

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### What I like about you

Is your middle grader sometimes irritable or moody? While it's a normal part of tween development, this behavior can be challenging for parents. Try to focus on what you enjoy about your child, like her generosity or artistic flair. You'll appreciate the person she is becoming, even when she's hard to get along with.

### Straw games

The drinking straw was patented on January 3, 1888. Boost your tween's creativity with a "Drinking Straw Olympics." How many events can he invent that use a straw? *Example:* Race to transfer water from one cup to another—dip the straw in one cup, place a finger on top of the straw, move to the second cup, and remove your finger.

### Safe winter mornings

Walking to the bus stop or to school in snow and ice may require extra time. Have your child leave a few minutes early so she won't be tempted to run on slippery surfaces. Also, if it's dark out, she should wear a light-colored jacket, hat, and gloves so drivers can see her.

### Worth quoting

"I am a great believer in luck. The harder I work, the more of it I seem to have." *Coleman Cox*

### Just for fun

**Q:** I have forests, but no trees. I have oceans, but no water. What am I?

**A:** A map.



## Mixing up study time

Playing sports and games, using technology, and spending time with friends are fun activities your middle grader can use to spice up his study routine. Share these ideas.

### Shoot and score

Encourage your child to turn studying into a sport. He could crumple up a used piece of paper for a "basketball" and shoot it into a laundry basket after each review question he gets right. Or he might pretend it's a hockey puck and use a broom to sweep it between two chair legs when he answers correctly.

### Read and listen

Have your youngster record himself reading a textbook chapter or class notes into a smartphone or an MP3 player with a microphone. He can play it back while he takes a walk or rides in the car. Saying and then hearing the information will give him two ways to study it.

### Play and win

Your tween could play games while he studies. He might use alphabet cereal



to spell history or science vocabulary terms. How many can he spell, and define out loud, in five minutes? Or when solving practice problems for a math test, have him draw a game board-style path and color in a space for each right answer.

### Film and review

Suggest that your child and his buddies make a video study guide. They can take turns filming each other as they explain material from their books and notes in their own words. They'll gain a deeper understanding of the material—and have a guide to review later. 👍

## Lead the way

Whether your child is on the school year-book committee or dance team, she can practice leadership skills that will help her in school and on the job. Here's how.

**Be assertive.** Encourage your tween to speak up and use a confident tone. If she shows that she feels good about her ideas, others are more likely to listen. *Example:* "The seventh-grade fund-raiser was such a success—I think it deserves a full-page spread" is more assertive than "Does anyone think we could maybe use a whole page?"

**Aim to inspire.** Good leaders make others eager to do their best. Tell your middle schooler to pay attention to others' talents and efforts so she can give sincere compliments. ("Your rhythm is really keeping us on tempo!") 👍



# Math in your mind

Can your tween solve math problems without writing them down or using a calculator? “Mental math” skills help her know whether an answer is reasonable, build her number sense, and let her solve multi-step and higher-level problems more easily. Share these strategies when you run errands together.

## Calculate prices

Your child can use “easy” percentages like 10% or 50% to figure out sale prices in stores. For instance, if a \$40 pair of jeans is now 30% off, she can calculate in her head that 10% of \$40 = \$4. Then, she should multiply by 3 to find the 30% discount and subtract the discount from the original price to get the final price (\$4 x 3 = \$12 off, and \$40 - \$12 = \$28). She’ll appear more confident when shopping with friends if she doesn’t have to pull out a calculator!



## Track spending

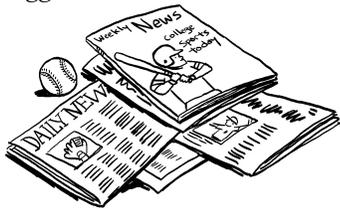
Mental math will help your child keep a running tally of how much she is spending in a store. When you grocery shop, have her figure out what your

total will be at checkout. If bread is \$2.69, milk is \$3.49, and chicken is \$6.99, she can round each number to the nearest dollar and add them (\$3 + \$3 + \$7 = \$13). The longer your grocery list, the more of a challenge it will be. 👍



# Use the news

Keeping up with current events will make your child an informed citizen and give him a chance to think critically. Try these suggestions:



■ Have him choose a news topic he’s interested in and read about it in multiple sources (national and local newspapers, news magazines). He’ll get different facts and viewpoints. The issue might be whether college athletes should be paid, for example, or what the minimum wage should be. What pros and cons are presented? What conclusions can he draw?

■ Encourage him to read newspapers at the library and evaluate opinion pieces. How do the writers feel about a given issue? What evidence do they use to back up their opinions? Suggest that he write a response to one column he agrees with and to another he disagrees with. 👍

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## Q&A

### Digital cheating

**Q** I’ve heard that cheating is easier these days because of electronic devices.

What can I do to prevent my son from cheating?

