

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

No skipping allowed

Middle graders may think it's cool to roam the halls or hang out in the bathroom instead of going to class. Make sure your child knows you expect him to be in all of his classes every day—and explain ahead of time what consequences he would face from school, and from you, if he skips.

Shifting moods

Tweens often go through ups and downs because of changing hormones. When your child seems out of sorts, that's when she most needs you to remain calm. Showing you have control will comfort her and make her feel secure, even if she doesn't realize it at the time.

Where's my glove?

Are family members constantly looking for missing gloves? Make it easier to get out the door to school and to work by giving each person his own bin for winter gear (mittens, hats, scarves). Stack them by the door, or place in a closet. *Tip:* Designate a spot for gloves without matches in case the mates show up.

Worth quoting

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."
Randy Pausch

Just for fun

Q: Why do dogs wag their tails?

A: Because nobody else will do it for them.



Happy to collaborate

You may have heard your middle schooler talk about group assignments—perhaps a paper she's writing with a partner or a slide presentation she's creating with classmates. Learning to collaborate will help her succeed in these projects *and* teach her an important skill for the future. Share these strategies.



Look for themes

Collaborating is about using everyone's thoughts and opinions to find a solution. First, group members need to brainstorm and keep track of suggestions. Then, they can look for ways to combine their ideas. For example, they might realize most of their concepts fit into three main categories and work together to divide their paper into three parts.

Learn to compromise

Help your tween use language that encourages others to participate and shows she is considering their recommendations. For instance, she could ask, "What's your reaction to this?" Or she can paraphrase someone's comments with "It sounds like

you're saying..." To disagree politely, she might reply, "I see what you're saying. I also see it another way."

Figure out roles

Another key to collaboration is using everyone's strengths. Say your middle grader's group is making a slide show. One person might use her organizational skills to schedule meetings and decide how to arrange the slides. Another can use technology know-how to create the slides and add special effects. 👍

"I care about you"

Caring about others can make your child feel good about himself and even help him make new friends. Inspire compassion with these ideas.

Trade places. Suggest that he put himself in someone else's shoes. Say his friend is disappointed because he didn't make a sports team. Your tween could think about how he would feel if he worked hard for something and didn't get it. Seeing things from his friend's perspective will help him understand his friend's feelings—and empathize.

Take action. Encourage him to find a way to support others who are going through a rough time. If a classmate loses his grandfather, he might visit the friend and invite him to tell stories about his grandpa. Or he can make a sympathy card and have other students sign it. 👍



Grow by the rules

Setting rules during the tween years can be puzzling, since middle graders aren't little kids anymore, but they aren't teenagers either. Try these tips.

Consider new freedoms

Think of ways to adapt rules for your child's age and maturity level. Ask for his input, and decide which suggestions make sense. Say he wants you to start dropping him off at the mall with his friends. You might agree to read in the mall's coffee shop while they walk around. Once you see how he handles it, you can choose whether to drop him off in the future.



Encourage problem solving

Parents want to protect their children—but your tween will often be better off experiencing the natural consequences of his actions. Perhaps your rule is that he needs to remember his own items for school. If he forgets a book for class, let him work out a solution instead of dropping it off for him. He'll learn to problem solve, and chances are he'll try harder to remember next time. 👍



Chores without complaints

Does your child pitch in around the house? Having her do chores helps her develop a good work ethic that will benefit her at home and in school. Here are ways to foster this quality.



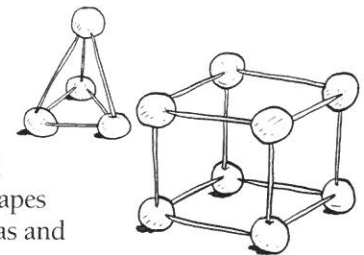
■ **Think “we.”** Have her regularly help with chores that benefit the whole household, such as doing dishes or cleaning out closets. That way, she'll learn to work hard even if it won't benefit her directly.

■ **Make it snappy.** Set a timer for 2 or 3 minutes, and challenge everyone to do a specific chore before time is up. Your tween might straighten up the family room while you wipe down kitchen counters. Keeping it short and fun makes it more likely she'll pitch in willingly—and be more open to helping out next time. 👍

Parent to Parent

Math night at school...and at home

My daughter and I recently attended family math night at her school. Marissa found the activities fun, so when her teacher sent home more ideas to try, we decided to hold a math night at home.



First, we rolled play dough into little balls and connected them with toothpicks to create 3-D shapes like cubes and cones. Marissa measured their areas and showed me how to do it.

Next, we played “secret function.” I wrote numbers on slips of paper. Marissa picked one at a time, performed a “function,” like adding 8 or dividing by 3, and wrote the answer on the flip side. I had to figure out the function she used. For “4,” she had written 16, and I said she had squared the number. She said that was right, but added, “It could have been $\times 4$ or $+ 12$.” That led to a great discussion about how many different functions may have been right!

I enjoyed seeing math in a new light. And I'm glad Marissa is enjoying playing with math. 👍

Q & A Work that's mine

Q My son recently received a zero on a paper because it was too similar to an online article he used as a source. He had simply rearranged the information, and he didn't understand this was plagiarism! What should I do?

A In today's online world, students may pass off someone else's work as their own without realizing it. They might believe that just rewording or rearranging material makes it theirs. Or they may

even forget which part is a direct quote from a source and fail to give credit.

Your son can avoid unintentional plagiarism by taking careful notes as he researches. Encourage him to put quotation marks around direct quotes and to keep a running list of sources.

Also, suggest that he jot down his own thoughts and reactions while researching. That will give him a good place to start when he writes so he is sure to use his own words. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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