

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Meet the teachers

Touching base with your child's teachers at the beginning of the year helps establish a relationship that makes it easier to communicate later. Attend a back-to-school night or parent orientation session. If you can't make it, send emails or notes to introduce yourself and share a little about your middle grader.

Last word

Does your tween insist on having the last word during disagreements? If so, try working on her conflict resolution skills. The next time there's an argument, suggest compromising—and letting it go. ("Both of us should've remembered to return the movie. Let's put a reminder on the door next time.")

Family time—on foot

When your child is going somewhere within walking distance, consider joining him for a walk instead of driving him. You might head to the library or to the store for project supplies. You'll both get some exercise and a chance to catch up.

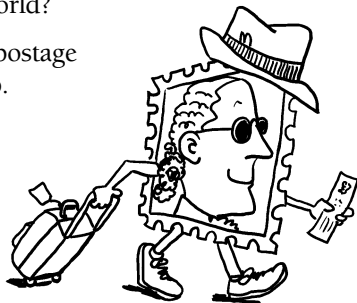
Worth quoting

"Kindness is always fashionable."
Amelia Edith Barr

Just for fun

Q: What stays in the corner but travels the world?

A: A postage stamp.



A+ organizing

What's one of the biggest differences between elementary school and middle school? A greater need for organization! With multiple courses and more homework, your tween can benefit from strategies like these to keep her stuff straight.

Locker

An organized locker will help your tween quickly grab what she needs. It's a good idea to place textbooks in the order of her classes on a shelf with the spines showing. A shoebox could store extra supplies like pens, erasers, and calculator batteries. Periodically, she should clear out clutter and take home items she isn't using.

Homework area

Whether your middle grader works at a desk or the kitchen table, keeping supplies handy will make study time more efficient. Perhaps she'll arrange them in a shower caddy or in clear jars. Also, have



her develop a system for storing old tests and assignments. She might cover empty cereal boxes with construction paper and label one for each subject.

Backpack

Busy students tend to dump everything into their backpacks and leave it there. Suggest that your child clean out her bag after school every Friday. Soon it'll become a habit, and she'll be ready for a fresh start each Monday. 👍

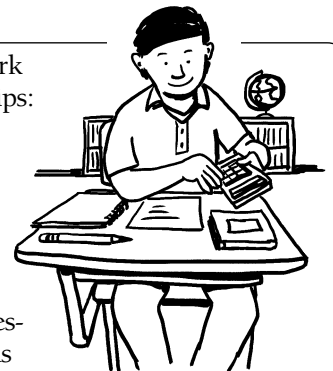
All set for class

Being ready before class starts lays the groundwork for your child to do his best in school. Share these tips:

■ Suggest that he get out books, notebooks, and supplies when he takes his seat. Preparing to pay attention right away will help him focus and catch important information announced when class begins.

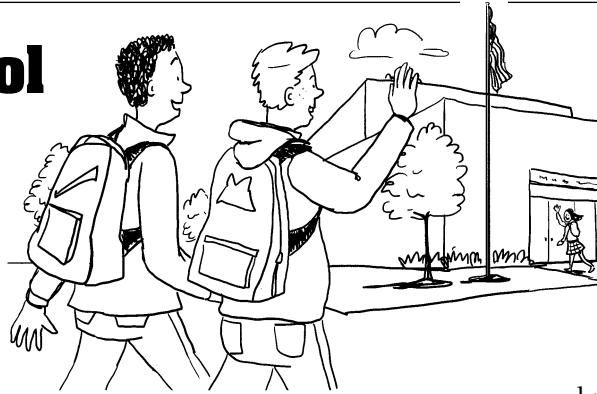
■ If he has time before the bell rings, he might skim yesterday's notes or textbook chapter. Doing so can jog his memory and help him participate in class discussions.

After he does homework each night, he could peek ahead to the next day's lesson. That way, he'll be prepared for what the teacher will be presenting. 👍



It's a middle school social life

Feeling accepted is important for middle graders. But your tween's classes might be filled with students he's never met, and old friends may have moved away or made new friends. Here is advice that can make it easier to navigate the changing social scene.



Be approachable. Tell your child to think of everyone he meets as a potential friend. By smiling and saying hi in the halls or cafeteria, he could strike up conversations with people he may want to spend more time with.

Make (and keep) plans. Suggest that your youngster take a chance and invite new friends over for pizza and a movie on a

weekend, for instance. It's best to plan ahead—if he waits until Friday afternoon to ask, they might already have plans. *Tip:* Encourage him to stick to his plans (even if something better comes up) so people know he's reliable.

