

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



► Everyday reading

Keep your child interested in reading with a daily “show and tell.” During dinner or before bed, each person can talk about something he read that day (chapter of a book, magazine article, report for work). Knowing that others read regularly can encourage your middle schooler to do the same.

► Handbook review

Go over your youngster’s student handbook together. That way, you’ll both be aware of important school information, like attendance policies, dress code, technology use, and bus and cafeteria rules. Since the handbook may change slightly from year to year, it’s a good idea to review it each fall.

► Keeping promises

Middle graders want to be trusted. Let your child know that the best way to build trust is for her to keep her word. For example, she should come home at the agreed-upon time. Or if she borrows a friend’s sweater, she should return it when she promised she would—and in the same condition.

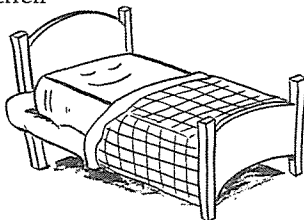
► Worth quoting

“The beginning is always today.”
Mary Wollstonecraft

► Just for fun

Q: Where do books sleep?

A: Under their covers.



Steps to a smooth year

Whether your child is just beginning middle school or returning for another year, you can help her get off to a successful start. Try these steps:

1. Attend back-to-school events. Teachers often go over grading policies and discuss how much homework to expect. Take notes and share them with your youngster when you get home. Also, teachers may ask you to fill out a card with your contact information and something you want them to know about your middle grader. You might mention a strength, weakness, or favorite hobby—anything that will help the teacher connect with your child.
2. Provide support. Middle schoolers can be nervous about a new year. Will the work be too hard? Will they have friends in their classes or their lunch period? Together, brainstorm ways your child can feel more comfortable. For example, she might find out about



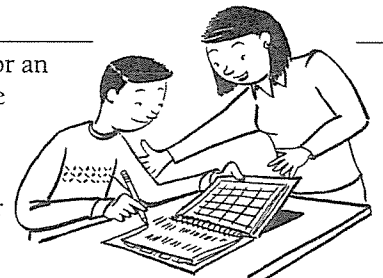
extra-help sessions before and after school. Or she could call a friend and make plans to sit together in the cafeteria.

3. Set up supplies. Suggest that your middle grader use separate folders and notebooks for each class. She might color-code them (English = purple, science = green) so she can spot them quickly. At home, help her stock a workstation with pens, pencils, pencil sharpener, paper, ruler, calculator, and reference books (dictionary, atlas). Having her supplies handy will let her stay focused on her work. 👍

What’s on the agenda?

Most middle graders use a student planner or an agenda book. Here’s how both of you can make the most of this valuable tool.

- Your child should write down homework assignments, upcoming tests, and due dates for projects. In addition, he should pencil in his activities (meetings, sports practice). Then, he can consult his planner to schedule homework time and study sessions.
- Look over your middle schooler’s planner nightly, and sign it if required. Read assignments and ask about missing subjects in case he forgot to write something down. Also, you can respond to any comments from his teachers and perhaps leave an encouraging note for your youngster (“Good luck on your history test!”). 👍



Learning from mistakes

Devon feels like he's ready for an oral report, so he decides he doesn't need to practice. But when he gets up in front of the class, he forgets a whole section.

When your child makes a mistake like this, you can help him learn from it. Try these suggestions.

Pinpoint the error. Encourage your youngster to figure out what he did wrong. Say he missed an easy math problem on a quiz. It's possible that he misread the question. Or he may have made a simple arithmetic error.



Find solutions. Together, talk about ways he can avoid making the same mistake in the future. For instance, he might read the test questions twice and double-check his work when he's finished.

Lead by example. Show your child how you deal with mistakes. You could make a light-hearted comment ("I guess we're lost after all") and then explain what you could do differently next time ("I'll print directions from MapQuest before we leave the house").

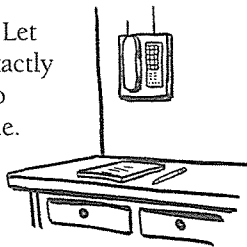
Tip: Remind your middle schooler that everyone makes mistakes. Learning to handle them now is a skill he can use throughout his life. 👍



Alone after school?

