

Middle Years

Working together for school success



Short Stops

Holiday teamwork

If your family celebrates a winter holiday, invite your tween to help with preparations. The bonding time can create special memories. You might work side-by-side to bake, wrap gifts, or decorate. Let your child know how much you enjoy her company—and her help!

Be a travel agent

Boost your youngster's imagination and research skills. Ask him to pretend he's traveling back in time to drum up tourism for an ancient city like Troy or Alexandria. He can read books and websites to learn what might attract visitors (theater performances, athletic competitions, poetry readings) and then design a travel brochure.

Hygiene habits

Middle school is a good time for you and your children to evaluate their hygiene routines. At this age, they'll start to sweat more, so they'll need to work harder to keep their skin clean. Introduce habits like washing their faces morning and night and wearing deodorant.

Worth quoting

"Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it."

Samuel Johnson

Just for fun

Q: What's the worst thing that can happen to a geography teacher?

A: Getting lost.



Acts of kindness

It's free, it can be big or small, and it can make your child feel good whether she gets it or gives it away. What is it? Kindness!

Middle graders who are considerate get along better with classmates and adults. They also tend to be happier and feel better about themselves. Foster kindness with these ideas.



Talk about why

Tell your child that when you help others, it benefits you as well as the person you're helping. You can get your mind off your own problems and feel good about making a difference. Plus, kindness makes life better for people in your youngster's school and community. Ask her to look for examples (a teacher helping parents learn English, a neighbor clearing snow from community sidewalks).

Take action

Encourage your middle grader to be kind whenever possible. For example, if there is a new student in her classes, ask her how she might feel if she was new. Putting herself in someone else's shoes makes it easier to be compassionate.

Then, she can think of ways to make the new girl feel welcome, such as introducing herself or sitting with her at an assembly. Also, suggest that she ask the school counselor if her school provides ways to help others (collecting books for needy children, for instance) and then participate.

Celebrate kindness

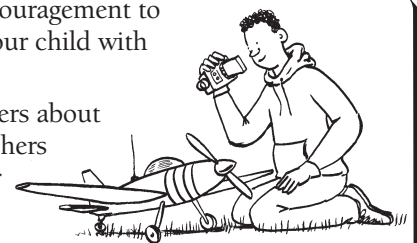
Highlight your child's kind behavior when you see it. You might say, "That was so nice of you to put away your brother's laundry while he's sick." Or declare "Kindness Week" at your house. Family members can write down random acts of kindness they see each other do. At the end of the week, take turns reading them out loud at dinner. Try to guess which family member did each one. 👍

Achievement boosters

Middle schoolers sometimes need extra encouragement to do their best. Create learning enthusiasm in your child with strategies like these:

■ Suggest that your youngster talk to his teachers about creative approaches to assignments. Some teachers may allow students to use different formats for projects. For example, your teen might make a video, do a slide show, or interview an expert.

■ Encourage him to use subjects he likes to help him do better in those he's less enthusiastic about. If he loves science but isn't fond of writing, for instance, he might write a science fiction story for a creative-writing assignment. 👍



Passing the test

A test can show your child—and his teacher—how much he has learned. But if he gets confused by the way a question is phrased or leaves an important point out of an essay, his grade might not reflect what he knows.

Share these techniques for tackling different types of questions with confidence.

True or false

■ Read the whole statement. If any part is incorrect, the answer is “false.” The entire statement must be accurate for the answer to be “true.”

■ Take a guess. If there’s no penalty for wrong answers, select the answer that makes the most sense, even if you’re not sure. You have a 50 percent chance of getting it right.



Multiple choice

■ Predict the answer. Before you read the choices, have an answer in mind. You’re less likely to get tripped up by answers that aren’t quite right.

■ Consider “all of the above.” If you’re sure more than one of the responses is correct, then all of them may be right.

Essay

■ Identify key words. Pay attention to whether the question calls for you to “compare,” “analyze,” “summarize,” or “explain.” Base your answer on what you are being asked to do.

■ Make an outline. Having a quick plan will help you focus on the main ideas and not forget a point you want to make in your answer. 👍

Parent to Parent

Which activity?

When my son Peter started middle school, I wanted him to find an after-school activity so he could try something new.

I suggested that he get a list of activities from the school office. He also talked to his buddies about groups they participated in. We were both surprised at the variety! There was a foreign-language club, drama program, yearbook staff, and debate team.

My son went through the list and starred the ones he most wanted to try. Together, we went over the time commitment for each of his favorites.

Peter decided to join the yearbook staff with his friend Ratul, and so far, he loves it. I’m happy he’s involved in a new activity, and he’s excited to be busy after school. 👍



Technology time-out

Between TV, computers, and phones, most teens and tweens spend a lot of time using technology. Try these tips to encourage moderation:

■ Set an example by unplugging on purpose. You might put your cell phone away during dinner and shut down your laptop while your family is watching a movie together. Explain that you can’t pay attention to family while you’re texting or emailing.

■ Make it clear that homework comes first. Consider checking finished work before your child turns on the TV or plays a video game. If she’s using a computer for homework, she should sign out of instant-message programs and social-networking sites.

■ Have a screen-time limit—experts recommend no more than two hours a day—and let your middle grader decide how to use it (texting, surfing the Internet). You might insist that she spend one hour being active (walking the dog, shooting baskets) for each hour she spends in front of a screen. 👍



Q & A Young love

Q My eighth-grade daughter has her first boyfriend, and they see each other a lot. How should I handle the situation?

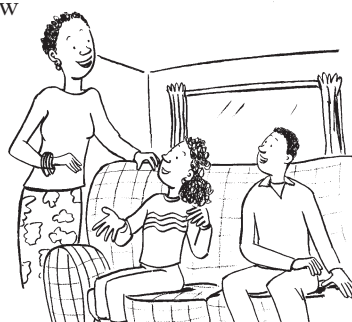
A Let your daughter know that you’re happy for her. She’ll be more likely to come to you with questions or concerns if she feels like you’re on her side.

Consider making rules about where she and her boyfriend can go. You might insist on group

dates in public places, like roller skating or movies with friends. Also, encourage her to invite him home so you can get to know this special person in her life.

Tell your daughter that even though she wants to be with him,

it’s important for her to spend time with family, too. Also, she should continue talking to her girlfriends and hanging out with them. If she “drops” them for her boyfriend, she could end up losing valuable friendships. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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