

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Book date

Children who read for fun build background knowledge that can help them with many subjects, from geography to history. Try setting aside a regular time to take your tween to the library. Browse the shelves, and then sit together and read silently or share interesting passages aloud.

### Mealtime manners

If your youngster is offered food she doesn't like at a friend's home, she might not be sure what to say. Tell her she can be polite by taking a small portion and trying it. If she has a food allergy, she can mention it and say, "Thank you anyway."

### DID YOU KNOW?

Middle graders need at least nine hours of sleep to be rested and alert for school. Set a reasonable bedtime, and encourage your child to unwind by dimming the lights and doing a quiet activity (reading, drawing, listening to soft music). To make falling asleep easier, he should avoid video games, cell phones, and TV.

### Worth quoting

"Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still."  
Chinese proverb

### Just for fun

**Teacher:** What happened at the Boston Tea Party?

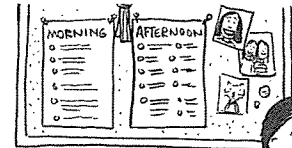
### Lindsay:

I don't know. I wasn't invited.



## On time for a new year

Good time-management skills make your middle schooler's day more predictable and help it go smoothly. Encourage your child to create good habits like these.



### Make lists

To-do lists can keep your youngster on track. She might make one for morning (shower, eat breakfast, take science project) and another for after school (eat snack, practice clarinet, do homework). Have her post each list where she can see it and check off activities as she goes. *Tip:* A calm morning starts the night before. Suggest that your youngster think about which tasks she could do before bed (lay out clothes, pack lunch or snack).



use a timer when she showers or walks the dog. Then, she'll know how much time to allow for each task.

### Plan for the unexpected

Encourage your youngster to regularly build in a few extra minutes for each item on her schedule. For instance, if she gets up five minutes earlier, a misplaced student ID won't be such a big deal. She can also use this strategy with schoolwork, especially when it comes to long-term projects. She might plan to complete a research paper two days before it's due—then she'll have more time if she needs it. 👍

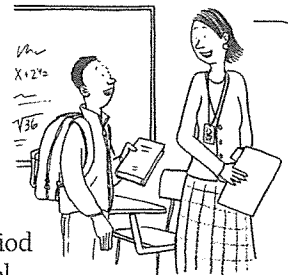
## Talking to teachers

When your child needed help in elementary school, you probably spoke with his teachers. Now that he's in middle school, he can be responsible for doing that himself. Share these suggestions.

**When.** Your middle grader should ask teachers when they're available to answer questions or give extra help. Some teachers might prefer to meet during a planning period or lunch, while others may have time before or after school.

**What.** Tell your child to be specific about what he needs. He can show the teacher a homework assignment or his textbook ("I don't know how they got this answer in chapter 2").

**How.** Explain that he should be courteous even if he doesn't agree with a teacher. For example, he can ask politely for an explanation on a grade ("I'm not sure where I went wrong on this essay"). 👍

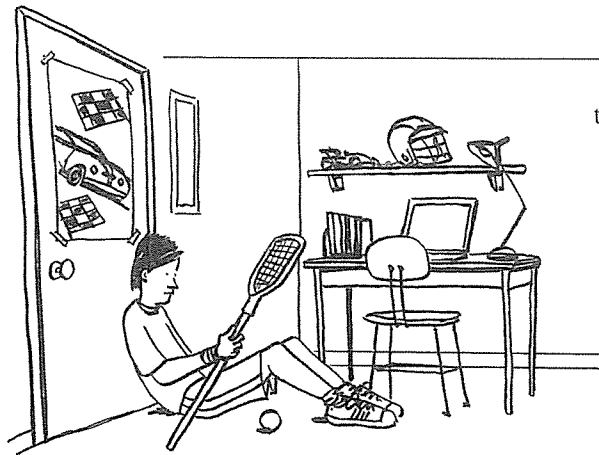


# Emotions in the middle

Moody, private, self-conscious... If this sounds like your middle grader, 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 encourage 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.

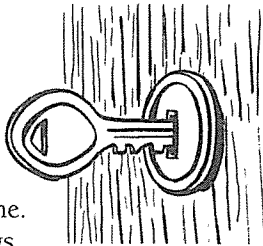
## Fitting in

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 (lacrosse team, student government, math club). 👍

# Alone after school?

Now that your child is in middle school, she may be too old for after-school day care. How can you make sure she's safe if she gets home before you do? Consider these rules:

- Talk about strangers. Your youngster should lock the door when she gets home and not open it for anyone. If the phone rings, she shouldn't tell the caller that she's alone.



