

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Thinking of you

It's comforting for children to know their parents care about the ins and outs of their daily lives. Try leaving a short, unexpected note where your middle grader will find it. Or send an email or text to show interest. ("Good luck on your math test tomorrow" or "Have a great Tuesday!")

### Too good to be true?

Advertisements often promise more than companies can deliver. Ask your tween to read the fine print carefully. What does she find out? She'll sharpen her critical thinking and reading comprehension skills as she evaluates the promises and the exceptions. Plus, she'll learn consumer smarts!

### Homegrown cooperation

When you need to do a big job around the house like reorganizing the attic or scrubbing the baseboards, have everyone pitch in. It will teach your child to cooperate and help him see the benefits of working together, such as getting more done in less time. *Idea:* Plan a fun activity to celebrate your accomplishment.

### Worth quoting

"It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters." *Epictetus*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did the cow cross the road?

**A:** Because the chicken was on vacation!



## My actions, my responsibility

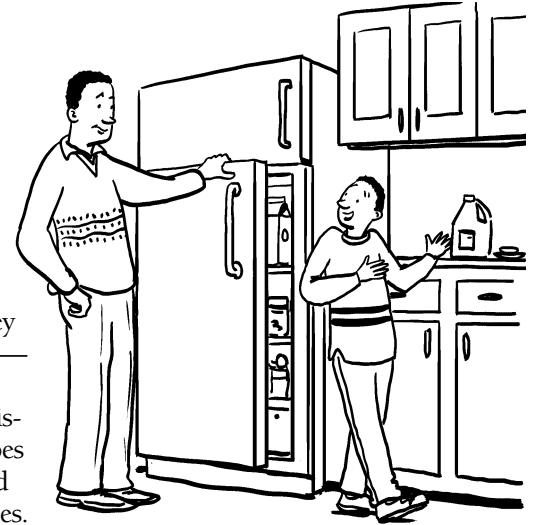
For your tween to take personal responsibility, it's important that he own up to his actions and keep his commitments. Help him learn this valuable lesson with these tips for handling common excuses.

### Admit mistakes

It's typical for kids this age to immediately deny wrongdoing. ("Who left the refrigerator open?" "Not me!") They do so to keep from getting into trouble—and to protect their pride. Your middle grader will be more willing to admit mistakes if you don't overreact when he does confess. Instead, use a neutral tone, and give a gentle reminder for minor offenses. ("Let's all try to keep the door closed.")

### Avoid excuses

Does your tween have an excuse for everything? Maybe he didn't get a permission slip signed and says, "You weren't home when I had it out." Make it clear it's his responsibility to find a way to get things done. Discuss what he could have done, such as leaving the paper on the kitchen counter with a note or putting a reminder in his planner to get it signed.



### Accept blame

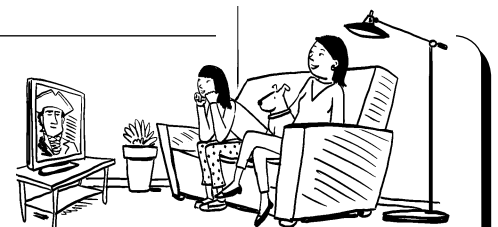
If your child is in the hot seat, he may be tempted to blame others. Maybe he didn't do well on a test, and he says his friend kept goofing off during study time. Explain that blaming others doesn't solve the problem—and that preparing for the test was up to him, not anyone else. Brainstorm what he can do next time (study alone, use a checklist to stay on track). 👍

## That's history

History class involves a lot of names, places, dates, and events. Share these ideas to help your child understand—and remember—the information she is learning.

■ **Compare and contrast.** To quickly tell the differences between two documents, events, or historical figures, she could draw a line down a sheet of paper. She might describe the Declaration of Independence on one side and the Constitution on the other.