School ends at 3:00, and you don't get home from work until 5:30. Can your middle grader stay home alone? If she isn't afraid and she usually follows rules, she may be okay unsupervised for a short time. Here are some ways to help her stay safe.

● **Provide structure.** Let your child know exactly what she should do when she gets home. Examples: call you to check in, make a snack, practice flute, do homework.



● **Set rules.** Your middle schooler should not answer the door, and she should never tell callers she's home alone. Instead, she might say, "My mom's busy. Can she call you back?" Spell out whether your child can use the computer, TV, or appliances (microwave, toaster).

● **Plan for emergencies.** Explain how to use a first-aid kit and what to do if there's a fire. Show your youngster where you keep flashlights, batteries, and a radio in case of a power outage. Also, post a list of emergency contacts by the phone (911, your work and cell numbers, neighbors). 👍

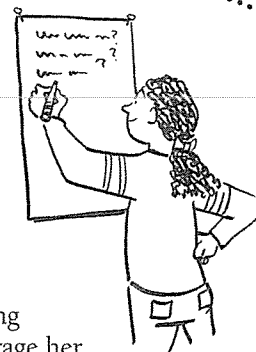
Parent to Parent

Curious questions

My child sometimes asks questions that I can't answer. For example, the other day she asked me why other countries use the metric system and we don't. And last week she wanted to know why leaves change color in the fall.

Unfortunately, I'm usually too busy to stop what I'm doing and help her look up answers—but I didn't want to discourage her curiosity. So I decided to post a "Questions we can't answer" board in our kitchen. Now anyone in our family can jot down what they want to know. When we have time, we look up information together in books or online at the library.

My daughter seems happy that I take her questions seriously—and she's excited that we're solving her "puzzles." I'm also pleasantly surprised by how many of my own questions teach us all something new! 👍



Q & A An earth-friendly family

Q My son said his friends talk about "going green." What are some easy, inexpensive ways our family can help the environment?

A Learning to take care of the earth will teach your child responsibility and show him that he can make a difference.

Start by asking him for ideas, and have him find out what his friends' families are doing. Then, agree on one or two changes to make. If you start small, you'll be more likely to stick with your new routines.

For example, your family might switch to reusable water bottles so that you use less plastic. Also, consider buying local fruits and vegetables. This choice supports farms in your area and saves fuel because the food isn't shipped long distances. Other easy habits include using both sides of printer paper, taking shorter showers, and participating in community cleanup days.

Tip: For more ideas, have your son visit www.epa.gov/newsroom/gogreen or www.scholastic.com/actgreen. 👍



O U R P U R P O S E

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

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Short Stops

High school-bound

If your middle grader is moving on this fall, help her get familiar with her new school by attending plays, sporting events, or other activities there. Also, write down dates of important events like freshman orientation, and schedule rides. And be sure to attend parent orientation if it's offered—so you can get ready for high school, too!

Try new foods

Summer is a great time to try new fruits and vegetables. You and your tween might browse a grocery store, an ethnic market, or a farmers' market for unfamiliar produce (say, rhubarb or passion fruit). Then, have him look up ways to prepare it. You'll add variety—and nutritious foods—to your family's meals.

A shoulder to lean on

If your child is upset about something (she didn't get the grade she expected, or a boy she likes doesn't like her), she may use you as a safe place to vent. Let her talk, and put away distractions so you can really listen. She may need your help, or maybe she'll just feel better getting it off her chest.

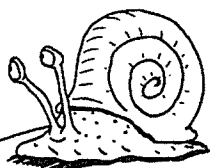
Worth quoting

"Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished." *Lao Tzu*

Just for fun

Q: No matter where I go, I'm never far from home. I travel by foot, but I'm toeless. What am I?

A: A snail.



