

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

- **A Cozy Tradition** – Family traditions give tweens a sense of security as they deal with the ups and downs of adolescence. Here’s one idea: Have hot chocolate parties on cold winter days. Set out toppings like marshmallows, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Then, chat about your day while you enjoy your treat.
- **Welcome, Second Semester!** – Before your child goes back to school, remind her to check her schedule for any changes second semester will bring. She should make sure she knows where new classrooms are and what supplies she will need. *Tip:* Send an email introducing yourself to any new teachers she has.
- **Middle School Dating** – If your tween mentions classmates who are dating, ask him what that means in middle school. Often, tween relationships start with “talking,” which means texting or chatting on social media. Ask your child whether he’s interested in anyone, and share your expectations, such as only exchanging messages and photos he’d be okay for you to see.

Worth Quoting – “There are no shortcuts to anyplace worth going.”
-- Beverly Sills

Just for Fun – Question - What word is spelled wrong in every dictionary?
Answer – Wrong!

Healthy Technology Habits

Limiting your middle grader’s screen time encourages her to interact with people in real life and focus on schoolwork. Try these tips:

- **Join In** – Setting limits on electronics use for the whole family may make your tween more likely to cooperate. Ask everyone to silence and put away devices during game nights or car rides. You can enjoy conversation and pay attention to each other. Also, set up a charging station where everyone leaves devices at night so that sleep isn’t interrupted.
- **Socialize Face to Face** – Suggest that your child brainstorm screen-free activities to do with friends. Some examples are having them work on a giant jigsaw puzzle or make up dance routines. They could use electronics in ways that don’t involve staring at screens. Maybe they’ll sing along with a free karaoke app or go outside and see who can take the coolest nature photos.
- **Stay Focused** – When your middle grader uses electronics for homework, have her close all apps or windows that she doesn’t need for the assignment. She should also turn off notifications so she’s not tempted to reopen the apps she closed. If she takes a break, encourage her to make it screen-free. Perhaps she’ll go for a short walk or play with her dog.

Developing a Growth Mindset

Does your child know that learning actually makes his brain grow? Using this advice, you could help him adopt a *growth mindset*, or an attitude that he can develop his abilities if he works at them.

- **Find Alternate Routes** – Say the dialogue in a story your tween is writing sounds unrealistic. Rather than thinking, “I’m just not a good writer,” he could look for ways to improve his writing. Perhaps he’ll ask someone to act out the story with him and decide how the characters would really talk.
- **Aim for Variety** – Encourage your child to strengthen the growing connections in his brain by learning new information in multiple ways. For example, to study Spanish vocabulary, he could choose a picture book and listen to an audiobook version of it in Spanish while he follows along in the book. By using this method he’ll see, hear, and say the words he’s learning.

Ready, Set, Debate

When would you want your tween to argue with you? During a friendly debate! Knowing how to make a strong argument can help her write persuasive essays and participate in class discussions. Here’s a fun way to practice.

1. **Choose a Topic** – You might debate whether it’s better to shop online or in stores, or whether we should colonize Mars or the moon.
2. **Prepare Arguments** – Have each person write down facts that support each side. *Examples:* Shopping online saves time because you don’t have to drive to a store, and you can quickly compare options from several sites. But in a brick-and-mortar store, you can choose the vegetables you want or try on clothes, and you’ll get in more steps for the day.
3. **Hold a Debate** – Assign half the family to one side and half to the other. Then, present your arguments for your side. Next, swap sides – each person argues the opposite position. Did anyone’s opinion change as a result of the debate?

Meaningful Math

Math isn’t just for the classroom. Numbers help to determine professional football team rosters, which TV shows stay on the air, and how new cars are designed. Your child can work with data, ratios, and percentages in areas that interest him. Share these examples.

- **Sports** – Let your middle grader compare stats of teams and players in his favorite sport. He might look up and chart a hockey team’s win-loss record and the star player’s goals, assists, and total points. What percentage of the team’s goals has that player scored so far this season?
- **Cars** – Engineers use math to design fuel-efficient cars. Ask your tween to look up the weight and gas mileage for various cars and calculate the weight-mileage ratio. He’ll discover that lighter cars generally get better gas mileage.

Q & A: Spread Kindness!

Q: I recently overheard my daughter and her friend making mean remarks about another girl. How can I encourage my child to be kinder?

Q & A: Spread Kindness, continued

A: Being kind has benefits that matter to tweens, like helping them make and keep friends and feel good about themselves. Suggest that your daughter challenge herself to do at least one kind act each day. Maybe she could smile and say good morning to the bus driver or custodian, or invite someone who's sitting alone in the cafeteria to eat lunch with her. When you ask your child about school at the end of the day, be sure to include, "Who were you kind to today?" and "Who was kind to you?" Tell her what you did that was kind, too – you'll give each other ideas to try another day.

Parent to Parent: Nervous? Try This!

My son Ben loves to play piano, but he was nervous about this year's recital. I recently gave a big presentation at work, so I knew how he felt. I decided to talk to him about strategies I used to calm my nerves.

I told Ben that I practiced a lot and it helped me feel more confident because I knew the material better. Then during the presentation, I looked for friendly faces in the crowd. I also kept going even when I stumbled over few words.

Ben has been practicing for his recital, and he has also asked me to listen so he could play in front of an audience. He said that on recital day, he plans to glance at our family for a boost of confidence before he sits down to play. I'm hoping that following my advice will make him a little less nervous.

Our Purpose

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

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