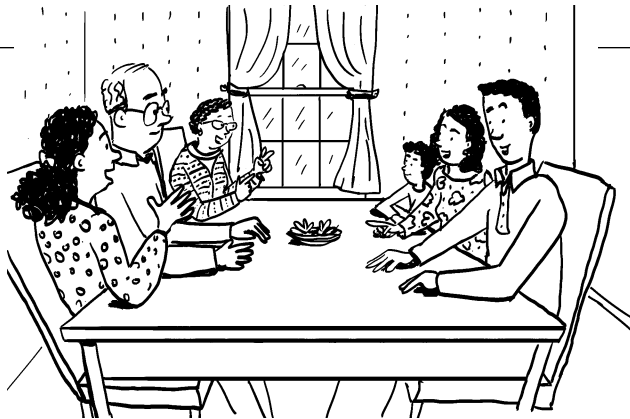
■ **Watch documentaries.** Encourage your middle grader to look for films related to topics she's studying, like the Gold Rush or the abolitionist movement. They will provide background that helps her understand the events better. *Tip:* Watch the documentaries together—you'll both learn, and they'll give you something to talk about. 👍



# Great discussions

Family gatherings are a fun time to practice the art of conversation—a skill your middle grader needs for classroom discussions, after-school activities, or just hanging with friends. Here are two activities to try.

**Talk in a “fishbowl.”** This strategy can teach your child what does and doesn’t work in discussions. Pick something to address, such as a news article or an idea for a new business. Divide into two groups, and let one group talk while the other watches.



The observers could jot down what’s helping the conversation (clarifying what someone else said) or hurting it (muttering under your breath). Then, switch roles.

**Take a side.** Help your tween learn to give her opinions constructively. Choose a hot topic. (“Athletes should make less money.”) Those who agree should sit on one side of a table, and those who disagree on the other. Debate with the person sitting opposite you for a few minutes. Next, the people on one side move down one chair. Start again. Repeat until all pairs have debated. 👍

# Create recycled art

Turning old objects into artwork will stretch your child’s creativity and give him practice seeing things in new ways. Suggest that he use these everyday items for do-it-yourself projects.



## CDs and DVDs

Let your tween make a “reflective mosaic” by cutting old CDs and DVDs into pieces of varying shapes and sizes. (*Note:* He should use regular scissors, wear goggles, and watch for sharp edges when handling the pieces.) He could arrange and glue the pieces to cardboard or a canvas for hanging. Or he might make gifts by decorating small boxes or picture frames with the mirrored pieces.



## Magazines

Have your middle schooler cut out text and pictures in black, white, and shades of gray. Now he can combine them into his own design. He’ll learn about *value*—the lightness or darkness of a color—as he decides where to place the different pieces. Or he could cut out one photo from a magazine, glue it to a blank page, and draw a background or scene around it to create a whole new piece. 👍

## Parent to Parent

### Put conferences on the calendar

When my daughter Marissa started middle school, I didn’t attend her parent-teacher conference because, as far as I knew, she wasn’t having any trouble. But as the year went on, I felt a little in the dark about her classes, and it was hard for me to recognize her teachers at school events.



So last year, I decided to go. Before the conference, I asked Marissa what she wanted me to discuss. She mentioned a science event where she could volunteer for extra credit, so I got more information from her teacher. Also, hearing about her work made it easier for me to discuss it with her—and I enjoyed seeing the classrooms where Marissa spends her days.

I’ve already signed up for a time slot this year, and I’m looking forward to attending! 👍

## Q & A

### Risky business

**Q** Now that my son is in middle school, I’m worried he may be introduced to drugs or alcohol. How can I convince him to stay away from them?

**A** Tell your child why he isn’t allowed to try drugs or alcohol. Not only is using them illegal at his age, but they are especially harmful to growing tweens.

Because the adolescent brain is still developing, it’s easier for addictions to take hold. And with repeated use, these substances can

cause permanent damage to his brain, affecting his memory and attention span.

Teens naturally want to take risks, so encourage your son to choose only healthy ones. He might push himself to do something outside his comfort zone, such as entering a writing contest or trying out for a new sport. Also, getting involved in after-school activities will give him a rewarding way to spend his time. 👍



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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