Tuned into learning

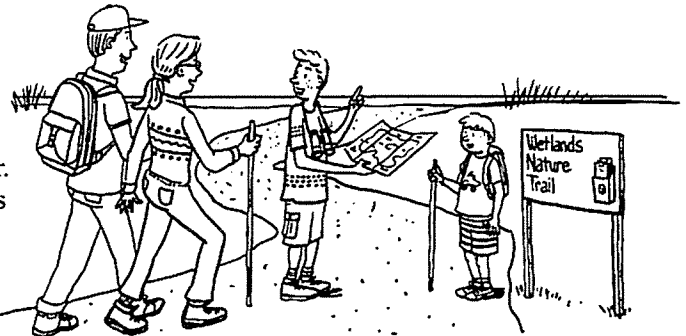
Your child's brain is like an engine. While it's revved up to learn, he can keep it running—and build on that momentum—so he's ready to go next school year. These activities will help his mind stay sharp over break.

Tinker away

Inventing new objects out of old ones lets your tween practice critical and creative thinking. Have him gather odds and ends like paper towel tubes, plastic containers, and broken gadgets. He could use his imagination to make something functional or fun (a robot, 3-D art, a roller coaster for action figures). Your community may even have a "maker-space" in a school or library where kids can create things out of random parts.

Enter contests

Doing a project for a competition will motivate your middle grader to dig into a topic and use all kinds of skills, from writing and research to initiative and persistence. He might design a space settlement, write a short story, or film a video



about ocean pollution. Encourage him to ask his teachers or look online for local and national contests. While winning would be the icing on the cake, he'll find the process itself exciting.

Build background knowledge

Together, review your child's course catalog to see what he will be learning next year. Then, look for interesting opportunities to discover more about those subjects. For instance, visit museum exhibits in your town or in places you travel to. When you hike, consult field guides for information about wildlife and plants. Or in the car, listen to music in the language he is taking. 👍

Summer socializing

Help your middle grader socialize safely this summer with ideas like these.

Enroll in programs. Encourage her to join a class, craft program, or tween "club" that meets throughout the summer. Check free or low-cost offerings at rec centers, libraries, YMCAs, places of worship, or local businesses.

Attend community events. She may run into familiar faces at an Independence Day parade, free community concerts, or local festivals. Consider inviting along another family with a child her age.

Plan a get-together. Perhaps your tween would like to host a midbreak party for classmates. She might have everyone bring a game, and she'll supply snacks. (Note: Be sure you're home to supervise.) 👍



Caring counts

While it's normal for your middle schooler to focus on her own needs, you can foster compassion for others by having her consider these questions.

“How can I pay it forward?”

Doing good deeds without expecting anything in return can be the ultimate kindness. Your tween can create a pay-it-forward chain by making a “Pay it forward” card.



When she does a kind act (walks the dog when it's her sister's turn), she gives the card to that person. Then, that person passes on the card with her own kind deed. Keep the card going, and even expand the circle outside your family.

“How do I act in public?”

You want your child to be caring toward everyone, not just those she's close to. Set an example when you're out

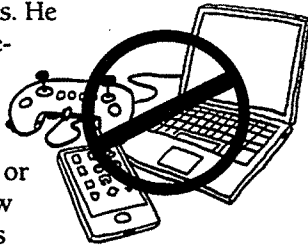
together: You might ask a cashier how her day is going or be understanding if a waiter spills a drink. Discuss everyday ways your tween can be kind, too. For instance, she could greet her bus driver with a friendly “hello” as she boards the bus and a “thank you” as she leaves. 👍

Q & A Addicted to technology?

Q My son would stare at a screen all day if I let him. Could he be addicted?

A Many children use screens for hours each day, which limits face-to-face interaction and physical activity.

But a child who is truly addicted may not care about things that once mattered—even eating or sleeping—and grow violent if you cut off access to his screens. He might be pre-occupied with the Internet or video games or lie about how often he uses them. If you suspect a serious problem like that, seek help from a mental health professional.



