

October 2014

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### School: An everyday thing

Make sure your child knows you expect her to go to school every day, even if she's "too tired" or "needs a break." Review the school attendance policy together, and discuss acceptable reasons to be absent (illness, family emergency). *Tip:* Point out that missing even one day can lead to lots of make-up work—that might make it less appealing to miss class time.

### Fall for fun

Looking for a weekend family outing? Take advantage of autumn with fun seasonal activities. You might attend a nearby harvest festival, go apple picking, watch a high school football game, or drive scenic routes to view changing leaves. It could be the start of a tradition to celebrate each new season together!

### Code games

Help your tween practice logical thinking by creating and deciphering codes. Suggest that each family member invent a secret code using a symbol for every letter of the alphabet. (Example: A = ♥, B = ♪, C = □.) Write coded messages, trade papers, and see who cracks a code first.

### Worth quoting

"The important thing is not to stop questioning." *Albert Einstein*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What do you get if you cross a skunk with a boomerang?

**A:** A terrible smell you can't get rid of!



## Rules that work

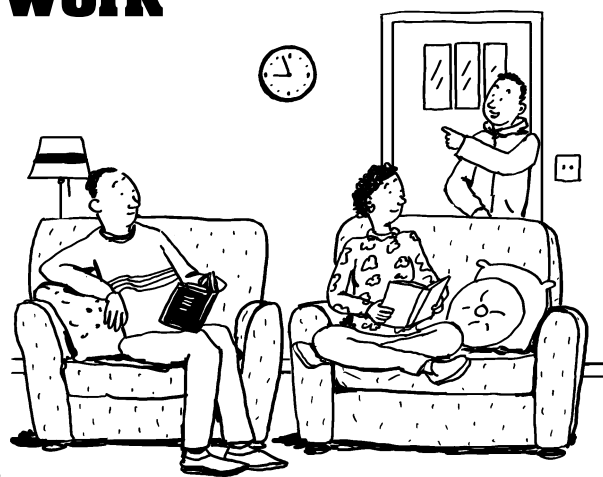
Your tween may be growing up, but he still needs the security that discipline provides. Setting rules and consequences can help him stay safe and feel cared for, even if he doesn't act like it. Consider these ideas.

### Spell it out

As your child finds himself in new situations, he may make assumptions that you don't like. To prevent problems, go over guidelines in advance. For instance, you might want him to call if he's at a friend's house and the parents invite him to go somewhere. That way, you can say yes or no. *Note:* Explain why you're setting this rule. ("We might have other plans, and you wouldn't be home when we needed you.")

### Choose consequences carefully

Holding your tween accountable shows him you're serious about your rules. Decide ahead of time what will happen if he breaks one, and be sure he knows what that is. It works best if you pick a consequence that's related to his



behavior—and, of course, one that you can enforce. *Example:* If he plays video games and doesn't finish his chores, video games are off limits for two days.

### Expand privileges

As your middle schooler shows he can be trusted, you can reevaluate his limits and consider giving him more freedom. But make it clear that those liberties may be revoked if he slides back. For instance, you might allow a later curfew if he consistently keeps the one you set and still has more than enough time for sleep. 👍

## Stay on top of math

Since each new math concept builds on previous ones, it's important for your middle grader to keep up. These strategies can help.

■ **Work backward.** When she's not sure how to approach a homework problem, suggest that she look for a similar problem that's already solved in her book or online. By starting with the answer, she could do the sample problem in reverse to see how each step led to the solution.

■ **Pinpoint mistakes.** Encourage your child to pay careful attention when teachers go over returned assignments and tests. That way, she can learn where she made errors and how to correct them. If she's still confused, she should arrange to meet with her teacher. 👍



# Research: Dig in

The amount of information available to your child increases rapidly every day. That means good research skills are crucial. Share these ways to help her gather the facts she needs.

**Focus on key questions.** Have her set up a system that helps her concentrate on finding the relevant information. For example, she could draw a vertical line to divide a sheet of paper in half. In the left column, she should write the questions she needs to answer. Then, as she works through library books, textbooks, newspapers, or websites, she can fill in the answers in the right column.



**Take notes actively.** Encourage your middle grader to write particularly interesting facts or words on individual sticky notes. For instance, if she's researching Roald Dahl, she could write, "Gobblefunk: Dahl's own language." As she writes her paper, these words can act as reminders and spark ideas. She might also sketch as she researches—for instance, drawing Orion's Belt when reading about constellations—so she has a reference point later.

*Tip:* Writing down her sources as she goes will make compiling a bibliography easier. It will also speed up fact-checking or finding additional information. Suggest that your child keep a list in her notebook or in a computer file. 👍

## Know what's up

Being part of your youngster's school experience can help him succeed, even in the middle grades. Here's how to stay in the loop.

### Stay informed

Ask how the school, PTA or PTO, teachers, and advisers send out announcements. You might join the PTO Facebook page, a teacher's email list, or a sports team's phone tree. If you don't have computer access, provide another way to be contacted.

### Watch for opportunities

Check announcements frequently. Requests for help will probably vary. You can choose those that fit your interests and availability—say, painting at Family Art Night or contributing a dish for social studies Greek Day.



### Talk about it

Mention events to your tween that you hear about, like a fall dance or a debate tournament. Keeping an eye on happenings at his school shows support, even if you're not directly involved. 👍

## 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

### Seeing the glass half full

**Q** My son tends to be a "glass half empty" kind of person. How can I encourage him to be more optimistic?

**A** Having a positive outlook will help your son feel happier, cope with stress better, and be more pleasant. Even if he's not naturally optimistic, he can develop a brighter way of seeing things.

Lead the way by looking for the good in situations. You might say, "It's going to be a busy day, but I'll feel great getting so much done!" To inspire him to do the same, prompt him to look on the bright side when things don't go as planned. ("We could work on our puzzle together since your baseball game was rained out.") Eventually, he may pick up the habit.

Also, help your child see setbacks as temporary and recognize things he can fix. Say he doesn't do well on a test. Point out that it doesn't mean he won't do well on future tests, and have him make a plan to improve. 👍



## Parent to Parent

### An earth-friendly party

My daughter Sarah wanted to throw a surprise birthday party for her best friend, but she didn't have much money to spend. I had heard of "zero waste" parties that not only help the environment, but also keep costs down since you don't buy many supplies. The idea is not to have any trash left that can't be recycled or reused.

I told Sarah about this, and she decided to try it. First, instead of buying and mailing invitations, she made

a free invitation online and emailed it. She also asked everyone to bring food—and, in keeping with the "green" theme, to use recyclable containers.

For the party, she used real plates, silverware, and cups instead of buying paper or plastic ones. She and another girl even decorated an old sheet to use as a tablecloth.

Her friend enjoyed the party, and Sarah liked making her friend's birthday special by being good to the earth—and not spending much! 👍

