

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



► Homework questions

If your middle schooler is stuck on a homework assignment, you can help her by asking questions. For instance, "Where could you look for more information?" or "What have you already tried?" Your prompting may be just what she needs to get back on track.

► Taming paperwork

Field trip forms, sign-ups for extracurricular activities, picture orders... middle school parents sign a lot of papers. To keep paperwork moving, get two file folders or paper trays. Have your child put everything that needs your signature in one (the "inbox"). Check it daily, and move signed papers to the other (the "outbox").

► Vocabulary booster

Your middle grader can learn new words just by having casual conversations with you. When you talk, agree to try to trade everyday words for more interesting ones. *Examples: mediocre instead of so-so, hysterical instead of funny.* You can both use a thesaurus to help you find words.

► Worth quoting

"The secret of joy in work is contained in one word—excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it." *Pearl Buck*

► Just for fun

Q: How does a farmer know when it's cold?

A: When he milks a cow and gets ice cream!



Making wise decisions

Your child is deciding whether to stay in band or to play lacrosse. It's a tough choice—but it's also a good opportunity for him to practice making decisions. Considering different possibilities and picking the best one is a skill he'll need for middle school and beyond.



Gather information. To make an informed decision, your middle grader needs all the facts. What is the time commitment for each activity? How would he get home from after-school practices? Will there be travel to band competitions or to lacrosse tournaments? Suggest that he speak to the band director and the lacrosse coach to get answers to all his questions.

Consider pros and cons. Have your youngster list the benefits and drawbacks of each choice. For example, lacrosse would be a great way to exercise

and meet new friends, but it might take time away from homework and other activities. If he stays in the band, he could become a better trombone player and be in performances, but he'd need to find a way to work out.

Rate options. Which choice has more pros? How important are the cons? Suggest that your middle grader rate each pro or con with one to five stars. The more stars he awards, the more important a pro or con is to him. Looking at how the stars add up will help make the right decision clearer. 👍

Joy in poetry

Silly or serious, poetry can motivate your child to read. Here are ideas the whole family will enjoy:

■ Read poems by candlelight or flashlight. Try a volume for middle graders, like *Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems* by Kristine O'Connell George or *The Dog Ate My Homework* by Sara Holbrook.

■ Surprise each other with poems. Find ones you like in a book or on a Web site, and write down a favorite verse. Tuck it into your youngster's lunch, or she might tape one to your bathroom mirror.

■ Hold a poetry scavenger hunt. Take turns naming a household object (quilt, plant) or favorite animal (panda bear, leopard). Each of you can search online or in the library for a related poem and read it aloud. 👍



Project primer

Successful school projects start with organization and time management. Your middle grader can get off on the right foot with these tips.

Make a schedule

A project will seem more manageable if it's divided into steps. Whether your middle grader is working alone or in a group, she will need to understand what her tasks are (doing research, writing an outline) and to remember the due date for each one.



Collect supplies

Your child's work will go more smoothly when she has supplies on hand. Before she begins, she can write down everything she'll need (printer paper, poster board). She can find items around the house and ask you to help her get the rest.

Practice teamwork

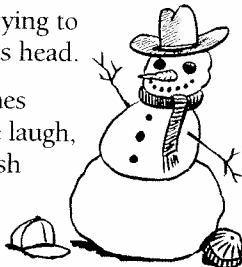
If your middle schooler is involved in a group project, encourage her to be a valuable member of the team. She might start by suggesting that the members meet regularly to bounce ideas off one another. They can also agree to touch base frequently by phone or e-mail. 👍



Laugh out loud

Laughing together can help parents and children get along better. Try these ideas:

- When you hear a funny joke, write it down. Cut out cartoons from newspapers and magazines, too. Post them on the refrigerator, and share them at dinner or in the car for a good laugh.
- Have fun in the snow together. You could play a game of catch with snowballs. Or build a snowman and take turns trying to throw a hat on its head.
- Play board games that make people laugh, such as Balderdash or Pictionary. Or get moving with a few rounds of Twister or charades. *Idea:* Try a version of charades in which you act out scenes from funny movies.



- Make up stories. One person starts with a silly sentence ("I was traveling to the jungle when..."). The next person adds a line ("...I saw an ape dressed in a tuxedo"). Continue until the story is complete. 👍

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Parent to Parent

Talking about tolerance

The other day I overheard my daughter and her friends imitating their new classmate's accent. When they left, I reminded Alexis how she felt when kids made fun of her glasses. She said this was different, because the girl didn't hear them. But I explained that their attitude would affect how they treated her.

Alexis admitted that she felt bad, but she didn't want to go against her friends. So we talked about ways she could react next time, like speaking up or changing the subject.

A few days later, Alexis told me she had tried one of our ideas. When her friends started to make comments, she changed the subject and asked them if they were going to the game that night. Then, later in the day, she saw her new classmate and introduced herself.

I'm proud of my daughter—and she's happy to have made a new friend. 👍



Q & A How much freedom?

Q My son wants me to drop him off at the movies. What should a seventh grader be allowed to do?

A There's no "magic age" for giving a child more independence. You might judge what he's ready for by gradually giving him more freedom. For example, you could start by taking him and a couple of his friends to the movies and sitting in a different row. Once you're both comfortable, you

might drop him off with friends at the community center or skating rink and plan to pick them up in an hour.

You can also satisfy your son's need for freedom—and help him feel inde-

pendent—by giving him other privileges. Although some issues aren't negotiable (curfews, smoking), a middle grader might decide how to cut his hair or how to spend his allowance. 👍