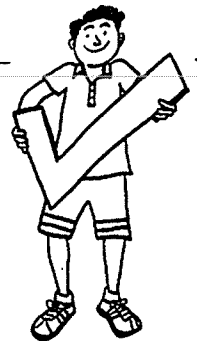
But even if your son isn't addicted, you probably want him to cut back. Consider making electronics off-limits during meals, car rides, and other family time. Also, you might keep television, video games, and smartphones out of his bedroom at night—using them can interfere with sleep. And finally, you could put on limits with parental control settings. 👍



End of the year? Check!

The school year is winding down. Wrapping things up a little at a time will make the final days less hectic. Suggest that your tween tackle end-of-year to-dos like these.

- Check with teachers, or view grades online.** He can see where he stands, make sure he doesn't have any missing assignments, and ask about extra credit to bring up a score.
- Add final projects and studying for exams to his planner.** Your child should break the work into steps and space them out so it's not overwhelming.
- Return library books to the school media center.** Thinking about this now will give him time to look for any he can't find right away.
- Clean out his locker and backpack.** He could take a plastic grocery bag to use as a mini trash can for unneeded papers, gum wrappers, or used-up supplies. 👍



Parent to Parent Make time for reading

My daughter Andrea's language arts teacher sent home a note saying how important it is for students to read over the summer. I hadn't made summer reading a priority before, but this year we've decided to try.

First, we set a daily time to read together—30 minutes after dinner and on weekend mornings. We also brainstormed places to read. I suggested our

porch, while Andrea thought of sitting by a nearby pond. We both agreed it would be fun to read at a frozen-yogurt shop, too.

Then, to get ideas for books, I had Andrea ask friends. We also spoke to a librarian. She recommended a few classics as well as newer books, and she also encouraged Andrea to read nonfiction about her interests. I'm really looking forward to our reading time—and I think Andrea is, too. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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Succeeding in Middle School

The leap to middle school is a big one. But it doesn't have to be one that your child makes alone. With your guidance and the tips below, your youngster can stay organized, manage her time, and learn to study effectively. After all, doing well in middle school forms the basis for success in high school and beyond.



Routines

A new school year always brings new routines. And moving to middle school means even more changes to your youngster's daily habits. Help him get set with these suggestions.



Tame morning madness. Gym uniform, calculator, musical instrument... your child will have more things to remember each day. Suggest that he put everything in one spot (in his room or by the front door) and hang a checklist nearby to glance at before he leaves for school. *Tip:* To save time in the morning, he might eat breakfast in the cafeteria.

Switch classes smoothly. Middle school usually means a bigger building and different classrooms for each subject. To make it to every class on time, your youngster will need a routine. If he's struggling to be punctual, talk about how he can reduce trips to his locker. For example, he can take everything he needs for the first half of the day and then switch at lunchtime to what he needs for the afternoon.

Plan for homework. Encourage your child to use a student planner to keep track of his increased homework load. At the beginning of each class, he can open the planner to that day's page. He should leave it on his desk until he has written down the homework assignment and due date. At the

end of the day, he can scan the page and put everything he needs for homework (books, handouts, notebooks) in his backpack. Then, have him check off each assignment as he completes it.

Organization

Your child will need to be organized to stay on top of all the extras that middle school brings. Try these strategies.

Color-code subjects. Suggest that your middle grader come up with a system to keep track of multiple classes. One idea is to assign a different color to each subject. For instance, she could use a blue folder, notebook, and book cover for history, and green supplies for math.

Get locker ready. A well-organized locker will help your youngster quickly find what she needs. She might use a low-cost locker shelf or a sturdy box turned on its end. Or she could hang a basket on the inside of the door for holding pencils and a calculator.

Choose a homework spot. Work with your child to create a place where she can do homework and keep school supplies. She might study at a desk in her room or at the dining room table. Remind her to let you know when supplies (pencils, pens, highlighters, batteries) are running low instead of waiting until she's completely out.



