

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### On that note

Middle school courses cover a lot of ground.

Taking good notes will help your child keep up. Encourage her to write down key points instead of every word, noticing items the teacher emphasizes or repeats. Also, note taking will go faster if she uses shorthand like symbols, abbreviations, or the first letters of words (“&” for *and*, “imp” for *important*).

### Together time

Spending even a few minutes one-on-one with your middle grader each day will help you stay connected. Look for ways to make the time enjoyable. Invite him to show you how to do his latest Frisbee trick, for example, or tell him a funny story from your day.

### Meet the staff

Secretaries and other staff play huge roles in running your tween’s school—and they can be a terrific resource. Say hello when you’re in the office, and encourage your child to do the same. The staff will feel appreciated, and you’ll both feel more comfortable asking for help if you need something.

### Worth quoting

“The expert at anything was once a beginner.” *Helen Hayes*

### Just for fun

**Q:** When you lose something, why is it always in the last place you look?

**A:** Because when you find it, you stop looking!



## In gear for a new year

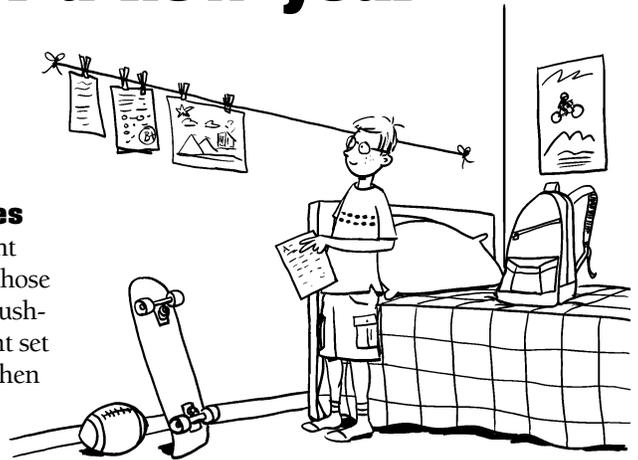
As the new school year gets under way, encourage your middle grader to set himself up for success with these strategies.

### Sticking to my routines

Let your tween experiment with routines until he finds those that work best. If he’s often rushing to catch the bus, he might set his alarm 5 minutes earlier, then 10 minutes earlier, until his mornings go smoothly. For his evening routine, perhaps he’ll do homework after dinner on days he has sports practices and right after school on other days. Once he has routines he likes, have him write them down so he’ll remember them.

### Expecting my best

Encourage your child to decide what he expects from himself. Where does he want to improve? He might focus on paying attention to detail if he lost points last year by not filling out science lab reports thoroughly. Or maybe he’ll create a plan for spreading out long-term projects so



he’s not scrambling at the last minute. He’ll gain satisfaction from a job well done when he follows through.

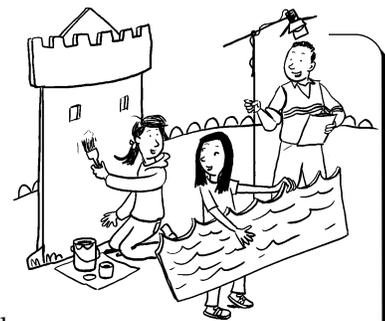
### Watching my progress

Suggest that your middle grader hang a school year “timeline” in his bedroom. He could string yarn from one corner to another and use clothespins to clip on assignments or tests he’s proud of. Perhaps he’ll display an essay on a favorite novel or a self-portrait he drew in art. Seeing his progress can motivate him to keep working hard. 👍

## Extra worth it

Are extracurricular activities worth the time when your tween has a lot on her plate? Share these reasons for giving them a try.

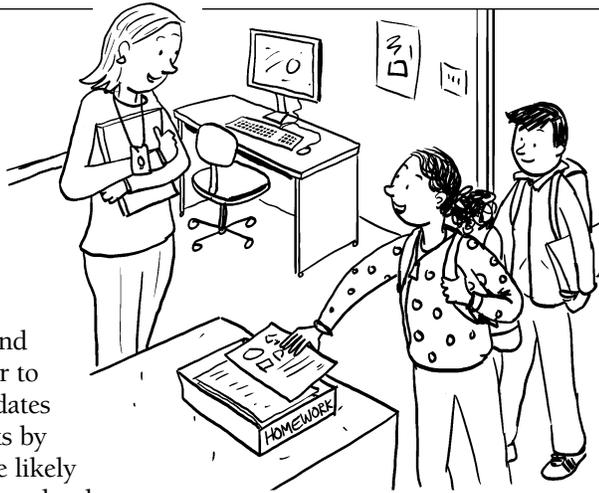
1. She’ll get to know classmates and teachers. As she builds sets in drama club, for example, she’ll bond with peers who have similar interests. And forming connections with club advisers can lead to networking for the future.
2. She’ll learn to set priorities. If her robotics club has a competition coming up, she’ll have to organize her study schedule around team meetings.
3. Gaining new skills will boost her confidence—and translate into school success. Playing doubles tennis encourages teamwork, for instance, while working on the yearbook helps with writing and editing. 👍



# Responsibility? It's all mine!

Tweens take on more responsibility in middle school. Help your child understand what she's responsible for now—and how she can meet her obligations.