Think of conversation starters. Help your tween come up with topics to talk about so he won't feel tongue-tied. Staying up-to-date on music or sports can give him things to discuss that other kids are likely to be interested in. Also, include him in adult conversations so he'll hear potential topics. 👍



Q & A Word wise

Q I've heard that a good vocabulary makes students better readers and writers. How can my daughter increase hers?

A You're right—a bigger vocabulary lets your middle grader understand more of what she reads and gives her new words to choose from when she speaks and writes.



Encourage her to use words she learns in school on a regular basis. Make it into a game by having her track how many times she says a new science term for a week—and then she can try to beat her "score" by using a social studies term the next week.

When she studies, she might have fun illustrating new words (say, a brick wall for a *barricade*). Or she could list related words, such as *police* and *cautious* for *vigilant*. Hanging the pictures or lists over her desk can make the words become familiar—and a part of her vocabulary. 👍

Jazzed about learning

Help your child find fresh ways to get motivated for a new school year. Try these three suggestions.

1. Talk about how classes will help her outside of school. For example, an economics unit could help her manage money. Or if she's learning Spanish, she'll be able to talk to neighbors or storekeepers who speak Spanish.
2. Enthusiasm is contagious, so show excitement about what your tween is studying. Ask about math topics she's working on, or let her describe a new form of poetry that she read.
3. Point out connections to current events and the latest technology. You might show her an article about the Mars rover if she's studying the solar system or suggest that she look for a drawing app if she's taking art. 👍



Parent to Parent Cyber "health"

I was surprised when I took my son Sam for a checkup and our pediatrician brought up cyber safety. My friends all seem to have different rules for their kids about computers and phones, so I was interested in hearing the doctor's thoughts. He said he is in favor of keeping laptops in the family room or kitchen where parents can supervise children online, and he thinks it's a good idea to set up parental controls on kids' phones.

At home, I brought up the issue again with Sam. I told him that he isn't allowed to share personal

information or chat with strangers online. And I explained that because it's my job to make sure he's safe, I need to be around when he uses the computer. He doesn't have a phone yet, but when he gets one, I'm going to look into the safety features that are available.

It was good to hear this information from someone we trust. Now even though his friends might not have the same rules as he does, at least my son got to hear the doctor's professional opinion. 👍



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 CCH Incorporated
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com
www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5540

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

School: An everyday thing

Make sure your child knows you expect her to go to school every day, even if she's "too tired" or "needs a break." Review the school attendance policy together, and discuss acceptable reasons to be absent (illness, family emergency). *Tip:* Point out that missing even one day can lead to lots of make-up work—that might make it less appealing to miss class time.

Fall for fun

Looking for a weekend family outing? Take advantage of autumn with fun seasonal activities. You might attend a nearby harvest festival, go apple picking, watch a high school football game, or drive scenic routes to view changing leaves. It could be the start of a tradition to celebrate each new season together!

Code games

Help your tween practice logical thinking by creating and deciphering codes. Suggest that each family member invent a secret code using a symbol for every letter of the alphabet. (Example: A = ♥, B = ♪, C = □.) Write coded messages, trade papers, and see who cracks a code first.

Worth quoting

"The important thing is not to stop questioning." *Albert Einstein*

Just for fun

Q: What do you get if you cross a skunk with a boomerang?

A: A terrible smell you can't get rid of!



Rules that work

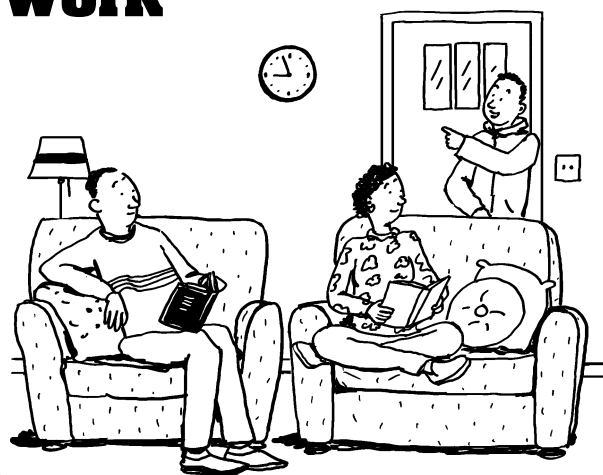
Your tween may be growing up, but he still needs the security that discipline provides. Setting rules and consequences can help him stay safe and feel cared for, even if he doesn't act like it. Consider these ideas.