- Decide whether friends are allowed to visit. If so, you might permit just one at a time and have your child get permission in advance.

- Agree on how to stay in touch. Maybe you'll have her call or text you as soon as she gets in the door each day.

- Review household safety. Let your middle grader know whether she can use things like the Internet, the stove, or candles when you're not there. 👍



## Q & A

### Write about now

**Q** My daughter will have more writing assignments this year, and she has struggled with writing in the past. What can I do to help?

**A** Regular practice is a key to better writing. Suggest that your daughter start a journal. It's a quick, low-pressure way for kids to fit in a little writing every day. Let her decorate a spiral notebook or get a diary at the store. She can write in it before she goes to sleep each night.

Perhaps she'll jot down thoughts about the day's events, facts related to a topic she's interested in (horses, art), or questions she has about a subject she's studying. Knowing that her words are for her eyes only will make her feel more comfortable writing. And as she gets used to writing, she'll discover that her words will flow more smoothly—both in her journal and when she does written assignments for school. 👍



## Parent to Parent

### Family-friendly nights

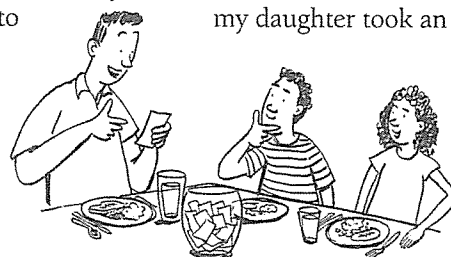
Our lives are so hectic that we don't get much time to share fun activities during the week. So I asked a few friends how they make the most of their evenings together.

My friend Melissa suggested putting creative "conversation starters" in a bowl on the dinner table. I decided to try this and asked everyone to come up with questions. My son wrote, "Why are organic foods popular?" and I came up with, "Which movie star would you want to have dinner with?"

The questions have already led to some thought-provoking discussions.

We've also tried an idea from our neighbor Dan. He said his family takes "picture walks" around the neighborhood with their cell phones (ringers off!). They snap interesting photos and share them with each other. We tried this, and my daughter took an excellent close-up of a pinecone.

Now we're enjoying our walks together, and we're taking some good pictures, too! 👍



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## Short Stops

### Sharpen your memory

Regular exercise and a good night's sleep are great memory boosters. That's because physical activity pumps oxygen to your middle schooler's brain, and her mind sorts and files memories while she sleeps. A healthy diet helps, too—"brain foods" include fish like salmon and tuna, green vegetables, fruits, and whole grains.

### Effective praise

Your praise still matters to your tween—even though he may not show it. When he works hard or makes a good decision, let him know you recognize it. Try to be specific: "I'm proud of you for getting started on your project right away."

### Timely giving

Take advantage of the holiday season to teach your tween about compassion. As the weather gets cooler, consider collecting blankets for homeless shelters or sorting toy donations for gift drives. Doing these activities as a family will build bonds and let you set a good example of helping others.

### Worth quoting

"If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door." Milton Berle

### Just for fun

**Q:** What did Mason say to Dixon?

**A:** We've got to draw the line here!



## A healthy social life

Socializing is a top priority for many middle graders. But hanging out with friends isn't just fun—it's an important part of growing up. And tweens who have friends enjoy school more and do better with their studies. Help your child have a safe, healthy social life with these ideas.



### Home

Encourage your youngster to have friends over to watch football or play cards. Try to include his friends in family activities when possible. If you host a dinner party, let him invite a buddy or two. He'll have a safe environment for socializing, and you'll get to know the people he spends time with.

### Community

Going to local tween-friendly events can strengthen your child's ties to the community. Have him look for announcements in the newspaper or call the parks and recreation department. You might drive him

and a friend to a tween night at a roller skating rink or a laser tag arena. Or they can train for a charity 5K run together.

