

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Geography detective

Sleuthing skills can help your child explore geography. When a city, state, or country comes up on the news, challenge him to dig for little-known facts about it in books or online. He might be fascinated to find, for instance, that Minnesota's Mall of America is the size of 78 football fields.

You've got mail!

Want to boost your middle schooler's self-confidence? Mail her a thank-you card telling her how proud you are to be her parent. List all the things you want for her in the future. The note will remind her of your love—without embarrassing her.

Touch base with teachers

Consider requesting a springtime parent-teacher conference, especially if your tween is struggling in any areas. A face-to-face meeting will give you a chance to share your concerns and get suggestions from teachers. By working together, you can create a plan to support your youngster for the rest of the year.

Worth quoting

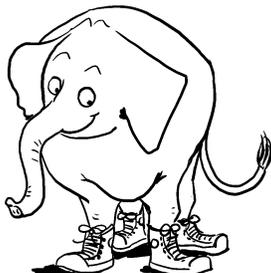
"I didn't fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps."

Thomas Edison

Just for fun

Q: Why did the elephant wear green sneakers?

A: Her red ones were in the wash!



Revise and shine

When your middle grader writes a paper, creating a draft is just the beginning. Her work isn't finished until she's sure it is clear, flows well, and includes supporting details. Encourage her to fine-tune her writing with these steps.

1. Read out loud

Suggest that she read her paper aloud. Hearing the words spoken can make problems jump out that she otherwise wouldn't have noticed.

2. Consider the focus

To make sure her essay or report is on target, your child should consider questions like these:

- Is my main idea clearly presented?
- Do I have details to support each argument?
- Does my introduction state what my paper will do?
- Does the organization make sense?
- Does my ending sum things up?

3. Watch wording

Encourage her to look for wording to improve. She should highlight problem areas like repeated words or awkward passages. Also, she can circle words to



substitute with stronger, more interesting, or more precise ones.

4. Vary sentences

Repeating the same sentence length or structure gets boring. Try this: Have your tween count the words in each sentence of a paragraph. If they're similar, she could combine or break apart sentences. And this: Let her underline each "The" or "I" that begins a sentence. If there are too many, she can mix things up (change "The general retired after 30 years in the military" to "After 30 years in the military, the general retired").

5. Make the changes

Finally, she should work on the revisions. And if a section is still not right? Revise it again! 👍

A polished paper

Proofreading is an essential last step before turning in a paper. Offer these tips for spotting errors so your child does his best work—and doesn't lose points for careless mistakes.

Take a break. The more recently he's read the piece, the harder it is to find errors. Suggest that your tween wait at least an hour to proofread.

Print it. Looking at words on paper (rather than on a screen) can help him see mistakes more easily. If there's no printer at home, he might print it at school.

Swap. Have your youngster trade papers with a pal and read once for each area (grammar, punctuation, spelling). Or friends could pass papers around a group, with each person looking for something different. 👍



Talk about bullying

Share this information to help your middle schooler understand what bullying is—and avoid being a target.

It's more than physical. Help your tween recognize bullying when it happens by explaining that it's not just about hurting someone physically. Bullying also includes harming people emotionally or verbally by spreading gossip and rumors, excluding them, putting them down, and texting harassing messages.



It's never okay. Bullying is not acceptable, no matter what. Knowing that it's not "normal" will make your tween more likely to seek help if needed. Have him think of a few people he could go to (a trusted teacher, an activity advisor, his school counselor).

There's safety in numbers.

Bullies aren't as likely to pick on someone with friends, so encourage him to walk with other kids in the hall and sit with people at lunch and on the bus. To build friendships, he might join a club or partner with classmates for projects. 👍

Coming up: Standardized tests

Standardized tests are one important way for schools to know how well they're teaching students and for students to know how well they're learning. Encourage your middle grader to do her best with these suggestions.

• **Make the most of in-class review.**

Many states have adopted new tests that require more critical thinking and problem solving, so it's important that she understand topics in depth. When teachers go over test material, she should pay close attention. If she needs a refresher, she can talk to her teacher and review her notes or textbook.

• **Take practice seriously.** Being familiar with the test format and types of questions will help her prepare. She should work as hard on practice problems and sample tests as she would on the real thing. She'll exercise skills that will help her on test day, such as analyzing, comparing, and explaining. 👍



Parent to Parent

Build responsibility

Recently, my friend said she's having her seventh grader learn to do practical things like iron his clothes and make his own dental appointments. Her feeling is that her son is "in training" to be an adult—and he should start now.



I had never thought of it that way. But that made sense, so I decided to have my son, Charlie, begin taking on tasks that I usually did for him. For instance, when his bike had a flat tire, I showed him how to pump it up. The next time a tire was low, he did it himself.

Likewise, when it was time to change his sheets, I suggested that he learn to do it. I can't say he was excited, but after doing it together twice, we added it to his weekly chores. His sheets might not look as neat as when I did it, but I'm glad he has chalked up another life skill—and is becoming more responsible. 👍

Q & A Together for dinner

Q Now that our kids are older, it's hard to get them to the dinner table, much less keep them there enjoying conversation with us. What do you suggest?

A This is a common problem in today's hectic world. Try sitting down with your calendars, and write in dinnertimes that will work. If possible, be flexible with timing to accommodate work and activity schedules. Then, let your children know

that dinner is part of their agenda just as soccer and play practice are.

Once you're at the table, make it enjoyable to be there. Keep conversations light, and avoid bringing up unpleasant subjects like bad behavior or poor grades. Instead, think of topics to spark fun conversations, such as reminiscing about favorite childhood toys or asking about the funniest things that happened that day.

And one last thing: Keep the television off and cell phones in another room so you can focus on what's important—each other! 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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