

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Getting the message

Let your tween know you're counting on her to keep you in the loop about school news. During morning announcements, she might jot down reminders ("Ask for a ride to basketball tryouts, Saturday 9 a.m."). Or have her post flyers on the refrigerator where you'll see them.

Mealtime manners

Encourage your child to be polite when he's offered food. If he doesn't like something, he could take a small portion to try—maybe he'll enjoy it after all! If he has a food allergy or eats a vegetarian diet, he can mention it and say, "Thank you anyway."

Turning in assignments

Your middle grader's homework isn't finished until she hands it in. Suggest that she take it out of her backpack as soon as she sits down in each class so it's ready to be collected. Or perhaps she'll keep homework in one folder to carry to every class so she doesn't leave any assignments in her locker.

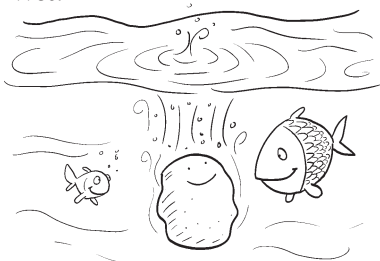
Worth quoting

"Happiness often sneaks in through a door you didn't know you left open."
John Barrymore

Just for fun

Q: If you throw a blue rock into the Red Sea, what will it become?

A: Wet!



Growing responsibility

Picture your middle grader as a responsible young adult. How do you help him get there? Consider these ideas for planting the seeds of responsibility now so he'll grow into the dependable person you're trying to raise.

Promote consistency

Sticking to routines makes handling responsibilities a natural part of your tween's day. For instance, if he needs a tablet for school, he might charge it on the kitchen counter every night. Or suggest that he bring his PE uniform home on Fridays so he can wash it.

Pass the "baton"

Imagine you're in a relay race and you're passing the "responsibility baton" to your child. Make the handoff by switching from giving instructions to asking questions. Say he's getting ready for a chorus concert. Instead of telling



him to put on his dress shoes and find his sheet music, try saying, "What do you need to do to get ready?"

Discuss accountability

Experience is an excellent teacher—and it can make your middle grader more responsible. Share an example from your own life ("I forgot about my doctor's appointment, so now I have to pay a no-show fee"). Then, explain what you learned ("I need to put appointments on my calendar right away").

Brainstorm for project success

Your tween may have heard the expression "Two heads are better than one." That's especially true when it comes to brainstorming! Share these tips she can use the next time she works on a group project.

■ **Get organized.** Decide what the group will accomplish (say, picking a topic for a class presentation). Review the assignment guidelines, and appoint one person to record ideas.

■ **Consider all possibilities.** Encourage your middle grader to call out any idea that comes to mind, even if she's not sure it'll work. An off-topic or half-formed suggestion may lead others to think of ideas that *will* work.

■ **Read and evaluate.** At the end of the brainstorming session, look over all the contributions. Think of ways to combine or tweak everyone's favorites.



Writing is fun!

Motivate your tween to write more often with these activities. She'll practice using parts of speech and descriptive language.

Make up Mad Libs. Your middle grader could create a silly story by leaving blanks for you to fill in. Encourage her to think carefully about where to put blanks and label each with the part of speech needed (noun, verb, adjective). For example, will



she leave out a noun so you can choose the character? (“I looked up to see a giant _____ walking down the street.”) Or will she pick the character and let you supply an adjective to describe it? (“There was a _____ wildebeest on the loose.”)

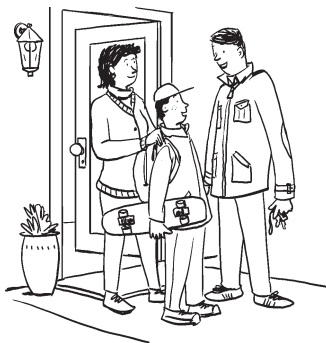
Write shape poetry. Can your child write a poem in the shape of her topic? With *concrete poetry*, she'll do just that. First, have her select an object to write about, such as an apple, and think about what it brings

to mind (baking apple pies with Grandma, visiting an apple orchard). She should draw an outline of an apple in pencil, write lines of poetry in pen to fit the shape, and erase the outline. 🍏

Parent to Parent

Peaceful co-parenting

After our divorce, my ex-wife and I used a co-parenting app to communicate because talking in person was awkward.



When I mentioned the app to my counselor, he suggested that it would be good for our son, Aiden, to see his parents getting along—in person.

I realized he was right, so lately I've started going to my ex-wife's door to pick up Aiden rather than waiting in the car. I caught my son smiling when he saw me talking to his mother about how he's doing in school and about our plans for the weekend.

We still use the app, but it's getting easier to set aside our emotions for Aiden's sake. He's realizing that we can work together even though we have our differences. 🍏



Q&A

Avoid the gossip scene

Q I recently heard my daughter talking with her friends about a rumor that's going around at school. How can I encourage her not to gossip?

A First, talk to your daughter when her friends aren't around. You could suggest that she always assume rumors are false. Point out that people who start or share them often don't even know if they're true. They may gossip because they want attention or to get revenge, for example.

Then, have your tween think about how the person being talked about would feel if he overheard the gossip. Instead of staying silent, your middle grader might speak up and say, “That sounds like a rumor.” She should also avoid spreading the rumor.

Finally, explain that sharing rumors can cause friends not to trust her. After all, if they know she's willing to gossip, they may wonder if she'll gossip about them one day, too. 🍏



Creative tweens

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.

1. Put an inexpensive art easel and supplies (drawing paper, paints, brushes, markers, colored pencils) in a corner of your home. When you're not looking, your tween may



decide to sketch a pet, paint a sunset, or try his hand at abstract art.

2. Put your middle grader in charge of making signs on the computer or on poster board for family members' birthdays. He can download pictures specific 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. 🍌

OUR PURPOSE

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

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