

April 2009

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Computer expert

Your child probably already knows a lot about computers. Boost his confidence by making him the family computer expert. When you need to install new software or add more memory, ask him for help. *Tip:* Encourage him to take a computer class at school or the library to increase his troubleshooting skills.

Spring into extracurriculars

School is more fun when kids get involved in extracurricular activities. From sports to the school musical, there's bound to be something that your child will enjoy this season. Suggest that she choose one or two activities, and remind her to leave time for homework and studying.

Cell phone safety

If your middle grader has a cell phone, make sure he sticks with these safety rules. He shouldn't use his cell phone to talk or text-message while he's crossing a street or biking. Also, you can set an example for your future driver by not using your cell phone when you're behind the wheel.

Worth quoting

"If you think about what you ought to do for other people, your character will take care of itself."
Woodrow Wilson

Just for fun

Q: What can you put in a wooden box to make it lighter?

A: Holes.



Discipline that fits

Just like children outgrow shoes, they also outgrow discipline strategies. Middle graders question authority more than younger children do, and they are growing more independent.

How can you enforce limits for your changing tween? Try these ideas.

Give explanations. If your middle grader understands the "why" behind a decision, she'll be more likely to accept what you say. For example, if she asks to go to a friend's house, you might say, "Let me call to be sure her mother will be home." If you end up saying no, explain your reason: "Her mom's not going to be home. I'm not comfortable with you and Annie being there without a parent."

Adjust consequences. Set consequences that relate to the problem and that matter to your child. For example, if she listens to music and ignores her homework, you might put away her MP3 player for the night. At the same time, try not to overdo it. She's more apt to cooperate if you don't set a punishment that's out of line with her behavior (*example:* two weeks of being grounded for not doing the dishes).

Follow through. You've both agreed that if your child exceeds her television time, she can't watch the next day. She watches an extra show. Instead of lecturing, let the consequences do the talking. Simply remind her, "No TV tomorrow." If she argues, help her brainstorm ways she can keep from going over her time limit, like setting an alarm. 🍷



"Ouch! That hurts!"

"You don't know anything!" Sound familiar? In trying to be grown-up, middle graders often rebel against their parents. Here are responses you can use when your child says something hurtful:

● "I understand you're upset, but it's not okay to be rude. Let's finish talking when you're calm."



● "I want to hear your thoughts, but you need to speak respectfully."

● "I'll be ready to help you when you're ready to ask nicely."

● "That hurt my feelings. I'm going to take a time-out." (Then, walk away.)

● "Try again. Say it like this." (Give an example, such as, "Can we please go pick up Eddie now?") 🍷

Make a study aid

Creating graphic organizers can help students understand and remember information. Share these three formats with your middle grader:

A **Venn diagram** compares two things. Draw two large circles side by side, overlapping their inside edges. Label each circle with an item you're comparing (ethanol, oil). Then, fill in characteristics unique to each item (ethanol—renewable resource, needs a lot of land to produce; oil—safe to burn, limited supply). In the shared space, list common traits (heat homes, power cars).



A **character web** describes a person or a book character. First, draw a circle in the center of a page.

Write the person's name inside (Eleanor Roosevelt). Then, draw lines to connect the circle to three other circles. List one character trait in each (compassionate, hardworking). Finally, link three smaller circles around each of those circles, and fill with supporting examples (helped needy children).

A **series of events chain** shows steps in a procedure, formula, or sequence. Draw a column of rectangles down a page. Connect them with arrows. Then, write a step in each box. To divide fractions, for instance, write: change division sign to multiplication → flip the second fraction → multiply. 🍷

Weekend learning

Take advantage of free family time to make learning a shared adventure. Here's how:

■ Play board games anytime, anywhere. You can enjoy them during a picnic in the park, a campout in your backyard, or a morning at a coffeehouse. Try Mastermind, checkers, or Scrabble to practice strategy and word skills.



■ Bookstores, hobby shops, and craft stores often hold family events. Look in the newspaper calendar or call the store for ideas. You can explore your child's interests—or help her pick up a new one, such as calligraphy or quilting.

■ Take a family field trip to a museum, and let your middle schooler explore history or art. Together, watch videos or take self-guided tours. Point out interesting items, and ask questions about what she's seeing. 🍷

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Q & A Good sports

Q My daughter gets so upset if her track and field team doesn't win. How can I teach Maya to be a good sport?

A Talk to Maya about how to win *and* lose nicely. If her team wins, she can celebrate with respect for the other team. For example, it's okay to high-five her teammates, but it's not acceptable to taunt her opponents. When her team loses, suggest that she congratulate the winners and focus on what she can do to help her team next time.

Remind her that good sports also avoid fights, arguing with coaches or officials, and blaming others for their own mistakes.

Finally, emphasize Maya's effort and improvement rather than winning or losing. Comment on how she beat her own best running time instead of what place she came in, for instance. 🍷



Parent to Parent Erasing math fears

My son Carl was becoming anxious about math. He kept saying, "I'm no good at numbers." I've always felt the same way, and I'd say so to comfort him. But then his test grades started dropping, and I approached his teacher for advice.

It turns out that expressing doubt about my own math skills was giving him more reason to feel he couldn't do well in math. Instead, Mrs. Coleman

said, I should say things like, "I use math more often than I realized," or, "Look—my checkbook balanced to the penny!" She also suggested that I remind Carl of the times he has succeeded with math, like when he memorized multiplication tables or mastered square roots.

Now I try to stay positive. And guess what? Carl and I have decided we're both better with numbers than we thought. 🍷

