and after using the bathroom. *Tip:* Carry alcohol-based hand sanitizer for times when soap and water are not available.

Cell phone?

Many middle schoolers have cell phones these days. If you're thinking about getting one for your child, consider setting ground rules such as times to turn off his phone (meals, homework) or the number of texts he can send. Also, review his school's cell phone policy together.

Worth quoting

"Give the world the best you have, and the best will come back to you."
Madeline Bridges

Just for fun

Q: Why did the moose stand on the marshmallow?

A: So he wouldn't fall in the hot chocolate.



Safe from bullying

Your child needs to feel safe in order to learn. But if he's involved in bullying—as a victim, bystander, or bully himself—he may not feel safe. Here are ways to help your middle grader if he's affected by bullying.

Victims

Bullying victims often blame themselves and are reluctant to tell adults. If your child is bullied, assure him that it's not his fault. Then, talk with school administrators and come up with a plan. You can tell your middle schooler to stay with friends or in groups so he's not alone in the hallway, restroom, cafeteria, or locker area. If a bully targets him, encourage him to hold his head up high and walk away. Let him know that acting angry or upset is likely to egg the bully on.

Bystanders

Youngsters often want to step in when they witness bullying, but they may be afraid or don't know what to do. Your middle grader can help by creating an excuse that gives the victim a way out ("Mrs. Suza



needs to see you now"). He can also tell an adult about bullying, including when and where he saw an incident. That way, staff can check into the situation and be on the lookout for patterns.

Bullies

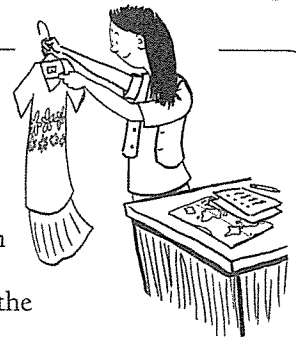
If you suspect your child of bullying, tell him why it's wrong. Lay out clear consequences and next steps (loss of privileges, apologizing to the victim and his family). You can ask a school counselor about ways to help your middle schooler, such as bullying-prevention programs. Also, try working on empathy at home by asking questions like "How would you feel if your brother did that to you?"

On location

Where in the world is Myanmar—and what does that have to do with your child? Learn about geography together with fun activities like these.

Raid your closets. Get a glance at world trade in your own house. Have family members go through closets and check clothing labels. Find each country on a globe or map. On a sheet of paper, tally where items like shirts, sweaters, and pants were made. Where did the most items come from?

Name that nation. Play a guessing game to learn about other cultures. Have each family member secretly pick a country (Turkey) and look up facts online or in a library book. Write down clues and take turns reading them ("Founded in 1923," "Borders the Black Sea"). Can someone name your country in 10 clues or less?



Support for homework

You want to help your child do her best in school—but it's *her* job to do her homework. Use these tips to provide the behind-the-scenes support she needs:

- Make schoolwork your youngster's responsibility. Explain that while you won't do the work, you will help her get supplies, quiz her on facts, and read over papers or listen as she practices presentations.



- Ask to see your middle grader's completed work—she'll know that you care about her homework. Even if you don't understand the subject or if English isn't your first language, you can check that the answers are filled in and see that her work is neat and presentable.

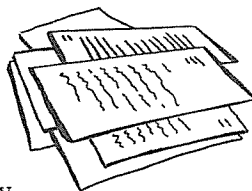
- Discuss the fact that homework isn't done until it's turned in! You might help your child set up a system for taking her work to school (file it in a "completed work" folder, put projects by the front door). *Idea:* Rather than reminding her to take her homework each morning, simply ask, "Do you have everything you need today?" 👍

Research: Using primary sources

When your middle grader has a research paper to write, *primary sources* can add interesting details. These firsthand accounts may be letters from famous people in history, speeches, photos, or newspaper articles written at the time something took place. Share these tips to help your child find them.

Library searches.

Suggest that your youngster search his school or local library's collection. Using an online catalog, he can enter key information (historical figure, court case) and choose a subject heading like "interviews" or "correspondence." Librarians can point him to different databases and show him how to search them.



Personal interviews. Your middle grader can also create his own primary sources by conducting interviews on his topic. For example, if he's writing a paper about plant science, he might interview a horticulturist at a local garden center. Encourage him to tape-record his interview (with the person's permission) and to take careful notes so he's sure to get the information right. 👍

OUR PURPOSE

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

Resources for Educators,
a division of Aspen Publishers, Inc.
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com
www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5540

Q & A Bonding over music

Q My daughter and I both love music. How can I use that to build our relationship?

A Music provides a terrific chance to bond with tweens. It's a natural interest for many children this age and can help you develop closer ties.

Listen to music you both like, from rock and country to show tunes and jazz. Put CDs on while you do dishes together, or listen to the car radio on the way to swim practice. If you're in the mall or at a park and see a live performance, stop and listen. You could ask your daughter to suggest music to you—she might create playlists or add songs to your MP3 player. And you can share your favorites with her.

