

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Take five

Spending just five minutes a day talking to your tween can help you stay connected. After work or before bedtime, try starting a conversation by sharing information about your own day. Then, pause and wait quietly for a moment—your child is likely to share something about hers.

### Staying in school

Habits that lead to dropping out of high school often begin in the middle grades, which means parents can help by stepping in early. If your youngster skips classes, is failing math or English, or often gets in trouble, talk to his school counselor. Working together to come up with a plan can help make sure your child graduates.

### Illustrated notes

Your middle schooler has probably heard the phrase “A picture is worth a thousand words.” It’s good advice that she can apply to note-taking. Suggest that she occasionally draw sketches while her teacher talks. She can include more detail in a shorter amount of time, and seeing a drawing may help her remember the information more easily.

### Worth quoting

“Never mistake motion for action.”  
Ernest Hemingway

### Just for fun

**Q:** What breaks when you talk?

**A:** Silence!



## Working in a group

From slide shows to skits, group projects are often a big part of middle school. Doing assignments with classmates can teach your tween about teamwork and prepare him to work with colleagues when he grows up. Share these tips.

**Build on ideas.** The best ideas are often those that people come up with together. Explain to your child that when his group is choosing a topic or format for a project, it’s good to suggest as many ideas as possible. One person might take part of a classmate’s idea and tweak it or add to it. For instance, they can’t interview world leaders, but they may be able to talk to a local historian who is an expert on their subject.

**Use talents.** Group members should consider each other’s strengths and interests when dividing up the work. Your middle schooler can ask them to discuss what they’re good at and what they like to do. For instance, a student newspaper



reporter could interview someone, while a child who loves art might create graphics for a slide show.

**Stay “professional.”** Tweens tend to have drama in their social lives. Group meetings will be more productive—and the project will probably turn out better—if they avoid discussing outside conflicts. If a work-related problem crops up (say, one member isn’t pulling his weight), they can address it professionally by using a sentence that starts with “I.” *Example:* “I feel like some people are doing more than others. Let’s review our jobs.” 👍

## Family time with tweens

With a little creativity, you can find winter activities that your middle grader will enjoy doing with you. Build family bonds with these suggestions:

- Have an indoor “cookout.” Ask your child to put together a playlist of beach music and come up with a menu of traditional summer foods (hot dogs, macaroni salad). She could also plan an activity such as a beanbag-toss tournament or hula-hoop contest.

- Take a hike. Let your youngster select a park or trail that she finds interesting. It might have historical significance or be in a wildlife preservation area, for example. Pack thermoses of hot chocolate, and have her play tour guide. She can tell you why she chose that spot and point out landmarks or animals as you hike. 👍

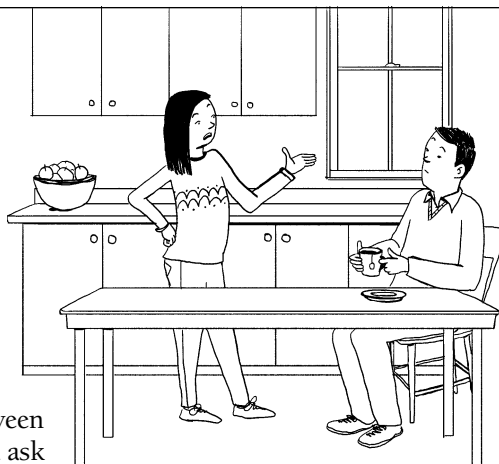


# Respectful relationship

Your child is polite and respectful one minute, and rude and sarcastic the next. While it's natural for her to test your limits, she still needs to treat you with respect. Try the following strategies.

## Be consistent

Respond the same way each time your tween is disrespectful. If she talks back, you might ask her to start over or to go to her room until she can be nice. If she snaps at you in a store, you could have her wait for you somewhere safe (like the checkout) or just end the trip early and go home.



## Say ouch

It's okay to let your youngster know you're human. You might say, "It hurts my feelings when you mutter under your breath" or "It makes me angry when you interrupt me." Being aware of how disrespectful behavior affects you may encourage her to think twice.

## Give alternatives

Instead of telling your child what *not* to say, explain what she *should* say. Also, remind her that her tone matters just as much as—if not more than—her words. For instance, "Thanks, I heard about that" sounds nicer than "Duh!" And "I understand that's important to you" is better than "Whatever." 👍

# Where in the world?

A good grasp of geography is about more than just being able to locate places on a map. It can also make your middle grader more aware of the world around him and help him understand events. Here are two ideas.

1. Hang up a world map, and have family members find places they hear or read about. They can write facts on sticky notes and put them on the correct locations on the map. For example, if your tween sees a documentary about the *Titanic*, he might locate the spots on the map where it sailed from, where it sank, and where it was headed.



2. Explore Google Maps. Your child can zoom in on your house, his favorite team's stadium, and even the Great Wall of China. Encourage him to learn more about the places he looks at. He could look up the weather for each location, find out its population, and see what time zone it's in. 👍

## Q & A

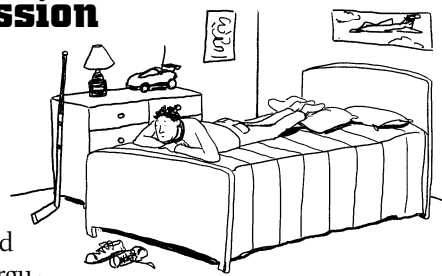
# Recognizing depression

**Q** Lately, my son has been avoiding hanging out with friends, and he doesn't seem to have much energy. Could he be depressed?

**A** Children can indeed suffer from depression. While it's common for a child this age to get upset over issues like an argument with a friend or not making the tennis team, he should be able to move on within a few days. If he stays upset for a couple of weeks or longer, something deeper may be going on.

Pay attention to symptoms like being quieter or more irritable than usual, a lack of energy, a loss of interest in favorite activities, big changes in sleeping or eating habits, and complaints of headaches or stomachaches.

If your son doesn't seem like himself, trust your instincts, and have him checked. Talk to his pediatrician or school psychologist. They can determine whether your youngster is depressed and discuss ways to help him. 👍



## Activity Corner

# Word-smart activities

To communicate well, your tween needs a good vocabulary. These activities can increase the number of words she knows.

## Word chain

Choose two words whose meanings have little or nothing in common (*lemon*, *calculator*). Write one at the top of a piece of paper and the other at the bottom. The goal is to make a word chain that connects the two words by a succession of related words in between. For example, you might come up with: lemon, lime,

tree, paper, pencil, calculator. *Idea:* Have players explain their reasoning for each word they choose. (Keep a dictionary and thesaurus handy for reference.)

## Vocabulary bookmarks

When your middle grader comes across a new word while reading, suggest that she write it on a homemade bookmark. She can add the word and its definition to a strip of paper or an index card—and then start a new bookmark as she fills each one. Seeing the words every time she uses the bookmark will help her remember them. 👍



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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