**Do your work.** Teachers might not remind middle graders when homework is due or to hand it in. Your tween should write due dates in her planner and put completed projects by the front door. That way, she will be more likely to complete assignments and take them to school.



Or perhaps a teacher wants finished work placed in a tray. Your child might get in the habit of not sitting down until hers is turned in.

**Do your part.** When others depend on your tween, it's up to her to do her part. For group projects, she could meet with members to get work done and let them know how her section is coming along. To prepare for a band concert, she may set goals for her practice sessions.

Then, at concert time, her performance will be stronger, and she'll feel good about holding up her end. 👍

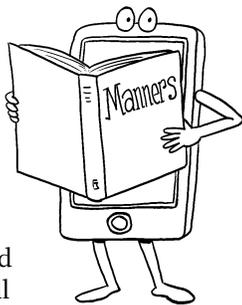
## Parent to Parent

### Mobile manners



I was in line with my son James at the store when his cell phone rang. He proceeded to carry on a conversation while the cashier rang up his purchase.

After we left, I told James it was rude to talk on his phone while he was being waited on. When he said, "Everyone does it," I knew it was a good time to discuss cell phone manners. I said people tend to talk loudly on their phones, disturbing others and turning private conversations into public ones.



James said he hadn't thought about it that way. He agreed to put his phone on vibrate when we're out and to return calls later. My son can't imagine what it was like growing up without cell phones. But I'm trying to help him understand that just because we have them, we don't need to use them all the time—and that good manners still apply. 👍

## Read to relax

Reading for pleasure can help your middle grader unwind—and has the added benefit of boosting reading skills along the way. Suggest these two ideas to encourage reading for fun.



### 1. Go on a "blind date"

Your child could swap books with friends using this interesting twist: Each person wraps a novel in paper and writes or draws clues about it. Everyone gets together and selects a book based on the clues. Then, they open it to reveal what book they have a "date" with.

### 2. Play reading bingo

Let your tween turn reading into a game by making a bingo card on a sheet of cardboard. In each box, have him write a reading category, such as mystery, science fiction, graphic novel, poetry, and autobiography. As he reads each type, he should X out a matching square. How quickly will he cross out a row? How about the whole bingo board? 👍

## On the same team

**Q** My oldest child just started middle school. Now that she has different teachers for each subject, how can I partner with all of them?

**A** To put faces with names, try attending an upcoming event to meet them, such as an open house or a curriculum night. You could also introduce yourself by writing a short message and copying and pasting it into an email for each teacher.



Either way, let them know you want to help your tween succeed, and ask what you can do to support her at home. Also, ask the teachers how they want to be approached (email, phone call, note).

Finally, find out if they want your child to come to them directly before you contact them. A middle school teacher may prefer that a student take the first step if she needs help or has a question. 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

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

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ISSN 1540-5540

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## Short Stops

### In the loop

You can stay involved in your tween's education from inside your own home. How? Make what's happening at school a regular topic of conversation. Visit the school website often, and check emails from teachers and the school district. Bring up subjects mentioned, such as school assemblies, or comment on photos that are posted.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Having good posture in class will help your middle schooler concentrate. Plus, it puts less strain on his back and lets him breathe better—increasing blood flow to his brain. He could practice while doing homework. Encourage him to sit up straight with his back touching the chair and his knees bent at a right angle.

### Fun historical facts

Want to spark your middle grader's interest in history? She could look in library books or online to find unusual stories about the people she studies. *Example:* Before the Civil War, Harriet Tubman once escaped capture by pretending to chase a flock of chickens.

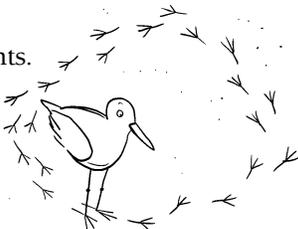
### Worth quoting

"Reach high, for stars lie hidden in your soul." *Pamela Vaull Starr*

### Just for fun

**Q:** "The more of me you make, the more of me you leave behind. What am I?"

**A:** Footprints.



## Tween push-and-pull

Your middle grader lets you into her world one minute, then seems to put up a "Keep Out" sign the next. She needs you—but at the same time, she's pushing away to figure out who she is and to become more independent. Try these ideas for handling classic "now I need you, now I don't" tween behavior.

