

December 2007

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops

Supply check

Suggest that your middle grader regularly check his backpack and desk for supplies (pencils, pens, paper, folders). Ask him to list what he needs, and pick up those items when you're out shopping together. Having the right supplies will make it easier for him to keep up with assignments.

"I promise"

Promises are important for building trust. Encourage your child to keep promises by having her write them on a kitchen whiteboard. *Example:* "I promise to wear my bike helmet." Writing promises down will remind her of what she said—and let her know that you expect her to keep her word.

Listening and learning

At the library, choose a book on tape or DVD to listen to with your middle grader. Then, when you're in the car together (going to practice, picking up dinner), pop in the next installment. Talking about what you've heard will build your child's listening and conversation skills—and you'll enjoy the time together.

Worth quoting

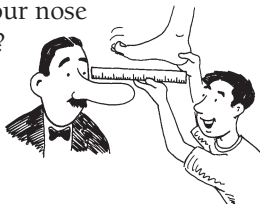
"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."

Sally Berger

Just for fun

Q: Why isn't your nose 12 inches long?

A: Because then it would be a foot.



Yes or no?

Making smart decisions

Your child's day is full of decisions—what to wear, what to do, who to be friends with. But many middle graders aren't sure how to make good decisions.

Pass along these tips to help your child evaluate the choices he faces.

List the options

Have your youngster start by making a list. Side by side on a piece of paper, he can write the pros and cons.

Example: He wants to try out for the soccer team. Pros: making friends, having fun, getting exercise. Cons: having less time for schoolwork and play, possibly being cut from the team. Making a list will show your child the consequences of his decision.

Sound it out

Together, role-play both sides of a situation. *Example:* Should your middle grader stay friends with Johnny, who



isn't always nice to him? You and your child can choose sides to discuss the benefits and drawbacks to being Johnny's friend. Talking about the options can help your child see things more clearly.

Look at results

Even bad decisions can teach kids how to make better ones. Encourage your child to think about what went wrong when he regrets a choice he made. *Example:* He got caught cheating on a test. Ask what he was thinking when he made that decision. What could he have done differently? Examining mistakes can show your middle grader how to choose more wisely the next time. 👍

Around the world

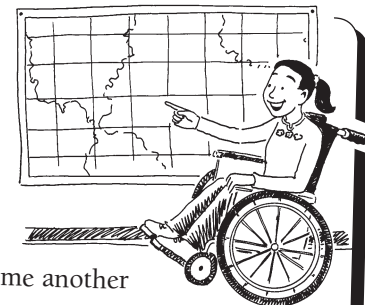
Boost your child's geography knowledge with these simple ideas:

■ Hang a world map on the family room wall. Point out countries or regions when discussing the daily news.

■ Play "Geography." One person names a continent, country, state, or city (say, Chicago). The next person uses the last letter of that location to name another place (Oregon), and so on.

■ Ask a geography "question of the day." You can find topics online or in your middle grader's textbook. *Example:* "Where is the world's tallest mountain?" (Mt. Everest is in the Himalayas bordering Nepal and Tibet.)

■ Use north, south, east, and west when you're going places. *Example:* "We're heading to the park north of our house." 👍



Note-taking secrets

Taking good notes can help your child understand and remember information she hears in class. Share with your middle grader these techniques for clear and accurate notes.

Develop shorthand. Encourage your youngster to come up with her own shorthand. *Examples:* “w/” for “with,” “b4” for “before.” Or she can borrow text messaging and IM methods, such as skipping vowels (“lkng” for “looking”). Using shortcuts will speed up her note taking.

Mark main points. Suggest that she number key points. For instance, if the teacher presents “three main issues of the Industrial Revolution,” your child can write 1, 2, and 3 by



each one. Listing the items will organize the facts in her mind and help her see if she’s missing anything.

Be selective.

Let your middle grader know she doesn’t have to write down every word the teacher says. Instead, she should sum up the information in a few words. *Example:* She can write “much tyranny” for “There are many examples of tyranny throughout history.” Writing less will free up your youngster to hear what the teacher says next. 👍

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“That’s creative!”

Ever wonder what happened to your singing, doodling, spontaneous child? He’s still there! Since middle graders are usually more self-conscious, they might need a little coaxing to express their creativity. Try these strategies:

★ Put an inexpensive art easel and supplies (drawing paper, paints, brushes, markers, colored pencils) in a corner of your house. When you’re not looking, your youngster may decide to sketch a pet or paint a sunset.



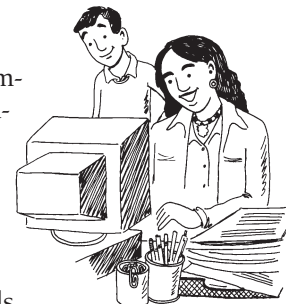
★ Encourage your child to keep a journal. Suggest that he write down everything from his thoughts about school to his favorite quotes and

predictions for the basketball season.

★ Let your middle grader be in charge of making signs on the computer for birthdays. He can download pictures unique to the person (favorite food or movie star) and write a clever greeting. *Example:* “Happy birthday from the whole bunch,” with a picture of bananas. 👍

Parent to Parent Reading matters

I do a lot of reading at my job—reports, e-mails, and memos. But because I’ve always talked about being on a computer all day, my son Jared didn’t think of my work as “reading.” One evening he joked about growing up and “never having to read anything again.”



I realized Jared didn’t know how much reading is involved in the workplace. So the next Saturday I took him to my office. I showed him the piles of reports and contracts I handle. Then, I scrolled through my saved e-mails for him to see how many messages I read in a day. “I guess reading is more important than I thought,” Jared mumbled.

Now at dinner, I ask him what he read that day in school, and I tell him what I read at work. We’re learning more about each other’s day—and Jared is learning that reading matters to grown-ups! 👍

Q & A Signs of depression

Q How can I tell if my child’s just acting moody or if she’s truly depressed?

A Peer pressure, changing bodies, and school challenges can make the middle years a difficult time. That’s why it’s important to recognize the signs of depression.

Watch your child closely for changes in behavior, such as withdrawing from friends and hobbies, acting hopeless, being extremely angry, overreacting

to criticism, or not caring how she looks. Other red flags include rapidly dropping grades or big changes in sleeping and eating habits.



If your middle grader shows these symptoms, talk to a pediatrician, school nurse, or guidance counselor. They’ll be able to suggest a therapist or other help.

Also, let your child know you’re concerned. Ask about her feelings, and listen when she talks. Knowing that you care may help her open up about what’s bothering her. 👍

OUR PURPOSE

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

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