Spell it out

As your child finds himself in new situations, he may make assumptions that you don't like. To prevent problems, go over guidelines in advance. For instance, you might want him to call if he's at a friend's house and the parents invite him to go somewhere. That way, you can say yes or no. *Note:* Explain why you're setting this rule. ("We might have other plans, and you wouldn't be home when we needed you.")

Choose consequences carefully

Holding your tween accountable shows him you're serious about your rules. Decide ahead of time what will happen if he breaks one, and be sure he knows what that is. It works best if you pick a consequence that's related to his



behavior—and, of course, one that you can enforce. *Example:* If he plays video games and doesn't finish his chores, video games are off limits for two days.

Expand privileges

As your middle schooler shows he can be trusted, you can reevaluate his limits and consider giving him more freedom. But make it clear that those liberties may be revoked if he slides back. For instance, you might allow a later curfew if he consistently keeps the one you set and still has more than enough time for sleep. 👍

Stay on top of math

Since each new math concept builds on previous ones, it's important for your middle grader to keep up. These strategies can help.

■ **Work backward.** When she's not sure how to approach a homework problem, suggest that she look for a similar problem that's already solved in her book or online. By starting with the answer, she could do the sample problem in reverse to see how each step led to the solution.

■ **Pinpoint mistakes.** Encourage your child to pay careful attention when teachers go over returned assignments and tests. That way, she can learn where she made errors and how to correct them. If she's still confused, she should arrange to meet with her teacher. 👍



Research: Dig in

The amount of information available to your child increases rapidly every day. That means good research skills are crucial. Share these ways to help her gather the facts she needs.

Focus on key questions. Have her set up a system that helps her concentrate on finding the relevant information. For example, she could draw a vertical line to divide a sheet of paper in half. In the left column, she should write the questions she needs to answer. Then, as she works through library books, textbooks, newspapers, or websites, she can fill in the answers in the right column.



Take notes actively. Encourage your middle grader to write particularly interesting facts or words on individual sticky notes. For instance, if she's researching Roald Dahl, she could write, "Gobblefunk: Dahl's own language." As she writes her paper, these words can act as reminders and spark ideas. She might also sketch as she researches—for instance, drawing Orion's Belt when reading about constellations—so she has a reference point later.

Tip: Writing down her sources as she goes will make compiling a bibliography easier. It will also speed up fact-checking or finding additional information. Suggest that your child keep a list in her notebook or in a computer file. 👍

Know what's up

Being part of your youngster's school experience can help him succeed, even in the middle grades. Here's how to stay in the loop.

Stay informed

Ask how the school, PTA or PTO, teachers, and advisers send out announcements. You might join the PTO Facebook page, a teacher's email list, or a sports team's phone tree. If you don't have computer access, provide another way to be contacted.

Watch for opportunities

Check announcements frequently. Requests for help will probably vary. You can choose those that fit your interests and availability—say, painting at Family Art Night or contributing a dish for social studies Greek Day.



Talk about it

Mention events to your tween that you hear about, like a fall dance or a debate tournament. Keeping an eye on happenings at his school shows support, even if you're not directly involved. 👍

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 CCH Incorporated
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com
www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5540

Q & A

Seeing the glass half full

Q My son tends to be a "glass half empty" kind of person. How can I encourage him to be more optimistic?

A Having a positive outlook will help your son feel happier, cope with stress better, and be more pleasant. Even if he's not naturally optimistic, he can develop a brighter way of seeing things.

Lead the way by looking for the good in situations. You might say, "It's going to be a busy day, but I'll feel great getting so much done!" To inspire him to do the same, prompt him to look on the bright side when things don't go as planned. ("We could work on our puzzle together since your baseball game was rained out.") Eventually, he may pick up the habit.

Also, help your child see setbacks as temporary and recognize things he can fix. Say he doesn't do well on a test. Point out that it doesn't mean he won't do well on future tests, and have him make a plan to improve. 👍



Parent to Parent

An earth-friendly party

My daughter Sarah wanted to throw a surprise birthday party for her best friend, but she didn't have much money to spend. I had heard of "zero waste" parties that not only help the environment, but also keep costs down since you don't buy many supplies. The idea is not to have any trash left that can't be recycled or reused.

I told Sarah about this, and she decided to try it. First, instead of buying and mailing invitations, she made

a free invitation online and emailed it. She also asked everyone to bring food—and, in keeping with the "green" theme, to use recyclable containers.

For the party, she used real plates, silverware, and cups instead of buying paper or plastic ones. She and another girl even decorated an old sheet to use as a tablecloth.

Her friend enjoyed the party, and Sarah liked making her friend's birthday special by being good to the earth—and not spending much! 👍

