

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Thinking of you

It's comforting for children to know their parents care about the ins and outs of their daily lives. Try leaving a short, unexpected note where your middle grader will find it. Or send an email or text to show interest. ("Good luck on your math test tomorrow" or "Have a great Tuesday!")

### Too good to be true?

Advertisements often promise more than companies can deliver. Ask your tween to read the fine print carefully. What does she find out? She'll sharpen her critical thinking and reading comprehension skills as she evaluates the promises and the exceptions. Plus, she'll learn consumer smarts!

### Homegrown cooperation

When you need to do a big job around the house like reorganizing the attic or scrubbing the baseboards, have everyone pitch in. It will teach your child to cooperate and help him see the benefits of working together, such as getting more done in less time. *Idea:* Plan a fun activity to celebrate your accomplishment.

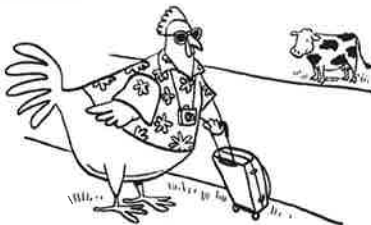
### Worth quoting

"It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters." *Epictetus*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did the cow cross the road?

**A:** Because the chicken was on vacation!



## My actions, my responsibility

For your tween to take personal responsibility, it's important that he own up to his actions and keep his commitments. Help him learn this valuable lesson with these tips for handling common excuses.

### Admit mistakes

It's typical for kids this age to immediately deny wrongdoing. ("Who left the refrigerator open?" "Not me!") They do so to keep from getting into trouble—and to protect their pride. Your middle grader will be more willing to admit mistakes if you don't overreact when he does confess. Instead, use a neutral tone, and give a gentle reminder for minor offenses. ("Let's all try to keep the door closed.")

### Avoid excuses

Does your tween have an excuse for everything? Maybe he didn't get a permission slip signed and says, "You weren't home when I had it out." Make it clear it's his responsibility to find a way to get things done. Discuss what he could have done, such as leaving the paper on the kitchen counter with a note or putting a reminder in his planner to get it signed.



### Accept blame

If your child is in the hot seat, he may be tempted to blame others. Maybe he didn't do well on a test, and he says his friend kept goofing off during study time. Explain that blaming others doesn't solve the problem—and that preparing for the test was up to him, not anyone else. Brainstorm what he can do next time (study alone, use a checklist to stay on track). 👍

## That's history

History class involves a lot of names, places, dates, and events. Share these ideas to help your child understand—and remember—the information she is learning.



■ **Compare and contrast.** To quickly tell the differences between two documents, events, or historical figures, she could draw a line down a sheet of paper. She might describe the Declaration of Independence on one side and the Constitution on the other.

■ **Watch documentaries.** Encourage your middle grader to look for films related to topics she's studying, like the Gold Rush or the abolitionist movement. They will provide background that helps her understand the events better. *Tip:* Watch the documentaries together—you'll both learn, and they'll give you something to talk about. 👍

# Dealing with cyberbullying

The digital world has opened up a whole new realm for bullying. Help your middle grader stay safe with this advice.



**1.** Explain that what may seem like common online behavior can be cyberbullying. If friends post or share embarrassing photos or videos of others, classmates spread rumors on cell phones, or peers send hurtful messages via social media, that's crossing a line. If done purposely and repeatedly, it's considered cyberbullying.

**2.** Point out that what happens online may have serious, real-life consequences. A humiliating photo gone viral could cause the victim to stay away from friends or hurt himself. And the bully can get into trouble at home, at school, or even with the law.

**3.** Go over rules. Your middle grader should avoid doing or saying anything online that he wouldn't do or say in person. Encourage him to think about how someone might feel before he texts or posts.

**4.** Tell your tween not to respond to a bully. It may make the situation worse. Have him save, print, or take a screen shot of the post to keep a record of what happened. Then, he should block the sender and tell you what happened so you can decide what to do, such as notifying your Internet service provider or the school. 👍

## Q & A Writing for pleasure

**Q** My daughter used to enjoy writing, but now she sees writing assignments as a chore. How can I help her find the joy in it again?

**A** Your child might rediscover her enjoyment by doing creative writing activities that don't have grades attached.



For example, suggest that she write and decorate an inspiring poem to put inside her locker. Or she could make up funny captions for photos and share them with family.

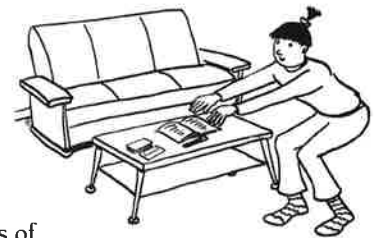
She can even write with friends by having a paper "snowball fight." One person writes an opening sentence of a story on a piece of paper, crumples it, and tosses it to another player. That person adds a sentence, re-crumple the paper, and tosses it again. Keep writing, crumpling, and tossing until the page is full. Then, read the story aloud.

Writing for fun may take the pressure off and unleash her imagination. And that can help her loosen up and enjoy written assignments in school more. 👍



## Fit in fitness

With school in full swing, your child probably has many demands on her time, and she may not be thinking about staying fit. Here are easy ways to add activity into her day.



**Start a 60/30 challenge.** Doing 60 minutes of activity a day for 30 days might kick-start a fitness habit. The hour can be spread throughout the day (30-minute dance class + 10-minute walk to a friend's house + 20-minute bike ride after dinner). Have her record her totals.

**Make a "random activities" pile.** Your tween could brainstorm exercises to do for 1–2 minutes, such as squats, push-ups, or sit-ups. She can write them on index cards and leave the cards by her desk and the TV. During homework breaks and commercials, she should draw one and do what it says. She might note on the back how many she completed and try for more next time. 👍

## Parent to Parent Work your way to success

My son Blake was surprised and disappointed when he auditioned for seventh-grade band and wasn't placed in the highest level. Until then, he had done well at whatever he tried. He wasn't prepared to handle it when something didn't come easily.

I explained that it was okay to struggle—and in fact, it was a normal part of life. I shared stories of times I've had to work to get better. In my first job, I

told him, I messed up a few customers' orders, so the manager had to review the steps with me for a week.

I encouraged Blake to see his trumpet playing as a work in progress. He brainstormed ways he could improve a little at a time. Then, he taped a note to his music stand that says, "Aim for progress, not perfection." He has been practicing extra each day, working on the parts that give him trouble—and on his perseverance. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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