Also, use music to start conversations: Ask your middle grader's opinions. ("What is the best band of all time?" "What's your favorite song?") And if you play instruments, make music together. You might put on a "concert" for other family members! 👍



Parent to Parent Be flexible!

My son Chris used to get upset when life didn't go as planned. If a friend canceled plans, he moped around the house. If he didn't get the role he wanted in the school play, he didn't want to be in it at all.

I know from personal experience how important it is to be flexible, whether it's with my team at work or with our family's schedule. I wanted to teach Chris this important skill. First, I told him that change is a part of life. Then,

I suggested that when something doesn't go the way he expects, he stop and think about what else he could do. For example, if a friend cancels, how could he use the time instead? He said maybe he could invite someone else over or he could practice his saxophone.

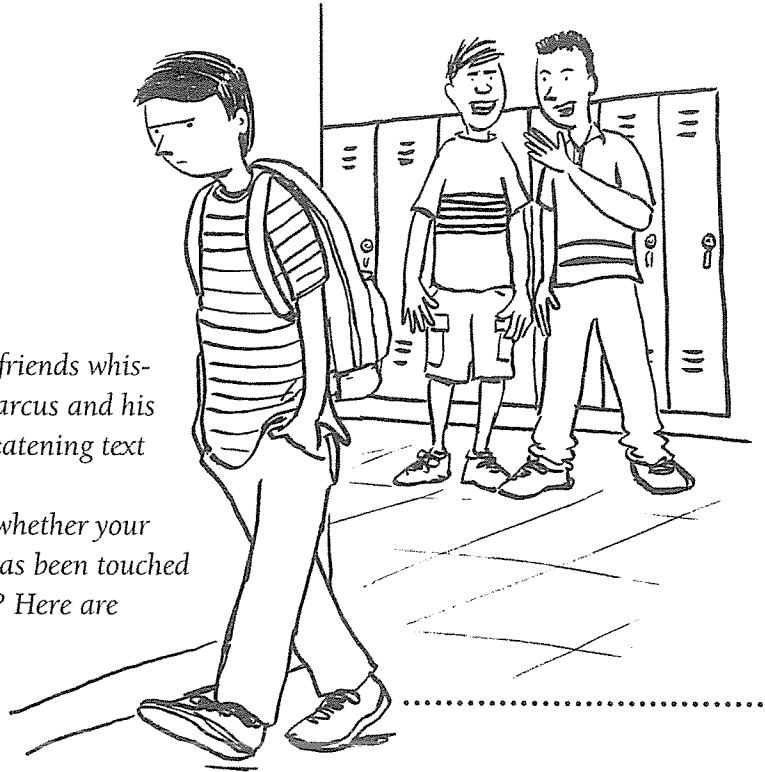
Now, when I notice Chris "going with the flow," I make sure to praise him. He's learning to adapt to change—and he seems happier, too. 👍



Bullying Q&A's

Lisa sits quietly at the “popular” lunch table while her friends whisper about an overweight classmate. On the school bus, Marcus and his buddies push a younger boy off his seat. Ellie receives threatening text messages from her ex-boyfriend.

These middle graders are all affected by bullying. And whether your child is a witness, a bully, or a victim, it's likely that she has been touched by the problem at some point, too. What can a parent do? Here are answers to common questions about bullying.



Q What is bullying?

A Bullying ranges from rejection (“This table isn’t for geeks”) to physical attacks like pushing and punching. It also includes spreading rumors, threats, name calling, and sexual harassment. When bullies use technology (say, by posting rumors on Facebook or sending hurtful text messages), it’s called *cyberbullying*. Usually, bullying is an ongoing problem rather than a one-time thing. Also, a bully typically has an advantage over his victim. For example, he might be more popular or physically stronger. Any form of bullying—verbal or physical—should be taken seriously.



Q I’ve been hearing a lot about bullying lately. Is it more common these days?

A Technology like text messaging and social networking has made it easier for tweens to continue harassing each other outside of school. Also, the problem is getting more attention as we learn about its serious consequences

for both bullies and victims. For instance, a child who bullies is more likely to get into trouble with the law as an adult. And being a victim can lead to increased school absences, falling grades, depression, low self-esteem, and dropping out. In some tragic cases, bullying has been tied to school violence and even suicide.

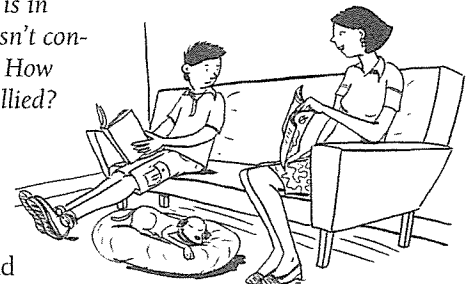
Q What motivates a bully?

