

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

No skipping allowed

Middle graders may think it's cool to roam the halls or hang out in the bathroom instead of going to class. Make sure your child knows you expect him to be in all of his classes every day—and explain ahead of time what consequences he would face from school, and from you, if he skips.

Shifting moods

Tweens often go through ups and downs because of changing hormones. When your child seems out of sorts, that's when she most needs you to remain calm. Showing you have control will comfort her and make her feel secure, even if she doesn't realize it at the time.

Where's my glove?

Are family members constantly looking for missing gloves? Make it easier to get out the door to school and to work by giving each person his own bin for winter gear (mittens, hats, scarves). Stack them by the door, or place in a closet. *Tip:* Designate a spot for gloves without matches in case the mates show up.

Worth quoting

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."
Randy Pausch

Just for fun

Q: Why do dogs wag their tails?

A: Because nobody else will do it for them.



Happy to collaborate

You may have heard your middle schooler talk about group assignments—perhaps a paper she's writing with a partner or a slide presentation she's creating with classmates. Learning to collaborate will help her succeed in these projects *and* teach her an important skill for the future. Share these strategies.

Look for themes

Collaborating is about using everyone's thoughts and opinions to find a solution. First, group members need to brainstorm and keep track of suggestions. Then, they can look for ways to combine their ideas. For example, they might realize most of their concepts fit into three main categories and work together to divide their paper into three parts.

Learn to compromise

Help your tween use language that encourages others to participate and shows she is considering their recommendations. For instance, she could ask, "What's your reaction to this?" Or she can paraphrase someone's comments with "It sounds like



you're saying..." To disagree politely, she might reply, "I see what you're saying. I also see it another way."

Figure out roles

Another key to collaboration is using everyone's strengths. Say your middle grader's group is making a slide show. One person might use her organizational skills to schedule meetings and decide how to arrange the slides. Another can use technology know-how to create the slides and add special effects. 👍

"I care about you"

Caring about others can make your child feel good about himself and even help him make new friends. Inspire compassion with these ideas.

Trade places. Suggest that he put himself in someone else's shoes. Say his friend is disappointed because he didn't make a sports team. Your tween could think about how he would feel if he worked hard for something and didn't get it. Seeing things from his friend's perspective will help him understand his friend's feelings—and empathize.

Take action. Encourage him to find a way to support others who are going through a rough time. If a classmate loses his grandfather, he might visit the friend and invite him to tell stories about his grandpa. Or he can make a sympathy card and have other students sign it. 👍

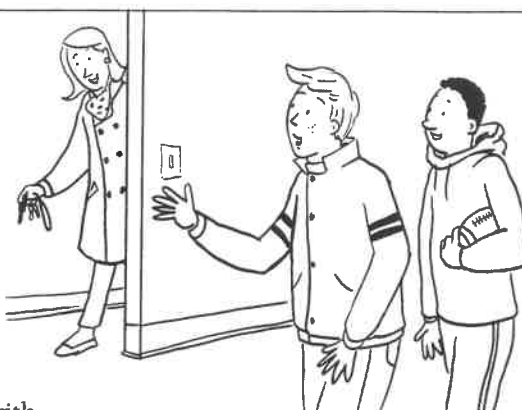


Grow by the rules

Setting rules during the tween years can be puzzling, since middle graders aren't little kids anymore, but they aren't teenagers either. Try these tips.

Consider new freedoms

Think of ways to adapt rules for your child's age and maturity level. Ask for his input, and decide which suggestions make sense. Say he wants you to start dropping him off at the mall with his friends. You might agree to read in the mall's coffee shop while they walk around. Once you see how he handles it, you can choose whether to drop him off in the future.



Encourage problem solving

Parents want to protect their children—but your tween will often be better off experiencing the natural consequences of his actions. Perhaps your rule is that he needs to remember his own items for school. If he forgets a book for class, let him work out a solution instead of dropping it off for him. He'll learn to problem solve, and chances are he'll try harder to remember next time. 👍

ping it off for him. He'll learn to problem solve, and chances are he'll try harder to remember next time. 👍



Chores without complaints

Does your child pitch in around the house? Having her do chores helps her develop a good work ethic that will benefit her at home and in school. Here are ways to foster this quality.



■ **Think “we.”** Have her regularly help with chores that benefit the whole household, such as doing dishes or cleaning out closets. That way, she'll learn to work hard even if it won't benefit her directly.

