

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

- **Write While You Read** – Textbooks pack in a lot of information. To see if your child understands what she’s reading, suggest that she stop every few paragraphs and jot down a few facts and ideas. If she can easily explain the material in writing, it’s likely she’s on track. If not, it’s a good idea for her to reread the part she’s unclear about.
- **A Good Start** – Pleasant goodbyes set a nice tone for the day. Get in the habit of saying, “Have a terrific day!” to your tween before going off to school and work. Or give him a high-five or a hug on the way out the door. Leaving on an upbeat note will help both of you feel good about the day ahead.
- **Choosing Electives** – Time to sign up for next year’s electives? Look over options with your middle grader, and encourage her to pick courses that sound interesting or help her meet requirements. Perhaps she’ll try Art one semester and Robotics the other. If she needs several years of a foreign language for college, she might get started now.

Worth Quoting – “Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.”
-- William James

Just for Fun – Question - What never asks questions but has to be answered?
Answer – A phone.

Manage Homework Like a Pro

Middle graders who do well in school generally have one thing in common: They stay on top of their homework. Your tween can use these strategies to manage his assignments successfully.

- **Make It a Priority** – Have your child put homework on his calendar and plan other activities around it. To decide how long he needs, he could add time estimates to his planner as he writes down assignments. Examples - “Read chapters 7 and 8 in novel, 30 minutes.” “Find five sources for Social Studies presentation, 20 minutes.” Over time, his estimates will get more accurate.
- **Identify What Works** – Recommend that your tweens find strategies and habits that fit him best. Say he finds it easier to work earlier in the evening. He might decide to do harder assignments before dinner and easier ones afterward. Or if he finds his mind wandering, he could take a snack break or walk around the room as he reviews his notes.
- **Have Help Ready** – Be sure your middle grader knows how to get help easily. Suggest that he put classmates’ phone numbers and email addresses in his contacts. He should also write down teachers’ office hours and keep a list of approved homework help websites and student portals.

Appreciating Differences

While your child may naturally feel drawn to people who are like her, she can broaden her circle of friends – and learn a lot – by getting to know kids who are different from her. Suggest these ideas:

- Encourage your tween to strike up a conversation with a classmate who is learning English and find ways to communicate. Perhaps she'll shiver and hug herself while saying, "It's cold out today!" or point to the basketball hoop and ask, "Do you want to play?"
- Introduce your middle grader to other cultures. Suggest that she read fiction and memoirs by authors from other countries. Find music from other cultures to listen to, and attend heritage festivals together. Talk about how the cultures are similar to and different from your own.

Rules That Grow With Tweens

The rules you set for your middle grader grow and change – just like she does. Use this advice to keep her safe as she becomes more independent.

1. **Let Her Make a Case** – Say your tween wants to go to the movies with friends and no adult. Explain your concerns, and together, think of ways to address them. For instance, maybe you could drop her off with her friends, and afterward they have to stay inside the theater until you pick them up.
2. **Consider a Trial Basis** – Lay out clear expectations for your child, such as seeing a movie you approve of and silencing her phone and obeying other theater rules. Then, allow her to go just with friends once. If she follows the guidelines, she can go again. If she doesn't, it's off the table until she shows more maturity. *Note:* Let your middle grader know what you won't compromise on. Good examples include safety rules (like no vaping), going to school every day unless she's sick, and treating people with respect.

Present Yourself Well Online

As your child approaches the age where he can open social media accounts, talk to him about how to leave a good impression online. Share this advice.

- **Think About Your Audience** – Have your tween imagine that every post will be seen by someone he admires. Before he posts a video or comments on a blog, he should ask himself if he'd want his coach or his grandpa to see it.
- **Be Positive** – Encourage your middle grader to follow the rule "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." It's a good idea for him to keep complaints to himself and instead offer encouragement and helpful information.
- **"Like" the Good Stuff** – Putting a "like" on a questionable photo, video, or comment tells others that he's okay with it. Point out that your child shouldn't endorse anything he wouldn't post himself.

Q & A: Working Together

Q: My middle grader has more group work in middle school than he did in elementary school. Why is that, and how can I support him?

Q & A: Working Together, continued

A: Teachers assign group work to help students learn collaboration skills. This prepares them for the future, when they'll need to team up with classmates in college or coworkers on the job. You can help by offering to host your son's group or drive him to meetings. Ask him how it's going. Is everyone doing their part? If not, help him brainstorm solutions like having group members check in with each other more frequently or setting deadlines to keep everyone accountable. You might also point out talents your tween has that he could share with his group. For instance, if he has an eagle eye, he might proofread their final paper or poster.

Parent to Parent: New Year's Resolutions

During winter break, my daughter Jessica had an interesting homework assignment – come up with two New Year's resolutions, one academic and the other related to good character.

The assignment inspired our whole family to make resolutions along the same lines. We decided to tackle the character one together by resolving to do community service as a family, once a month. Jessica offered to take the lead on researching local volunteer opportunities online.

Then for her academic resolution, Jessica wanted to bring up her Math grade. She talked to a friend who does well in Math but struggles in History, and they agreed to tutor each other. Since my wife and I aren't students, we made our "academic" resolutions about work. Finally, Jessica listed our resolutions so they're right there in plain sight – and we all promised to help each other stick to them.

Our Purpose

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

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