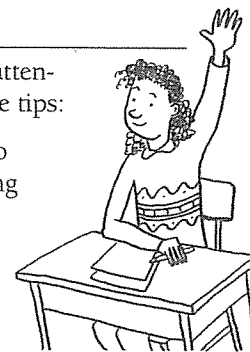
### School

A circle of friends is an important support network. Suggest that your child participate in study groups or call classmates with questions about assignments. Also, urge him to be a "joiner." He could sign up for after-school clubs or teams. And volunteering to help with a special event (science fair, art exhibit) might allow him to work with students he doesn't see all the time. 👍

## Up for discussion

Participating in class discussions helps your child pay attention and learn more. Encourage her to speak up with these tips:

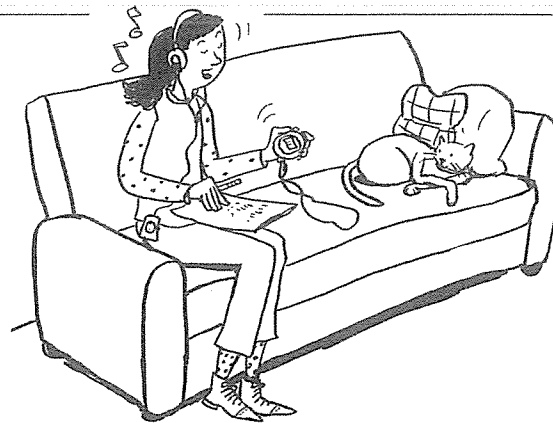
- When she studies, she can jot down ideas she'd like to share in class. That way, she'll have a list to refer to during the discussion.
- Encourage her to answer *and* ask questions. She may introduce possibilities that others haven't thought of.
- Remind her to share the spotlight. Staying on topic and keeping comments brief will give peers a chance to jump in.
- Your tween should be respectful if she disagrees with a classmate's comment. ("I understand what you're saying. Another way to look at it is...") 👍



# Make math matter

Does math appeal to your tween? If not, it could be because she doesn't see how it relates to the real world. These activities will show her how numbers are part of everyday life.

**Listen to music.** Ask your child if she knows why the chorus of a song sticks in her head. Then, suggest that she find out by exploring the relationship between math and music.



Have her pick a favorite song. She can use a timer to see what percentage of the song the chorus takes up. She'll probably find it's a large portion—and that's why the chorus is so easy to remember!

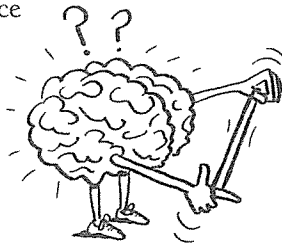
**Calculate food prices.** Restaurants use math to determine how much to charge customers. Many places triple food costs to cover expenses and turn a profit. When you dine out, have your youngster determine the cost of the food (the menu price divided by 3). At home, she could calculate your meal costs by adding up the ingredient prices and dividing by the number of servings. If she ran a restaurant, how much would she need to charge to make a profit? 👍

## Q & A Creative minds

**Q** I've heard that creative thinkers are in demand in the workforce today. How could I encourage my son to use his creative side?

**A** You're right—companies want workers who can think creatively to come up with fresh solutions.

When you face an everyday problem, ask your tween to help you solve it. For instance, have him suggest several ways to rearrange your schedule so you're able to fit in all of your commitments. Or if you don't have an item that you need, tell him to look around for a different object that would work in its place. A rubber band could keep a snack bag closed with-out a "chip clip," for example.



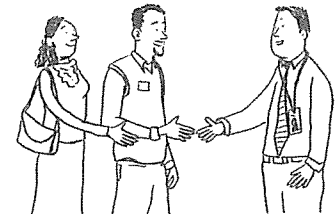
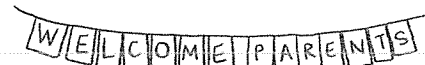
If your son is working on a school project, encourage him to think of a fresh idea or angle for his presentation. For instance, he might build a mobile or write a newscast. Using creativity in this way will help his project stand out and give him good training for the future. 👍



## Winning conferences

A parent-teacher conference gives you a chance to find out how your middle grader is doing and to connect with his school. Consider these suggestions.

1. Set a positive tone. Let teachers know you look forward to working with them to help your child succeed.
2. Ask about the curriculum. Find out what your tween should be able to do as the year unfolds and what kinds of projects he'll have. By being aware of what he should focus on, you can try to keep him on track.
3. Share information. Maybe your child learns best through hands-on activities, or perhaps your family is going through a difficult time. Talking about these things will put you and his teachers on the same page and help them work with him.
4. Focus on solutions. If the teachers mention problems (too much talking in class, falling test scores), ask for suggestions. You'll discover what the teachers plan to try, as well as ways you can provide support. 👍



## Parent to Parent

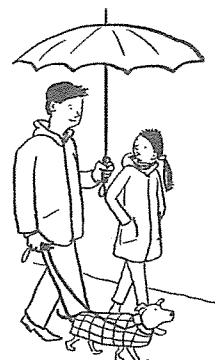
### High-tech cheating

My daughter Gina told me her friend got caught cheating in science class. During a quiz, Kendra had her phone in her lap and was reading notes she had texted to herself.