■ **Make it snappy.** Set a timer for 2 or 3 minutes, and challenge everyone to do a specific chore before time is up. Your tween might straighten up the family room while you wipe down kitchen counters. Keeping it short and fun makes it more likely she'll pitch in willingly—and be more open to helping out next time. 👍

Parent to Parent

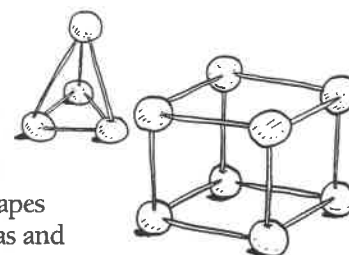
Math night at school...and at home

My daughter and I recently attended family math night at her school. Marissa found the activities fun, so when her teacher sent home more ideas to try, we decided to hold a math night at home.

First, we rolled play dough into little balls and connected them with toothpicks to create 3-D shapes like cubes and cones. Marissa measured their areas and showed me how to do it.

Next, we played “secret function.” I wrote numbers on slips of paper. Marissa picked one at a time, performed a “function,” like adding 8 or dividing by 3, and wrote the answer on the flip side. I had to figure out the function she used. For “4,” she had written 16, and I said she had squared the number. She said that was right, but added, “It could have been $\times 4$ or $+ 12$.” That led to a great discussion about how many different functions may have been right!

I enjoyed seeing math in a new light. And I'm glad Marissa is enjoying playing with math. 👍



Q & A Work that's mine

Q My son recently received a zero on a paper because it was too similar to an online article he used as a source. He had simply rearranged the information, and he didn't understand this was plagiarism! What should I do?

A In today's online world, students may pass off someone else's work as their own without realizing it. They might believe that just rewording or rearranging material makes it theirs. Or they may

even forget which part is a direct quote from a source and fail to give credit.

Your son can avoid unintentional plagiarism by taking careful notes as he researches. Encourage him to put quotation marks around direct quotes and to keep a running list of sources.

Also, suggest that he jot down his own thoughts and reactions while researching. That will give him a good place to start when he writes so he is sure to use his own words. 👍



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Math+Science Connection

Intermediate Edition

Building Understanding and Excitement for Children

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Middle Country School District
Title I - Parental Involvement



INFO BITS

Symmetry drawing

Ask your youngster to fold a piece of paper in half. Along the folded edge, have her write her name in bubble letters and color them in. Then, she can cut around the letters and unfold the paper. Suggest that she color the blank side to match—the two sides will be *symmetrical*, or mirror images of each other.



Chocolate-chip mining

With chocolate chip cookies and a toothpick, your child will learn how mining affects the earth. His goal is to remove the “minerals” (chips) with the least damage possible to the “earth” (cookie). *Note:* He may only “drill” down (no flipping the cookie over) to get to the minerals. Can he leave the “land” intact?

Web picks

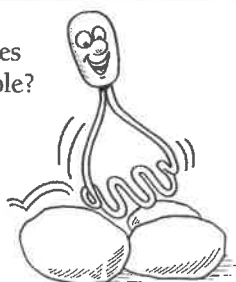
Visit mathgametime.com where your youngster can pick his grade and play games like Penguin Jump Multiplication and Puppy Chase Decimals.

Your child will learn about the sun, the planets, and more at spaceplace.nasa.gov. She'll find online games as well as out-of-this-world crafts and activities to do offline.

Just for fun

Q: How do you divide 6 potatoes among 15 people?

A: Mash them!



Let's compare fractions

Which is greater, $\frac{4}{7}$ or $\frac{5}{12}$? If your youngster has strategies for comparing fractions, he'll know that it's $\frac{4}{7}$! Here are strategies he can choose from to develop his “fraction sense.”

0, $\frac{1}{2}$, or 1?

This cooperative game encourages your child to use *benchmarks* like 0, $\frac{1}{2}$, and 1. Have him write these fractions on separate sticky notes: $\frac{1}{5}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{6}{10}$, $\frac{11}{12}$. Mix them up facedown, and let each player take a note to put on someone else's forehead (without showing that person the fraction).

Now, line up from smallest to greatest fraction—without speaking. Compare the fractions you see, and guide each other to the right spots. To compare, your youngster can decide whether each fraction is closest to 0 ($\frac{1}{5}$), a little less than $\frac{1}{2}$ ($\frac{3}{8}$), slightly more than $\frac{1}{2}$ ($\frac{6}{10}$), or closest to 1 ($\frac{11}{12}$). Remove your sticky notes—are you in the right order?



