

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Being assertive

Does your middle grader know how to assert herself?

Have her practice clearly expressing what she needs. If a friend borrowed her sweatshirt and hasn't returned it, she could call and say, "I need it back by tomorrow morning, please." As she gets more comfortable speaking up for herself, her confidence will grow.

Extra reading time

Try this idea to get your middle grader to read more. Consider letting him stay up 15 or 30 minutes later if he spends that time reading for pleasure. Read in the living room as a family, or he can read in bed. You might even like to read the same book, then discuss it when you're finished.

DID YOU KNOW?

Companies spend billions of dollars marketing to kids. Help your child be a savvy consumer by encouraging her to notice product placements, such as candy bars as characters in video games or soda cups on TV reality shows. When she spots one, discuss whether it influences her and how she thinks it affects others.

Worth quoting

"Deal with the faults of others as gently as with your own."
Chinese proverb

Just for fun

Q: When is a black cat very bad luck?

A: When you're a mouse.



Typical tween behavior

As your child goes through the middle grades, you can see the rapid changes his body is making. But his brain is also changing, causing normal tween behaviors like these.



Push-pull

You might notice that your youngster wants to venture off and do his own thing—but still look back to see that you are there. This gives him security and comfort. So let him have space and spend time with friends, but don't assume he doesn't need you. Ask about his life regularly, and attend his school or extracurricular activities when you can. Also, plan fun times together to keep him in touch with family.

Mood swings

One minute your child is cooperative and pleasant, willing to vacuum the car or play with his little brother. The next, he's slumped on the couch, communicating only with grunts or shrugs. Tween moods tend to shift quickly and without warning! You can help by staying calm and

upbeat. And where possible, save serious conversations ("We need to talk about your grades") for when he's in a more receptive mood.

Risk-taking

Middle graders don't always stop and think before acting. The good news is that you still have influence over your youngster and can motivate him to make good decisions. Bring up important topics often, and be clear about your position. *Example:* "I've heard kids are sharing prescription medications. That concerns me because it's dangerous and illegal." He will likely be listening more than you know. 👍

You've got my attention

Concentrating in class not only lets your child learn—it can also prevent her from distracting others. Share these creative strategies for staying tuned in:

- Picture an imaginary tunnel between you and the teacher as she talks. Purposely ignore anything that happens outside of the "tunnel," like a classroom door opening or students whispering behind you.
- Make predictions, and listen to see if you're right. For instance, predict what will happen next in the presidential campaign the teacher is discussing.
- Use the SLANT method: **S**it up in your chair, **L**isten, **A**sk questions, **N**od when you understand, and **T**rack the teacher as she speaks. 👍



Learn with homework

Learning doesn't end when the last bell rings. Help your child get as much as possible out of homework with these tips.

Be ready. Have your tween gather everything she needs before she begins working. She'll learn more if she doesn't have to stop to sharpen pencils, search for her dictionary, or call a friend to find out which problems she's supposed to do. *Tip:* For handy reference, she might bookmark class websites and links to electronic textbooks.



Make it relate. When your middle grader has choices in her assignments, encourage her to think about her interests. For instance, if she has to write word problems for math, she could make them about fashion or music. If she needs examples of natural resources for an economics report, she can look at the country her grandparents came from.

Start the timer. Suggest that your child pick one specific task (making an outline) and set a time limit (10 minutes). That will help her get going, and accomplishing something may energize her to continue. 👍



Forecast: A fit winter

Don't let chilly weather keep your family from being active this winter. Stay fit—and have fun together—with these three ideas.

1. Go sledding. Balancing and steering a sled, and walking back up the hills, will give muscles a workout. Your child could pull a younger sibling on a sled, too.



2. Think summer. Try traditional warm weather activities like Frisbee or badminton in your backyard or at a park. For a real summery experience, find your beach towels and swimsuits, and go to an indoor pool.

3. Create a fitness course. Does your area get a lot of snow? As your youngster shovels, he can pack the snow into obstacles like mounds to climb and mazes to navigate. In a milder climate, he might build a course on grass with cones to run around and hula hoops to jump in and out of. Time each other going through your course. 👍

Q&A

Curing the “gimmies”

Q My son wants everything he sees. How can I teach him that there are limits on what he can have?

A At this age, your child knows the difference between needs and wants—but he might not always think about it. Remind him of choices you make in your household. For instance, the water bill must be paid to keep your water running, but getting a new gym bag may have to wait.

Having your son pay for his own wants will help teach him the value of money. Perhaps he gets an allowance or earns cash from odd jobs. He will quickly see the results of his financial decisions. For example, if he buys too many smoothies and doesn't have money to see a movie with friends, maybe he will make better choices down the road. 👍



Parent to Parent

How to boost critical thinking

During my recent job search, I learned that critical thinking is a key skill employers look for. So when I heard about a free seminar on the topic, I decided to go. As the presenter spoke, I realized the information could help my eighth grader, Josie.

For instance, critical thinkers analyze situations from different viewpoints. I told Josie that I'd heard our school district was considering later start times for students, and I asked her opinion. She thought it was a great idea (of course—she would get to sleep later!), but then

I asked why people might be against it. She thought about it and said a later schedule might interfere with after-school activities or jobs.

I also learned that critical thinkers ask a lot of questions and reflect on how and why things happen. When Josie mentioned a famous battle her class studied, I asked, “Which side did you agree with?”

and “Why do you think the other side felt they were right?”

The end result of all this? Better discussions for us, and better thinking for her! 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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