

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Conference time

As your youngster tackles tougher coursework in middle school, he needs your support more than ever. Make attending parent-teacher conferences a priority. You'll show him that you value his education, and you'll find out how he's doing. Be sure to tell your child what his teachers said, and follow up on recommendations they make.

### Family ties

Staying close with relatives will help your child develop important family connections. Encourage her to call grandparents with news about school or sports—or just to say hello. Also, try to plan visits around her schedule when possible. She'll be happier going to her aunt's house if she doesn't have to miss dance rehearsal or a friend's party.

### Lighten the load

Heavy backpacks can be a real pain—in the back, neck, and shoulders. Your middle schooler can limit the weight he carries by stopping at his locker throughout the day and using a separate bag for sports equipment. He should also wear both straps of his backpack to distribute the weight evenly.

### Worth quoting

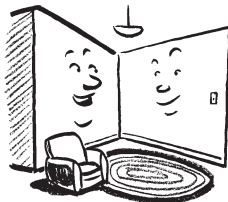
"The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it."

*Alan Saporta*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What did one wall say to the other?

**A:** Meet me at the corner!



## Let's cooperate

How can your child be a contributing member of your family, her class, and her community? By cooperating. Here's how to encourage a spirit of teamwork in your youngster.

### At home

Understanding her role can motivate your middle grader to cooperate. For example, your family's goal every morning is to leave for school and work on time. Explain to your youngster that when she gets up and comes to breakfast without reminders, you can focus on your own morning routine.

### At school

When your youngster is assigned a group project for a class, ask her to describe her part to you. Remind her that she has to do her job so that everyone can earn a good grade. If she's supposed to take care of plants for a group science experiment, for instance, she might need to water them daily or measure their growth weekly.



### In the community

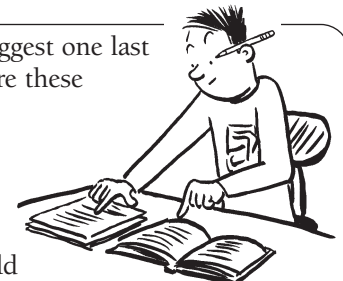
Find a volunteer project to do together. You might sign up for a neighborhood cleanup or serve spaghetti at a fundraising dinner. Your middle schooler can see how neighbors cooperate to make their community a better place to live.

*Tip:* Recognizing your youngster's contribution can encourage her to cooperate in the future. Look her in the eye, and thank her for something specific: "I appreciate your help with the leaves. Our yard looks really nice." 👍

## Polishing homework

Before your youngster turns in his homework, suggest one last way to make it shine: editing and proofreading. Share these ideas to help him do his best work:

- If he's answering textbook questions, have him flip back through the chapter to double-check spellings of names and places and to verify dates.
- Be sure that the work makes sense. When your child writes up an experiment in his science journal, he should reread it to make certain that he has included all the steps and that they're in order.
- For longer assignments (stories, essays), suggest that he look for one kind of mistake at a time. He can read through once for spelling, again for capitalization, and a third time for punctuation.
- Encourage your middle grader to allow at least 30 minutes between finishing an assignment and proofing it. Problems are often more obvious with a fresh eye. 👍



# Research skills

Your middle schooler has to write a report about a famous author. Help him find good information quickly with these research tips.

**Get focused.** Picking a topic is one thing. Deciding on an angle is another. Say your child is researching author Sharon Creech. He should browse through books, articles, and Web sites and jot down main points. Then, he can choose one idea to focus on (what led her to write *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, how her writing style has changed over the years).



**Use reliable sources.** Your youngster will need to make sure his report contains only factual information. An author's official biography or Web site is more reliable than one written by a fan, for instance. He can verify facts by finding them in more than one publication (an encyclopedia and a journal article).

**Stay organized.** Suggest that your child sort facts as he conducts research. This will help him make sure he includes all the important information. He might take notes on index cards and use paper clips to keep cards with similar ideas together (the author's childhood, novels she wrote). 👍



## Rediscover the library

When your child was younger, she may have loved library story time. Now that she's in middle school, she can enjoy the library in different ways. Here are several ideas:

- Your middle grader might explore her interests on library computers, borrow movie versions of her favorite books, or check out books on tape or CD.



- She can meet other students by signing up for a book club or creative-writing forum. Suggest that she ask at the reference desk about meetings and programs.

- Have your child check into library volunteer opportunities for students. She may be able to read to younger children or shelve books. 👍

## Parent to Parent

### Single-parent solutions



Raising a middle schooler on my own was becoming a challenge. When my son David questioned my rules or wanted more freedom, I had no one to discuss it with.

I mentioned my dilemma to a friend who's active in the PTA. With her help, I placed a note in the PTA newsletter to see if other single parents would be interested in getting together and talking over problems. A handful of people responded.

For our first meeting, we met at my house. We chatted about everything from setting curfews to handling homework. I especially appreciated one mom's advice to take time for myself, like going out for coffee or taking a walk with a friend.

Everyone has a busy schedule, but we've decided to meet once a month. Our next meeting will be at the community center. I think that just knowing I'm not alone will help me be a more confident parent. 👍

## Q & A Saving a friendship

**Q** My daughter and her friend haven't been getting along. What advice can I give her?

**A** All friendships have ups and downs. Explain to your daughter that in good relationships, positive factors—like having fun together—outweigh negative ones, such as dealing with the other person's moodiness.

To decide if the friendship is worth saving, suggest that your child ask herself some questions. Do

they argue over minor issues (which movie to see) or major ones (putting each other down)? Do they enjoy the same activities? Do they like to talk about the same things?

If your daughter decides to try to work it out, encourage her to talk to her friend. You might help her brainstorm things to say. ("I feel like we usually do what you want. Sometimes, I'd like to choose.") A true friend will want to listen and try to solve the problem together. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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