Number line match-up

A number line is a great visual way to compare fractions. Let your youngster cut out two strips of paper, fold one into fourths and the other into sixths, and unfold both. Have him label the fourths strip 0, $\frac{1}{4}$, $\frac{2}{4}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{4}{4}$ and the sixths strip 0, $\frac{1}{6}$, $\frac{2}{6}$, $\frac{3}{6}$, $\frac{4}{6}$, $\frac{5}{6}$, $\frac{6}{6}$.

Take turns calling out one fraction from each strip (say, $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{5}{6}$). The other person compares the number lines by placing one above the other to see which fraction is greater ($\frac{5}{6}$). *Idea:* Make more strips (thirds, fifths, eighths, tenths), and compare more fractions. 📦

Make a terrarium

Your child can create a terrarium to see the *water cycle* in action.

Give your youngster a clear glass or plastic container with a lid. Have her add a few inches of potting soil and plant several seeds (bean plants will grow quickly). Let her water the soil so it's damp (not soaked), then put the lid on tightly.

Place the terrarium in a sunny spot, and encourage your child to observe it each day. She'll notice water droplets forming on the inside of the container, on the soil, and on the plants when they start to grow.

Explain that the water evaporates (turns into a gas), condenses as droplets, and “rains” (turns into precipitation) onto the soil. This cycle keeps going and waters the plants. 📦



Play with patterns

Patterns help your youngster do multiplication and understand algebra formulas. Give her practice with these fun activities.

Skip count. With this two-player game, your child can practice skip counting to make patterns. Take turns rolling two dice. On your turn, set a timer for 30 seconds, start counting at the lower number rolled, and skip count by the higher number rolled. *Example:* Roll 2 and 5, and count, “2, 7, 12, 17.” Your score is the highest number you say correctly when the timer goes off. Play 5 rounds, keeping a running total of your scores. High score wins.



Find the hidden pattern.

Draw a grid with 5 rows and 5 columns, and write a pattern for your youngster to discover. Perhaps you'll “hide” a pattern like 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19. Write one number per square—in squares that touch horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. Now, “camouflage” the pattern by putting random numbers in the other boxes. Circle the number to start with, and tell your youngster to color in the boxes that make a pattern. Can she figure out your pattern (begin at 4, add 3)? Now let her make a camouflaged pattern for you to find. 🎲



Q & A Watch the time fly

Q: My son Diego has learned to tell time. However, he struggles with problems where he has to figure out how much time has passed. Any suggestions?



A: With regular practice, your child can develop a good sense of *elapsed time* and become comfortable calculating it.

Be specific when you talk about time. Say it's 7:24 a.m., and you need to leave at 8:00 a.m. Rather than saying, “We're leaving in about half an hour,” tell him, “We're leaving in 36 minutes—what time will that be?” He could think, “In 6 minutes, it will be 7:30, and in 30 more minutes, it will be 8:00.”

When you get in the car, check your GPS, and tell your son your arrival time. Can he tell you how long you'll be on the road? Or if you're taking a bus, train, or plane, have him look at the schedule and calculate how long your trip will last. 📅

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SCIENCE LAB

What's inside my bones?

Show your child why it's important to drink his milk! This experiment demonstrates how the calcium in milk and other foods keeps his bones strong.

You'll need: 2 chicken drumstick bones, 2 large clean jars with lids, white vinegar

Here's how: Let your youngster examine the bones and describe how they feel (strong, hard). Now, have him put one bone in each jar. He should cover one bone with vinegar, leave the other bone dry, and screw the lids on tightly. In 3–4 days, have him take out the bones.

What happens? The bone that was in vinegar will be bendable and feel squishy. The dry bone will still be firm.

Why? The vinegar, an acid, dissolved the calcium in the bone, and all that's left is bone tissue. Calcium is a mineral that gives bones their strength—without it, bones become soft. 🦴



MATH CORNER

Keep a math journal

Encourage your youngster to write in a math journal at home, and she'll gain new ways to think about math each day. In a notebook, she could:

- Graph data from her day. For instance, she could keep track of what she eats, then draw a colorful bar graph in her journal that shows which food group she ate from the most.
- Make up a math problem for a book she's reading.