**A** Cheating has, unfortunately, been around for a long time. What’s different now is that, with instant access to information, it’s easier for students to look up test answers or copy others’ words.

One way to help keep your son from cheating is to share your expectations. Tell him that you expect him to behave with integrity. Then, mention that you’ve heard reports of kids texting themselves answers or downloading reports from the Internet. Make sure he realizes these activities are just as dishonest as old-fashioned cheating, and let him know they can lead to failing grades and—in his case—loss of his phone or tablet privileges.

Finally, remind him to listen carefully to his teachers’ instructions about which apps or windows he can have open during a test or quiz. Anytime he’s unsure about whether he’s allowed to look at a device, he should ask his teacher. 👍



## Parent to Parent

### Middle school dating?

When my daughter Anna mentioned that some of her friends have started dating, I was surprised. I figured we wouldn’t be talking about this until high school.

My neighbor, who has older children, explained the “middle school definition” of dating to me. Typically, she said, these relationships last only a couple of weeks. They mostly involve texting, walking each other to classes, and eating

lunch together in the cafeteria. When her middle graders asked to go on actual dates, she had their dates come over when she was home instead.

I told Anna that if she has a boyfriend one day, he would be welcome to come over for dinner or to hang out in the family room when we’re home. She doesn’t seem interested in dating yet, but it’s nice to have a heads-up on what might be right around the corner. 👍



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### Think on your feet

Improv comedy can provide fun with friends or family and challenge your tween's creativity. Have a group form a circle. One person steps in the middle and starts acting out a scene, such as a monkey swinging in the jungle. Then, the others join in the acting, perhaps throwing the monkey a banana.

### In order

Organizing information in a sequence will give your middle schooler practice with critical thinking—and another way to review material when she studies. She might put historical events in order from least to most important, for example. Or she could plot character development in a book from the most life-changing actions to the least.

### Driver-in-training

It's still a few years before your child will be behind the wheel of a car, but it's not too early to start "pre-driver's ed." Point out ways that you drive safely and stay calm in stressful situations. If it's raining, you might say, "I'm driving more slowly because the roads are slick."

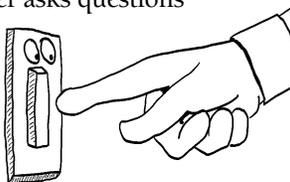
### Worth quoting

"There is something delicious about writing the first words of a story. You never quite know where they'll take you." *Beatrix Potter*

### Just for fun

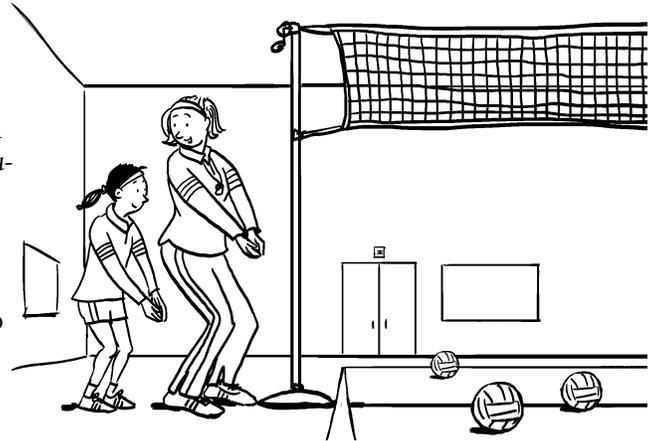
**Q:** What never asks questions but is often answered?

**A:** A doorbell.



## Motivated from the inside

Danielle joined the swim team because she likes to swim and wants to see what she's capable of. Her motivation comes from within. This *intrinsic motivation* will help her do her best—not only in swimming but also in whatever she puts her mind to. Help your middle grader develop that kind of motivation with these tips.



### Choose wisely

Maybe you hoped your child would try out for the math team, but she wants to be on the student council. She'll be more naturally motivated if you allow her to choose what matters to her. Also, giving her a say in how she pursues her interests will spark her enthusiasm. For instance, let her decide whether to run for office or be a committee member.

### Challenge yourself

The more your tween sees her skills improve, the more encouraged she will be to push further. Suggest she ask teachers and coaches what she can do to reach the next level. Her volleyball coach might say she should practice

returning serves to become more consistent. Then, she could set a goal for her practice sessions—and aim for more successful returns during games.