A Experts used to believe that most bullies had low self-esteem and that they hurt others to feel better about themselves. While

this does happen, popular children can also be bullies. They’re motivated by social power, and they take advantage of less popular children to gain even more power. For example, a well-liked middle schooler might decide who gets invited to parties or where other kids can sit at lunch. If a classmate doesn’t do what she says, she might push or threaten the other child or call her names.

Q Now that my son is in middle school, he doesn’t confide in me very often. How will I know if he is bullied?

A It’s not unusual for children to keep bullying a secret. That’s because they’re afraid the bully will punish them for telling or because they’re ashamed of themselves for being picked on. Try bringing up the subject with your son. You might show him a newspaper or magazine article about bullying. Mention that it’s a common problem, and ask if it’s going on at his school and whether he feels safe. Also, know the risk factors—children are bullied for being overweight, having a disability, or seeming different, or because of their sexual orientation. Finally, be aware of warning signs. A victim might begin to spend more time alone, ask to stay home from school, or even experiment with dangerous behaviors (drinking alcohol, using drugs, having sex). If you suspect your youngster is being picked on, talk to the school counselor for advice.



Q What should my child do if she sees someone being bullied?

A Bullies love a crowd, so the best thing your middle grader can do is to pay attention to the victim and ignore the bully. If someone is being physically attacked, your youngster should tell the nearest adult. If a classmate is being teased, she might walk up and give the victim an excuse to escape (“Hey, we gotta go” or “Mrs. Jackson needs to see you in her office”). Keep in mind that it’s normal to be afraid to step in. It’s important for your youngster to remember that a child who is being bullied is probably scared and upset and wants help.



Q My son’s school counselor called and said he’s part of a group that’s bullying a boy in the cafeteria. We have a meeting at school this week. How should we react?

A First, get your son’s side of the story. Tell him about the phone call, and ask for an explanation. If he admits to participating in bullying, let him know that his behavior is unacceptable, and tell him what the consequence will be at home (the school will likely have its own consequence). Also, help your child become more empathetic. Talk regularly about others’ feelings (“Your sister is disappointed that she didn’t make the drill team, so let’s try to cheer her up”), and consider getting involved in community service as a family.

Q My daughter has been unhappy lately. She finally told me it’s because some of her friends have become more popular, and now they say she isn’t “cool enough” for them. Is there anything I can do?



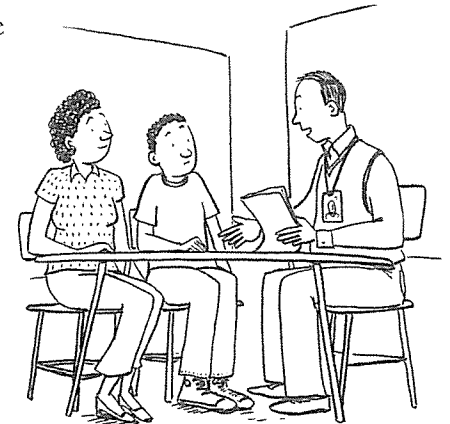
can seek out other friends. For instance, she might join an after-school activity (yearbook, field hockey) where she can find classmates who share her interests. In the meantime, ask a librarian to help you find books about tweens who struggle

A You can explain to your daughter that friendships change as kids get older. But let her know that you understand it doesn’t make things easier now. Although she might not be able to change these girls’ behavior, she

to make friends. Knowing that other middle schoolers go through the same thing can help her feel less alone, and she might learn about strategies for building friendships.

Q My son doesn’t want to go to school because kids tease him about his learning disability. And he doesn’t want me to talk to his teachers or school counselor about it. How can I help him?

A Let your son know this isn’t something he should have to handle alone. Perhaps he’ll let you write an email to his school counselor that doesn’t name the bullies but asks for help. (“What resources do you have for children who are bullied?”) The counselor’s reply might help him feel comfortable sharing. Also, since most bullying takes place when adults aren’t looking, encourage your son to stay with a friend or a group in “hot spots” like the bus, bathroom, cafeteria, or hallways. *Tip:* Have him practice assertive body language (standing up straight, looking others in the eye). This can send the message to the bullies that he isn’t an easy target.



Q A classmate has been spreading rumors about my daughter on Facebook. What can we do?

A The first step is to help your daughter block the student from her account. Although this won’t stop the bully from posting rumors on other people’s pages, knowing that your child is ignoring her might encourage her to stop. That’s because cyberbullies enjoy the drama of posting and getting reactions. If the problem continues, you might consider contacting the bully’s parents if you feel comfortable doing so. Or the school counselor might suggest peer mediation. In the meantime, keeping an eye on your daughter’s online activities can help protect her. Try putting your computer in a common area so you can see what she’s doing. Some parents insist that their child “friend” them as a condition of joining a social networking site. Finally, remind your daughter never to share her password with anyone.

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