Suggest that she illustrate and solve it. For *Holes* by Louis Sachar, she might write, “Stanley dug a hole 5 ft. deep, 5 ft. wide, and 5 ft. long. How big was the hole?” (Answer: $5 \times 5 \times 5 = 125$ cubic ft.)

● Write about what she wants to be when she grows up, listing how she would use math in her career. *Hint:* She could ask you and other grown-ups what kinds of math you do in your job. 📊



Recipes for Success

Practical Activities to Help Your Child Succeed

FEBRUARY 2018

Character Corner

☐ PATIENCE

Some things are worth the wait. Help your youngster become more patient by talking about things that get better with time. For instance, homemade soup is tastier after it simmers. How many ideas can he come up with?



☐ GENEROSITY

Teach your child to be generous by suggesting that she donate a toy, book, or game to a hospital for patients to use. She can choose a gently used item or save her allowance to buy something. Tip: Call your local hospital to ask what kinds of things are needed.



☐ TRUSTWORTHINESS

Help your child learn about trust with this activity: Cover his eyes with a blindfold (scarf, tie), and steer him through a room safely. Switch roles, and he can guide you next.



MULTIPLICATION

Try this "sweet strategy" for multiplication practice. Make a toaster waffle, and ask your child to show you 4 x 2—in chocolate chips. She would arrange the chips to cover four rows and two columns on the waffle. Now she gets to eat her problem!



SPELLING Fishing for words

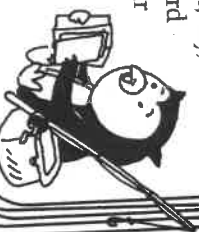
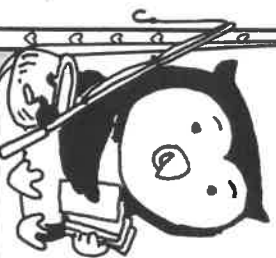
This version of Go Fish will help your child spell tricky words correctly.

Ingredients: 2 dozen index cards, pencils

Together, list 12 pairs of homophones (words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings). Examples: *aet/eight*, *paws/pause*. Have your youngster write each word on a separate index card.

Shuffle the cards, and deal five to yourself and five to her. Stack the rest facedown beside the list. Take turns trying to make a pair. For example, if your child has *peak*, she would ask, "Do you have p-e-e-k?"

If you have the card, give it to her, and she will lay down the pair. If not, say, "Go fish!" and she draws one card from the pile. Then, it's your turn. The first player to get rid of all her cards wins.



CREATIVITY

Encourage your young artist to create his own mosaics—pictures made of small pieces of tile or other materials. Simply gather colored paper, glue, and a coloring book. He can tear the paper into tiny bits and glue those "tiles" onto coloring book pictures.



READING

Audiobooks let your youngster explore more difficult books than she might normally read. At the library, have her choose a couple to listen to in the car or at bedtime. Check out the print versions, too, so she can follow along with the words.



LISTENING

Play this listening game with relatives or friends. Quickly whisper a silly sentence ("Patrick ate 37 plates of green and purple macaroni") in the first person's ear. Have each person whisper it to the next person. The last person announces the line out loud—will he get it right?



Congratulations!

We finished _____ activities together on this poster.

Signed (parent or adult family member)

Signed (child)

Reading Connection

Working Together for Learning Success

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Book Picks

■ **A Dog's Life: The Autobiography of a Stray** (Ann M. Martin)

What does a stray dog think about? This story is told from the view-point of a dog named Squirrel. As a puppy, he became separated from his mother. Now he must search for a permanent home—while avoiding dangers along the way.



■ **Eye of the Storm: NASA, Drones, and the Race to Crack the Hurricane Code** (Amy Cherrix)

Young weather buffs can follow hurricane hunters and NASA scientists



doing the difficult work of predicting

when and how hard a hurricane will hit. Also explains how smartphones and social media have saved lives and improved emergency preparedness.

■ **Smile** (Raina Telgemeier)

Sixth grade isn't off to a great start for Raina, especially since she lost her two front teeth when she tripped and fell. This funny and colorful graphic memoir is based on the author's middle school dilemmas. (Also available in Spanish.)

■ **Lives of the Presidents: Fame, Shame (and What the Neighbors Thought)** (Kathleen Krull)

Celebrate Presidents' Day with these profiles that focus on fun facts. Kids will enjoy discovering how one president got stuck in the bathtub, another had a beard that was so long it dipped into his soup, and much more.



