

December 2014

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Color-coded notes

In social studies class, your tween needs to remember which people, places, dates, and events go together. As she takes notes from her textbook, suggest that she write related words in the same color pen or pencil. For instance, if she's reading about the Civil War, she could use blue ink for Union names and victories and gray for Confederate.

### Make a time capsule

This New Year's Eve, start a tradition: Create a time capsule for the year that's ending. Gather photos and mementos, and list big events (major news stories, blockbuster movies, top songs). Ask your child to seal the items in an envelope, and tuck it away in a safe place. It will be fun to open next New Year's Eve—and then to create one for 2015.

### Up for change

Being adaptable can improve everything from your youngster's relationships with friends to his value to future employers. Point out that change is part of life and that often things work out for the best. If he has to switch ideas halfway through a class project, for example, he might come up with something he likes even better.

### Worth quoting

"What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness." *John Steinbeck*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What has two hands, a round face, always runs, but stays in place?

**A:** A clock!



## A place for respect

Where's the best place for your child to show respect? Everywhere! Share these pointers to encourage respect no matter where he is.

### School

Together, talk about ways kids are respectful—or not respectful—in his classes or after-school activities. He could compare a classmate who waited his turn patiently during a group discussion vs. the one who kept interrupting everyone else. Then, ask about times your middle grader finds it hard to show respect. For instance, maybe he thinks a teacher doesn't grade his papers fairly. Explain that he still needs to approach him with respect—and that the teacher is more likely to listen to him that way.

### Social events

Prep your child for how to behave at family gatherings. For starters, you might let him know that relatives won't appreciate playing second fiddle to his phone or video game. Remind him to look people in the eye when they're



talking and to answer questions politely. It's also a nice show of respect to be interested in their lives and to ask questions back. ("How's everything in Cleveland, Aunt Martha?")

### Home

There's no question that life goes more smoothly when family members treat each other with respect. Consider writing up a few "Family Rules of Respect." Each person could contribute an idea or two, and then work together to follow them. Some ideas: "Speak in a nice tone of voice." "Ask before borrowing something." "If you break or tear it, fix or replace it." 👍

## Do your work carefully

Your middle grader might know how to solve  $831 \times 427$  or how to spell *chromosome*—but if she isn't careful, she could still get the answer wrong. Here are ways for making sure her work shows what she knows:

- Encourage her to take care with the little things so they don't turn into mistakes. For example, did she line up the numbers properly in her math problems? Did she include all the steps in her lab report?
- Have your child reread papers and essays before turning them in. A tried-and-true system is to lay a sheet of paper on top of her work and slide it down slowly, reading one line at a time. Or she could try this trick: Look for one type of error (spelling, punctuation, grammar) on each reading. 👍



# Reading: The right connections

When your tween reads, making meaningful connections can help her understand the text and enjoy reading more. Suggest these strategies.

**Connect with characters.** Ask your middle grader to think of ways in which she is similar to a book character. Maybe the character just started middle school. Your child could think back to how she felt on the first day of school (nervous, excited) to help her understand the character's behavior.



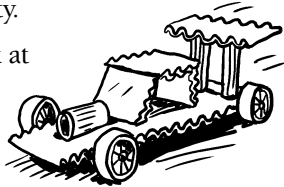
**Connect with other books.** What is the theme of the book, and how is it similar to other books she has read? For instance, the story might be about growing up. Your youngster may compare it with other coming-of-age novels she has read—what do they have in common? Perhaps she'll notice that characters discover important things about themselves or that they start to think more about their futures.

*Idea:* Your tween can deepen her understanding of the plot by jotting down the connections she makes in a journal. 👍

## Activity Corner Start your engines!

Can your middle grader use his noodle to build a race car out of pasta? Encourage him to explore engineering with this activity.

**1.** Let him look at pasta in the grocery store and think about which shapes would fit together to make a car. *Examples:* lasagna for the base, spaghetti threaded through penne for axles, wagon wheels for tires.



**2.** Suggest that he sketch a model of his race car on paper.

**3.** Using his sketch, he can arrange the uncooked noodles and attach the parts with craft glue.

**4.** To test his vehicle, he could make a ramp by leaning a piece of cardboard against a stack of books. Then, he's ready to send it down the ramp and measure the distance it travels.

**5.** Based on his results, have him redesign and retest until he comes up with the ultimate race car. *Idea:* A friend or sibling could make one, too, and they can race. 👍

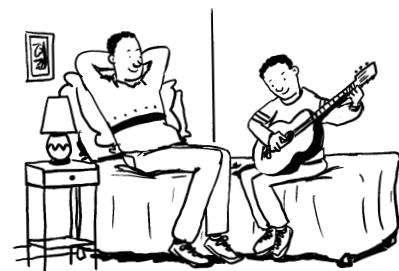


## Together time

Parent-child relationships are a lot like gardening—tend them with care, and watch them grow! Use these tips to stay close to your middle grader.

### Catch up

Try to spend 15–20 minutes a day in one-on-one time. Let him show you something he's working on, like a song on his guitar or his math homework. Or you might chat about school or friends before he goes to sleep.



### Tune in

When your child wants to talk, stay focused on what he's saying. You could close your laptop if he comes to you for help or put down your magazine if he starts to talk about his day.

### Make plans

Ask your youngster what special things he'd like to do together, and write them on your calendar. Maybe he'd like to play racquetball on the weekend or go to an art fair next month. 👍

## Parent to Parent

### Alcohol...already?

I recently heard a startling statistic: About a third of eighth graders say they've had alcohol in the past year. My daughter Sabrina is in eighth grade, and it really concerned me to think of children her age drinking.

I asked Sabrina how she feels about underage drinking. She said it can be dangerous and assured me she wouldn't break the law. I was happy to hear that, but I know it's hard to say no to peer pressure.

So we talked about ways to avoid pressure, like only going to parties supervised by adults. I reminded Sabrina that saying yes to drinking could lead to her being arrested or suspended from school and activities. I also mentioned that alcohol can make people do embarrassing things and even lose friends.

Sabrina didn't say much, but I'm hoping she'll remember our conversation. I plan to bring up the subject regularly to help her think twice about drinking. 👍



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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