

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### ► Everyday reading

Keep your child interested in reading with a daily “show and tell.” During dinner or before bed, each person can talk about something he read that day (chapter of a book, magazine article, report for work). Knowing that others read regularly can encourage your middle schooler to do the same.

### ► Handbook review

Go over your youngster’s student handbook together. That way, you’ll both be aware of important school information, like attendance policies, dress code, technology use, and bus and cafeteria rules. Since the handbook may change slightly from year to year, it’s a good idea to review it each fall.

### ► Keeping promises

Middle graders want to be trusted. Let your child know that the best way to build trust is for her to keep her word. For example, she should come home at the agreed-upon time. Or if she borrows a friend’s sweater, she should return it when she promised she would—and in the same condition.

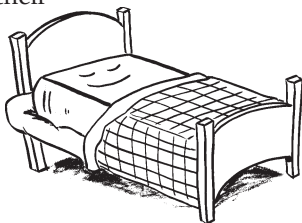
### ► Worth quoting

“The beginning is always today.”  
*Mary Wollstonecraft*

### ► Just for fun

**Q:** Where do books sleep?

**A:** Under their covers.



## Steps to a smooth year

Whether your child is just beginning middle school or returning for another year, you can help her get off to a successful start. Try these steps:

**1.** Attend back-to-school events. Teachers often go over grading policies and discuss how much homework to expect. Take notes and share them with your youngster when you get home. Also, teachers may ask you to fill out a card with your contact information and something you want them to know about your middle grader. You might mention a strength, weakness, or favorite hobby—anything that will help the teacher connect with your child.

**2.** Provide support. Middle schoolers can be nervous about a new year. Will the work be too hard? Will they have friends in their classes or their lunch period? Together, brainstorm ways your child can feel more comfortable. For example, she might find out about



extra-help sessions before and after school. Or she could call a friend and make plans to sit together in the cafeteria.

**3.** Set up supplies. Suggest that your middle grader use separate folders and notebooks for each class. She might color-code them (English = purple, science = green) so she can spot them quickly. At home, help her stock a workstation with pens, pencils, pencil sharpener, paper, ruler, calculator, and reference books (dictionary, atlas). Having her supplies handy will let her stay focused on her work. 👍

## What’s on the agenda?

Most middle graders use a student planner or an agenda book. Here’s how both of you can make the most of this valuable tool.

■ Your child should write down homework assignments, upcoming tests, and due dates for projects. In addition, he should pencil in his activities (meetings, sports practice). Then, he can consult his planner to schedule homework time and study sessions.

■ Look over your middle schooler’s planner nightly, and sign it if required. Read assignments and ask about missing subjects in case he forgot to write something down. Also, you can respond to any comments from his teachers and perhaps leave an encouraging note for your youngster (“Good luck on your history test!”). 👍



# Learning from mistakes

Devon feels like he's ready for an oral report, so he decides he doesn't need to practice. But when he gets up in front of the class, he forgets a whole section.

When your child makes a mistake like this, you can help him learn from it. Try these suggestions.

**Pinpoint the error.** Encourage your youngster to figure out what he did wrong. Say he missed an easy math problem on a quiz. It's possible that he misread the question. Or he may have made a simple arithmetic error.



**Find solutions.** Together, talk about ways he can avoid making the same mistake in the future. For instance, he might read the test questions twice and double-check his work when he's finished.

**Lead by example.** Show your child how you deal with mistakes. You could make a light-hearted comment ("I guess we're lost after all") and then explain what you could do differently next time ("I'll print directions from MapQuest before we leave the house").

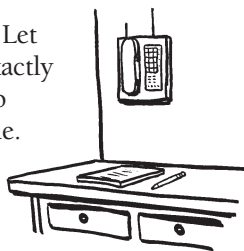
*Tip:* Remind your middle schooler that everyone makes mistakes. Learning to handle them now is a skill he can use throughout his life. 👍



## Alone after school?

School ends at 3:00, and you don't get home from work until 5:30. Can your middle grader stay home alone? If she isn't afraid and she usually follows rules, she may be okay unsupervised for a short time. Here are some ways to help her stay safe.

● **Provide structure.** Let your child know exactly what she should do when she gets home. *Examples:* call you to check in, make a snack, practice flute, do homework.



● **Set rules.** Your middle schooler should not answer the door, and she should never tell callers she's home alone. Instead, she might say, "My mom's busy. Can she call you back?" Spell out whether your child can use the computer, TV, or appliances (microwave, toaster).

● **Plan for emergencies.** Explain how to use a first-aid kit and what to do if there's a fire. Show your youngster where you keep flashlights, batteries, and a radio in case of a power outage. Also, post a list of emergency contacts by the phone (911, your work and cell numbers, neighbors). 👍

## Parent to Parent

### Curious questions

My child sometimes asks questions that I can't answer. For example, the other day she asked me why other countries use the metric system and we don't. And last week she wanted to know why leaves change color in the fall.

Unfortunately, I'm usually too busy to stop what I'm doing and help her look up answers—but I didn't want to discourage her curiosity. So I decided to post a "Questions we can't answer" board in our kitchen. Now anyone in our family can jot down what they want to know. When we have time, we look up information together in books or online at the library.

My daughter seems happy that I take her questions seriously—and she's excited that we're solving her "puzzles." I'm also pleasantly surprised by how many of my own questions teach us all something new! 👍



## Q & A An earth-friendly family

**Q** My son said his friends talk about "going green." What are some easy, inexpensive ways our family can help the environment?

**A** Learning to take care of the earth will teach your child responsibility and show him that he can make a difference.

Start by asking him for ideas, and have him find out what his friends' families are doing. Then, agree on one or two changes to make. If you start small, you'll be more likely to stick with your new routines.



For example, your family might switch to reusable water bottles so that you use less plastic. Also, consider buying local fruits and vegetables. This choice supports farms in your area and saves fuel because the food isn't shipped long distances. Other easy habits include using both sides of printer paper, taking shorter showers, and participating in community cleanup days.

*Tip:* For more ideas, have your son visit [www.epa.gov/newsroom/gogreen](http://www.epa.gov/newsroom/gogreen) or [www.scholastic.com/actgreen](http://www.scholastic.com/actgreen). 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

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

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