I hadn't heard of this type of cheating before, but I explained that looking at answers in your own text is just as wrong as looking at someone else's paper. The

consequences are the same, too: you get a zero—and you don't learn the material.

Gina mentioned that her friend felt pressure to get As. So I told my daughter that if she also feels too much pressure or is struggling, she can come to me, and we'll figure out how to get help. I also said I prefer that she earn a low grade honestly rather than get any other grade by cheating. 👍



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## Short Stops

### Take good risks

Encourage your tween to try an activity that appeals to her, even if she's a little nervous. Maybe she wants to join the cross-country team but hasn't run longer distances. Or perhaps she's interested in the improv club but is hesitant about public speaking. Stepping out of her comfort zone will stretch her abilities and build confidence.

### Agree to disagree

If your usually agreeable child starts poking holes in your opinions, that's a sign his reasoning skills are developing. Try not to take it personally, and ask him to share his views respectfully. He'll learn that it's okay to disagree, as long as he's polite about it.

### Puzzle me this

Crossword puzzles boost your tween's vocabulary. Have her print free puzzles she finds online or get crossword books from a dollar store. Or she and her friends could make crosswords for each other on graph paper or with a website like [puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com](http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com).

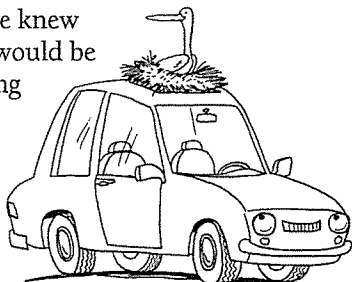
### Worth quoting

"The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing." *Walt Disney*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did the bird build a nest on the car?

**A:** She knew they would be moving soon!



## A good attitude = more learning

Starting the year with a positive attitude about school goes a long way toward a student's success. Inspire your tween to develop a winning outlook with these strategies.

### Look for positives

Your middle grader can find something interesting about every class. Suggest that he start a list of fun facts, one from each class every week. After a biology lesson on genetics, he might write, "I had a 50 percent chance of having blue eyes since Mom's are brown and Dad's are blue." Encourage him to share his discoveries with you.

### Celebrate achievements

Tell your tween to congratulate himself on a job well done. Maybe he earned a higher score on this week's vocabulary quiz than he did on last week's. Or perhaps he picked a topic for his history paper, even though he was tempted to



put off getting started. Saying "I did it!" will make him feel good about himself and motivated to keep working hard.

### Seek help

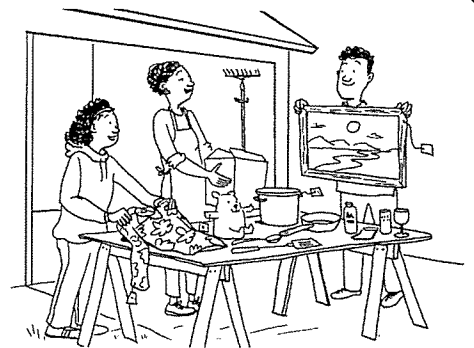
Successful students know how to get help when they face challenges. For example, your child could post a schedule of teachers' office hours or homework-help sessions in his locker. Then if he's struggling, he can sign up for a slot. Having a plan in place will help him stay upbeat. 👍

## Fall family fun

Strong parent-tween relationships help kids resist risky behaviors and make family life more enjoyable. Try these ideas.

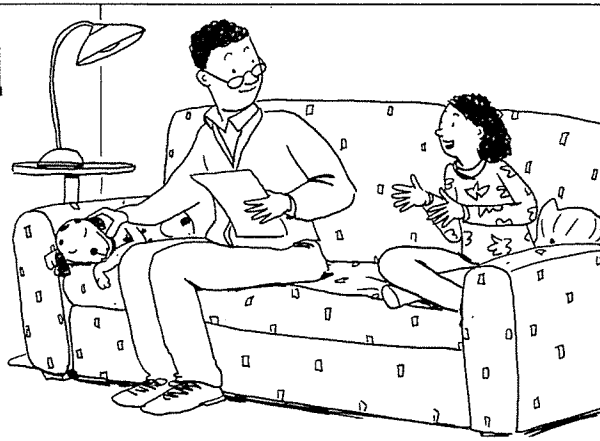
■ **Outings.** Ask your child to find outings that sound fun, such as a fall festival or a paint night. For ideas, she could look in the newspaper or check library and community center websites. *Tip:* Suggest that she ask classmates where their families like to go on weekends.

