

November 2007

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Untangling math

If your child has trouble with a math problem, suggest that she review the process with a teacher, classmate, or tutor. Working through the steps she took to reach her conclusion will help her pinpoint mistakes. That way, she'll get the right answer and know how to work similar problems later.

DID YOU KNOW?

High school graduates earn a lifetime average of \$300,000 more than dropouts do. A two-year college degree adds \$700,000, while a bachelor's degree increases earnings by a whopping \$1.4 million. Share these facts with your middle grader—they're sure to get his attention and help keep him interested in learning!

Encouraging words

Give your child a boost of encouragement with some simple words. Let her "overhear" you tell a friend something good about her. *Examples:* "She takes such good care of our dog." "She's always willing to read to our little one." Hearing a compliment can inspire your middle grader to keep up the good work.

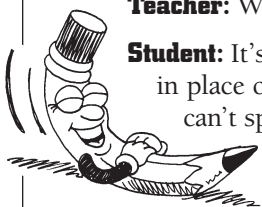
Worth quoting

"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."
Annie Dillard

Just for fun

Teacher: What's a synonym?

Student: It's a word you use in place of the one you can't spell.



Family peace

Imagine a household where parents and middle graders don't fight. Sounds like a dream, right? Use these suggestions to limit arguments in your family and work on that dream.

Keep calm

When tempers flare, it's important to control your anger. Try counting silently to 10 or taking a few deep breaths before speaking. Walk into another room if you need to. Remember, staying calm keeps you from acting out of frustration and saying something you don't mean. It also lets you listen to what your child is saying.

Inject fun

A little fun can go a long way toward easing tension. For example, if your middle grader's grumbling has sparked arguments, post a sign on the front door: "Leave complaints outside!" Then, take time to discuss what's bugging her. Or make light of a stressful situation. Say she's not ready when it's time to leave for the dentist. Instead of yelling, announce the "Great get-out-of-the-house race" and start counting down from 20.

Head off conflict

Look for patterns that can help your family avoid fights. For a week, keep track of when arguments erupt. Is it usually when you're busy making dinner, or in the morning when



everyone is rushing to get out the door? Then, plan for those times (develop a morning routine, have your middle grader help you cook). Working around difficult times can help things stay peaceful. 🍌

Let's get started

Does your child tend to put everything off until tomorrow? Here are ways other parents have stopped the procrastinating:

- "When my middle grader has an assignment, we set a 'family' deadline that is earlier than the real deadline. Now he starts his work sooner."
- "I explained to my daughter that procrastinating can become a habit. I told her she could try to break this habit the same way she stopped biting her nails a few years ago."
- "We gave our son a timer to set when he begins work. The ticking seems to keep him on task."
- "I asked my daughter to write down how long her homework took each night. That helped her plan her time better for the future."
- "Our child knows we won't rescue him if he turns things in late. It's his job, and he has to face the consequences." 🍌



Research: Just the facts

Max feels good about his project. That's because he did lots of research, which gave him solid information to use.

Help your middle grader improve his research skills with these strategies.

Use the library. Encourage your child to consult a variety of sources, including books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. He can search the library database for materials or ask the librarian for suggestions. Using many sources will increase the variety of information he finds.



Search the Web. When hunting for information online, your youngster should be as specific as possible. Typing narrow keywords into a search engine (Google, Yahoo) will give him targeted results. *Example:* "history color photography" rather than "photography."

Check facts. Urge your middle grader to verify the details he finds. This is especially true for the Internet, where good—and bad—information is posted. As a rule of thumb, he should confirm facts with three sources. And he needs to verify his sources (Is the date recent? What are the author's credentials?). If the facts aren't correct, his paper won't be either! 👍



Q & A Socializing on the Web

Q My child is talking a lot about MySpace and Facebook. What do I need to know about these Web sites?

A These are "social networking" Web sites where kids post personal profiles and pictures and chat with people they know—and don't know.

Even though the sites were designed for teens and college students, they have become wildly popular with preteens, too. Talk with your youngster about the sites he is visiting, and make sure he follows crucial safety rules. He should set his "profile"—the page with his pictures and any identifying information—so that it can only be viewed by people he designates as "friends."

Also, insist that he never add strangers to his friends' list.

Finally, make sure your middle grader is aware of the public nature of these

sites. He shouldn't post anything he wouldn't want everyone to know (a new crush, comments about a teacher). 👍



Parent to Parent Conference success

My first parent-teacher conference in middle school was a big change. Instead of talking with a teacher who had Tiffany all day, I met with only one of her seven teachers. Mr. Wright knew how Tiffany was doing in math, and he shared reports from her other teachers. But I had more questions. Was she participating in each class? How did she get along with others?

Mr. Wright suggested that I contact Tiffany's other teachers. I was happy when they responded with the information I wanted, and they invited me to keep in touch. In fact, they seemed pleased that I was involved in my daughter's education.

Before my next conference, I e-mailed questions to each teacher. Now I feel like I'm getting to know all Tiffany's teachers—and I know what's going on in each class. 👍



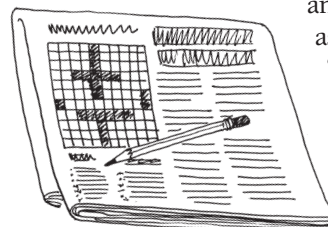
A word a day

What needs daily work but is never complete? Your child's vocabulary. Here are three ways to help her learn new words every day:

1. While your middle grader is reading, have her look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary. Then, she can draw a simple picture to help her remember the meaning. *Example:* "Equilibrium" (balance) could be a child sitting in the middle of a balance beam.
2. Make the daily crossword puzzle a family activity. Or try guessing definitions at

Fake Out (www.eduplace.com/fakeout) or playing word puzzles at Vocabulary University (www.vocabulary.com/VUlevel2S140.html). These are fun ways to build your youngster's personal word bank.

3. Leave word books, such as *Word Smart*, in the family room. In the evening, flip open the book and ask a question, such as "Who knows what 'caustic' means?" Have your middle grader challenge you next. Your enthusiasm will be contagious. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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