Time management

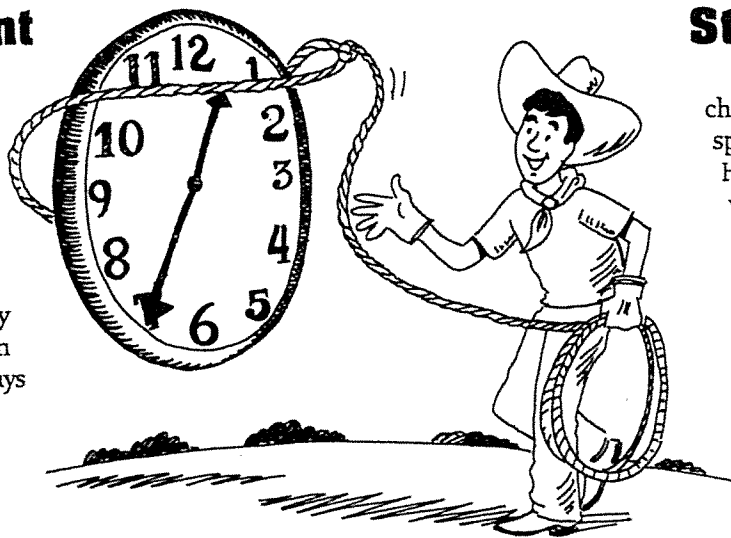
Everyone has the same amount of time—it's how we use it that makes the difference. Share these ideas to help your middle grader set priorities.

Make time for activities.

Middle schools usually offer more after-school activities than elementary schools do. If your child wants to run track or play chess, help him find ways to make time. Suggest that he get a head start on his homework if he has time between his last class and his activity. Also, have him add his activities to his planner. That way, he'll see which days he has more time to work on long-term projects or study.

Avoid distractions. When your child sits down to do homework, he should turn off his cell phone and stay off instant messenger, MySpace, or Facebook. Also, talk to him about polite ways to turn down invitations for times when he has work to do. For example, if friends want to go skating one afternoon, he might ask if they can go another day.

Don't procrastinate. Postponing work on an assignment will make your youngster feel pressed for time and not allow him to do his best work. Show him how to break a big job into smaller chunks, and teach him to stick to a schedule. He can write each task on a separate page of his planner. For example, if he has a book report, he could set aside a certain number of nights for reading the book, creating the draft, writing the final report, and polishing it.



Study skills

In middle school, your child will find that she has to spend more time studying. Here are several tips that will help her.

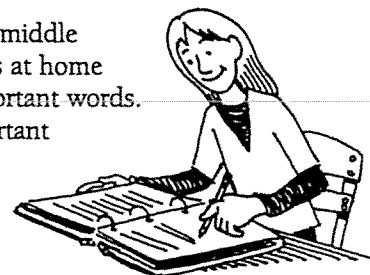
Take good notes.

Let your youngster know that taking good notes in class will make studying much easier. Explain that note taking doesn't mean copying down every word the teacher says. Instead, she should listen

carefully and write down the main points. If she didn't catch something, or if she's not sure she understood correctly, she should ask the teacher.

Write and highlight. Your middle grader can go over her notes at home and underline or circle important words.

Suggest that she write important facts and formulas on index cards. Encourage her to answer end-of-chapter questions or to do practice math problems. She'll remember more and be better prepared for tests.



Find study buddies. Studying with friends can motivate your child. Recommend that she find other students in her class who might be easy to work with. They can share ideas, discuss tough concepts, and quiz each other in study sessions at each other's houses or at the library.

Stay involved!

Did you know that it's important to stay involved in your child's education as he gets older? Here are three ways to show him you care about school:

1. Know the teachers. Attend back-to-school nights, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences. Make sure you meet all of your middle schooler's teachers, as well as his guidance counselor. It will be easier to discuss problems if you've established communication from the start.
2. Talk about school. When your youngster gets home,



or at dinnertime, ask specific questions that invite discussion. *Examples:* "What did you do in science lab?" "What are you working on in math this week?" You'll hear what your child is doing and let him know that you're interested.

3. Track progress. Look over your youngster's graded tests and marked papers. If your school reports grades electronically, check them regularly. Also, watch for interim grade reports in the mail or in your child's backpack. If you monitor his progress, you'll be able to encourage him to get extra help—or to praise him for a job well done.

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