■ **Projects.** Let your middle grader plan family projects. Perhaps she'll suggest a garage sale. Work together to gather books, housewares, and toys you don't need anymore. She can help to advertise the sale, price items, and greet customers. 👍



# Wanted: Involved parents

What does parent involvement look like in middle school? While you probably won't be volunteering in your child's classroom, she still wants your support (even if she doesn't act like she does). Consider these tips for being a partner in her education.



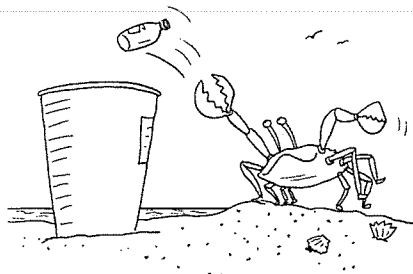
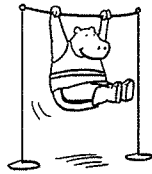
**At school.** Make it a priority to attend school events like curriculum nights and school plays. Also, look for ways to help that are related to your tween's activities. If she plays in the band, you could volunteer to set up for a concert. If she belongs to a book club, you might offer to shelve library books and talk to her afterward about

books you noticed. Or if she's an athlete, maybe you'll work at the concession stand during sporting events.

**At home.** Offer to quiz your middle grader on material she's studying or to look over a paper she's working on. To stay in the loop about what's happening in school, read the website regularly and sign up for email or text alerts. Mention the announcements to your child so she knows you're interested in her school. 👍

## Q & A Getting started with community service

**Q** My son is required to complete community service hours this year, but he can't decide what to do. How can I help him?



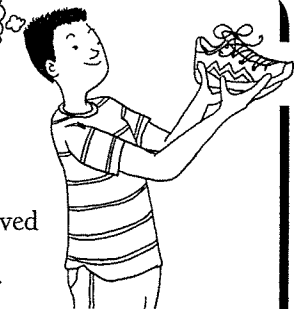
**A** Doing community service will let your son help others and gain work experience. The main office or his school counselor may have a list of places where he can volunteer. He could also ask friends, relatives, and neighbors for ideas.

Then, suggest that he choose a job that matches his interests—he'll get more out of it that way. For example, he might participate in a beach cleanup if he's concerned about the environment. Or if he likes working with younger children, he may play games or read with little ones at a homeless shelter while their parents attend job training.

Finally, encourage him to keep track of his work, including names of supervisors, so he'll receive credit—and even have references for a job someday. 👍

## Everyday engineering

From shoes and clothing to appliances and electronics, just about every product your tween uses was designed by engineers. Help him discover how engineering affects his daily life with this activity.



**1.** Encourage your child to consider the engineering involved in his favorite products. Maybe his running shoes absorb impact, the smoothie maker purees big chunks of fruit, or his jacket repels rain.

**2.** Now let him pick a product to redesign. He could decide to add another layer of foam to his shoes. First, he should run a block and rate his comfort on a scale of 1–10. Then, he can add foam, run another block, and rate his comfort again. What happens if he adds even more foam? How much might be too much? 👍

## Parent to Parent The "elevator speech"

When I was looking for a job, I discovered an interesting technique for "selling" yourself in an interview: the "elevator speech." I shared the idea with my daughter Susan, thinking she could use it to write summaries or make points during class discussions.

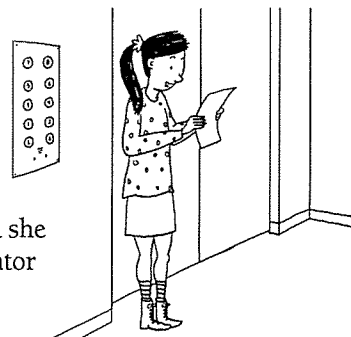
I told Susan to pretend she was going to ride an elevator with me and summarize the novel she's reading in

30 seconds or less—about the time it would take to ride from the ground to the top floor of a building.

Susan jotted down what she wanted

to say. At first, it took her almost 3 minutes to read it. But she kept trimming her summary until it was about 30 seconds long.

Then, she read it aloud to me. She got to the point quickly, and now she plans to try the strategy in class. 👍



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