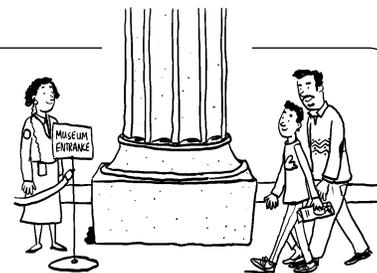
### Find a purpose

Have your youngster look for reasons why school subjects or after-school activities are relevant to her life. That will make them more appealing and increase her motivation to tackle them. For instance, she might think about careers that interest her and how she would use the information she's learning. *Example:* A nail salon owner uses math to set prices and order nail polish. 👍

## Parents (still) wanted!

Research shows that tweens want to spend more time with their parents, even though they may act the opposite way. Consider these ideas for enjoying time together:

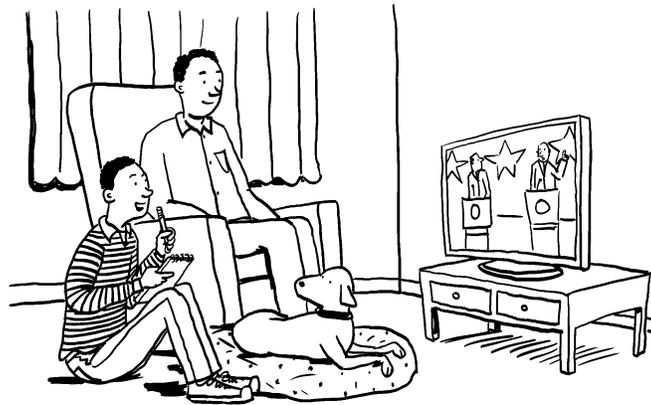
- Look for activities to do side by side. You might try out new recipes in the kitchen, do Sudoku puzzles, or play chess or checkers.
- Build in daily "solo time"—just you and your tween. Perhaps take a nightly walk together after dinner, or go into his room for a chat at bedtime.
- Make a date. Once a month or so, go to a movie, a museum exhibit, or anything else that appeals to the two of you. 👍



# Summing things up

Summarizing is a skill your middle schooler needs when taking notes during class, doing reading assignments, and researching papers. Suggest strategies like these.

**Read, then tell.** Encourage your youngster to tell you about a biography he read by giving you three main facts. *Tip:* To keep his summary short and to the point, he could jot key words on a sticky note while reading.



**Listen, then repeat.** Ask him to repeat the important points when you give him directions (like what to do after school if it's different from his usual routine). That will help him practice listening for crucial details. And it has the added benefit of letting you know he got the message!

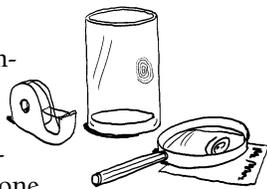
**Watch, then highlight.**

Have your child summarize a political debate or sporting event he's watching on television. He can take notes during the broadcast and then pretend to be a news analyst or sportscaster. His "on the air" updates should highlight the most important happenings of the debate or game. 👍

## Activity Corner Follow the clues

Does your middle grader enjoy reading mysteries or watching detective shows? With this idea, you can set up an imaginary "whodunit" and let your child use real-world forensic science skills to crack the case.

**1.** Have each family member press her right thumb to a separate glass. Place one of those glasses at the "crime scene."



**2.** Lift the fingerprint from that glass by sprinkling on cocoa powder and gently dusting with a brush. Press clear tape to the print, lift, and press onto an index card. Label this, "Evidence."

**3.** With a pencil, shade in a square of paper for each family member. Have each person press her right thumb on a square. Use tape to lift the prints, press onto separate index cards, and label each card with the person's name.

**4.** Compare the fingerprints to the one left at the scene. Who is the culprit? 👍



## Q & A

### No more self-putdowns

**Q** My daughter used to be so confident. But lately I keep overhearing her put herself down. What should I do?

**A** It's normal for kids to become more critical of themselves as they approach the teen years. But there are strategies you can use to keep this from becoming a habit.

First, be sure you're kind to yourself in front of your daughter. Try to avoid making negative comments about your appearance ("I look fat in this") or abilities ("I'm not good with numbers"). Instead, let her overhear confident, self-motivating statements, such as "I'm going to have a great workout" or "I know I can figure out this spreadsheet formula."

Then, ask her to pay attention to how she talks to herself—out loud *and* in her head. Together, you could come up with "code words" to use if you hear a self-putdown. *Examples:* "I don't *think* so!" or "We need a redo!" 👍



## Parent to Parent Working with teachers

When my son's Spanish teacher called to say Carl was disrupting class by talking too much, I was not happy. Mrs. Anderson said she had moved Carl's seat and made sure he doesn't sit near his good friends, but she wanted me to be aware of the problem so we could work together.

I thanked her for letting me know and asked how I could help. She suggested that I mention to Carl that we had

spoken. Also, she said if things didn't improve, she would want to meet with both of us.

I told Carl I was disappointed to get the call. And I made sure he knew he was being disrespectful to both his

teacher and his classmates. Carl knows that I'm going to follow up with Mrs. Anderson—and I'm hoping that our teamwork will encourage him to stop interrupting in class. 👍



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