**Challenge:** *Your child no longer tells you all about her life.*

**Solution:** Instead of pressing her for information, wait until she's in the mood to chat. If she opens up as you're heading to bed, consider staying up longer. Then, listen closely instead of immediately offering your opinion or ways to fix problems.

**Challenge:** *Your tween spends more time with friends and less time with family.*

**Solution:** It's normal for her to want to be with friends. To encourage family time, look for opportunities that appeal to her. Maybe you'll have breakfast together on weekdays or let her do your nails after she does hers.



**Challenge:** *Your middle grader is embarrassed by whatever you do.*

**Solution:** At this age, children want to fit in and are sensitive to what their peers think. Try not to take it personally, and remember that she'll outgrow it. In the meantime, notice what embarrasses your tween, and work around it if possible. For instance, if she doesn't like you hugging her good-bye in front of others, you might say "Love you" and walk away. 👍

## Musical learning

Most tweens love listening to music! Use your child's interest to boost his learning.

**1. Be a critic.** Suggest that he write reviews of favorite songs. He could bring songs to life with *similes*, or figures of speech that compare two things in an interesting way. *Example:* "The upbeat tempo is as thrilling as a roller coaster ride."

**2. Think like a songwriter.** Picking out the main message in the lyrics—the *theme*—will give your middle grader practice with a key reading skill. What message does the songwriter want to share? Invite your tween to search for songs with similar themes.

**3. Find the math.** Ask your child to choose a popular song. Can he detect a *pattern* in the lyrics (verse, chorus, verse) or the rhythm (say, the drumbeat)? How many times does the pattern repeat? 👍



# Stellar study techniques

Regularly reviewing textbooks and class notes helps information sink in and prepares your tween for tests without last-minute stress. Here are interesting ways he can study.

## Poster perfect

Suggest that your middle grader summarize a chapter's most important points on poster board or construction paper. Perhaps he'll model the lunar cycle for science or outline events in the Peloponnesian War for social studies.



Then, he could add graphics to illustrate the information. Using both words *and* drawings is a great way to cement information in his brain. *Tip:* He might hang finished posters on a wall for easy review.

## Game show

Have your child and his study buddies write review questions on separate slips of paper and put them in a bowl. A "host" can draw and ask questions. Players "buzz in" to answer by tapping the table. If the first person answers correctly, he earns a point. If not, the other players buzz in again. (*Note:* The host should consult the textbook or study guide to check answers.) Give everyone a turn as host, using a new set of questions each round. 👍



## Parent to Parent

### Financial sense

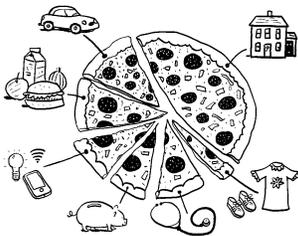
My 13-year-old, Alice, complained that she wanted the same clothes her friends have. But they're too expensive, and I wanted her to understand how we make financial decisions.

I had Alice draw a circle and told her to imagine it was a pizza. Then, I asked her to divide it into slices to represent our budget.

I explained that about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of our money goes to rent and almost  $\frac{1}{5}$  is for car expenses.

After Alice finished dividing up the pizza, she was surprised by how little was left for clothing. She realized that to spend more on clothes, she'd have to take something from another slice—and there really wasn't anyplace to do that.

Alice still wishes she could buy more clothes, but now she understands the reason. I hope this lesson helps when she has to manage her own money "pizza" someday. 👍



## Living in a diverse world

In school, in college, or on the job, your child will meet and work with people of various backgrounds and abilities. Share these strategies for embracing diversity:

- Point out that cultural differences make life more interesting. A classmate from another heritage might invite her to participate in a tradition with her family or introduce her to foods that taste and smell different. Then, have your tween do the same to share her background.
- Encourage your middle grader to connect with classmates who speak other languages. She can ask them to teach her words and phrases and then try using them in conversation.
- Let your tween know you expect her to show respect toward everyone. She could sit down to chat with a student in a wheelchair (rather than towering over the person). Also, she should smile and say hello when walking by people with disabilities—the same way she would with anyone else—rather than ignoring them. 👍



## Q & A Sticking with it

**Q** My son gets frustrated when schoolwork isn't easy for him.

*How could I motivate him to keep trying?*

**A** It's important for your son to believe he can succeed when something is difficult.

First, have him think of a situation where he struggled and then made progress. Maybe he became a better Little League pitcher from one season to the next. Ask him what steps he took to accomplish that.

He might recall that a coach gave him feedback on his stance and that he practiced hard until he improved.

In the same way, he can overcome obstacles with schoolwork. To understand a tough science concept, he might ask his teacher for extra help and look up fun related experiments to try at home.

Finally, suggest phrases he could say to himself to stay motivated, such as, "I'll get this if I keep at it." 👍



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