

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Election day

Although your tween is too young to vote in this month's elections, he can still get involved. Take him to the polls with you, and talk about your choices. Then, watch the election results together. It's a great way for him to see citizens participating in government—and to prepare for voting when he's older.

### The "write" word

Students sometimes think long, fancy words sound impressive. But short, simple words can have more impact if they make writing clearer. Suggest that your child replace complicated words with easier ones and then read both versions aloud ("She wore an undecorated frock" vs. "She wore a plain dress"). Which sounds better?

### Thinking of others

Being thoughtful can improve your middle grader's relationships. Encourage him to work on this at home. If he gets a glass of water, he could ask his sister if she wants one, too. Or he might offer the computer to another family member when he realizes he's been on it for a while.

### Worth quoting

"It's okay to make mistakes. Mistakes are our teachers—they help us to learn." *John Bradshaw*

### Just for fun

**Teacher:** Do you know the 20th president of the United States?

**Student:** No. We were never introduced!



## Controlling impulses

If your tween can be impulsive, blame it on science: the part of her brain that controls impulses won't be fully developed until her early 20s. In the meantime, here are some ways you can help her practice self-control.

### Focus on the future

Encourage your child to think things through ahead of time. For instance, remind her to consider her schedule before making plans ("I have jazz practice Thursday afternoon, so I can't go to Andrea's that day"). Also, try having discussions that help her visualize next week, next year, or even 10 years from now. You could ask about her weekend plans, her goals for summer vacation, or her ideal career.

### Practice patience

Learning to wait for what she wants will help your middle grader build self-discipline. Talk about how you avoid acting on impulse when it comes to things such as shopping or eating. You might say, "I would like to buy this outfit, but I'm going to save the money toward a



new couch" or "Ice cream sounds so good right now, but let's enjoy it after dinner."

### Encourage cooling down

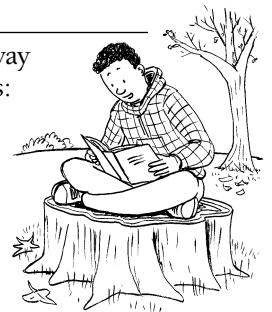
If your youngster gets angry or upset, she needs self-control to avoid saying or doing something she will regret. Help her recognize signs that her feelings are escalating, and brainstorm ways she can handle them before they spiral out of control. For example, if her face is flushed and she feels like screaming during a disagreement, she could say, "Let's discuss this another time," and then walk away. 👍

## Read for pleasure

How can you get your child to read more often? One way is to help him find books he enjoys. Try these suggestions:

- Surround him with reading materials. When you see books you think he'd like, try leaving them on his nightstand or in the car. You can also scatter comic books, fact books, and joke books around the house. This may encourage him to read when he has a few minutes.

- Help your middle grader find new favorites. He might ask a librarian what's popular with kids his age. Or he could type titles he enjoyed into an online bookstore—the site will list other books by the same author and suggest similar titles by other writers. 👍



# Ways to prevent plagiarism

Your middle grader knows he's not supposed to copy others' work when he writes a paper. But he might not always be sure how to use information without passing it off as his own. Share these tips to help him avoid plagiarism.

**Cite sources.** Your child should list each book or website that he uses for a research paper. Depending on his teacher's guidelines, sources might go in the body of the paper or in a footnote or bibliography. Quotation marks go around exact quotes.



**Use multiple references.** Relying too heavily on one source can lead to presenting the information as original work. Instead, your youngster should use facts and ideas from several places, summarize information, and draw his own conclusions.

**Write from scratch.** Remind him to craft his own sentences and paragraphs. Let him know that replacing a few words or moving sentences around is not enough.

*Note:* Facts that are common knowledge don't need to be cited. When your child is in doubt, he can check with his teacher. 👍

## Discover the past



Exploring your family's heritage can make history come alive for your child. These fun activities will let her investigate the past.

### Places

Suggest that your middle grader research the countries or states that her relatives came from. She can look at a map to find the capital city or learn which mountain ranges are nearby. Then, have her look for more information in library books or on websites. For example, she might read a novel set in 1900s China to learn about life for her great-grandparents.

### Artifacts

Encourage your tween to explore *artifacts* (objects that give us information about the past). She might ask relatives to share pictures, documents, and keepsakes. Perhaps she'll notice that some are related to what she's studying in school (say, letters her grandfather received while serving in the Vietnam War). 👍



## Q & A Ready for conferences

**Q** I want to be prepared for my upcoming parent-teacher conferences. What should I expect now that my daughter is in middle school?

**A** Try talking to your daughter ahead of time about the conference. Ask her what she wants her teachers to know, such as what she likes and dislikes about each class.

During the conference, share her excitement ("Jenna really enjoys the science experiments") and bring up concerns ("Jenna said she's having trouble with the group project").

Also, carry a pen and paper so you can take notes. Before you leave the conference, go over what you and the teacher decided ("So I'll sign off on her homework each night, and you'll let me know if she doesn't turn in Spanish assignments"). At home, follow up with your child so she knows what you discussed. 👍



## Parent to Parent Someone to look up to

My son Elias loves sports, and he really admires his favorite players. When one was arrested recently, Elias shrugged and said, "He's still a great player, and he's not the only one to get in trouble."

My first instinct was to lecture Elias, but instead I said he was right: the player is talented, and too many celebrities are getting in trouble. But I asked, "Why do you think that is?" Eventually, he said maybe they feel they're

above the law because they're talented and famous.

Now I show Elias articles about people who are truly worth looking up to, like firefighters who save lives and folks who are cleaning up our town creek. And when a teenage neighbor helped organize a canned-food drive, I introduced him to my son. I think it made an impact—Elias said he never realized how many local families don't have enough to eat.

He still admires athletes for winning games and setting records, but he has discovered heroes off the field, too. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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