Background knowledge builds comprehension

"I saw a shark just like that at the aquarium."

"I camped out under the stars once."

"I always want to win big prizes at carnivals, too."

When your child connects what he already knows to something he's reading, his comprehension can soar. Try these ideas to activate his background knowledge.



Brainstorm word associations

Before your youngster starts reading a book, ask him to scan the cover for an interesting word or picture—and use it to trigger associations with words he knows. For *Treasury of Greek Mythology* (Donna Jo Napoli), he might target mythology and come up with a string of words like *stories*, *legends*, *heroes*, and *old*. This kind of brainstorming gives him a general idea of what to expect from the book.

Visualize the setting

Having an image in his head increases your child's understanding. As he reads, he could jot down places mentioned in

the text (examples: castle, island). Every time he adds a setting to the list, he can ask himself: Does this place remind me of any place I have visited or that I've seen in a TV show or movie?

Think about other books

When your youngster starts a new book, encourage him to look back on similar books he has read. For example, if he's reading historical fiction, he might relate it to a textbook chapter he read about the same time period. Before reading the second book in a series, he can skim through the first installment to recall details about the characters' personalities and the plot. ■

Just-right words

Encourage your child to stretch her vocabulary by going on a "word quest." She'll see how papers and other written assignments can be more interesting when she uses a variety of words.

1. Ask your child to write three sentences and underline at least one word in each. Examples: "The ugly monster roared." "The little rabbit ate." "The leaves blew in the dark forest."
2. How many synonyms can she list for each underlined word? Perhaps the rabbit nibbled and the leaves rustled. (Hint: If she's stuck, suggest that she use a thesaurus.)
3. Now she can try the new words in her sentences. Which ones sound best? ■



Picture this! Write that!

Looking for a way to inspire your youngster's creative writing abilities? Photos can do the trick. Here are ways to get started.

Photo walk. Go for a walk together, and let your child take pictures of scenes that might lead to a story. She could snap a photo of a fire truck speeding past with its lights flashing or of a frozen lake shimmering in the sun. At home, she



can look at the pictures and write a story about a courageous rescue or an ice hockey game.

Magazine clippings. Have your youngster cut out pictures of people, places, animals, and objects from old magazines. Next, suggest that she put the pictures in a paper bag, reach in, and pull out three at random. She can challenge herself to write a story to go with all three pictures. If she pulls out a photo of a cat, a backpack, and a little girl sitting in a classroom, your youngster may write about a cat who sneaks into his owner's backpack so he can go to school, too. 🐱

Q&A Never too old for read-alouds

Q Now that my daughter can read by herself, should we still read aloud?

A Reading aloud—at any age—is great for parent-child bonding and for boosting your child's reading and listening skills.



Let her choose books she might not read on her own, perhaps ones with more complex stories or longer chapters. Mix

things up by having her read a page or section to you, too. Or choose characters for you each to "play," and read their lines in different voices.

Another way to liven up read-alouds for this age is to read in various places and at different times. Reading before bed is great, but you could also read to her in the kitchen over snacks, on the front steps on an unexpectedly warm day, or while waiting for a relative at the bus station. 🚌

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Parent 2 Parent

Watch out for spell-check

For the longest time, I couldn't get my son Max to understand the importance of proofreading his writing. He would roll his eyes and insist that spell-check and autocorrect were there to do the job for him.

Then one day, he read a story he had written to our family. He kept tripping over sloppy mistakes—and he couldn't believe how much they changed the meaning of his story. The first one was kind of funny: "I didn't know he was a police officer because he wasn't wearing his *unicorn*." It was obviously supposed to be *uniform*. We laughed about what autocorrect had done to his story, but he quickly realized that proofreading wasn't a laughing matter.

Now when Max writes, he likes to share funny examples from autocorrect. But I'm glad to hear them, because finding the mistakes means he is proofreading his work carefully. 🐾



Fun with Words

A new kind of word puzzle

What in the world is a *ditloid*?

It's actually a rather funny name for a clever kind of word puzzle. Simply put, you combine numbers and letters to represent a familiar phrase, date, or fact. For example, *24 H in a D* is a ditloid for *24 hours in a day*. (Note: Common words like *the*, *in*, *a*, *an*, *of*, and *to* usually aren't abbreviated.)

You and your youngster can take turns making up ditloids for each other to solve. He'll practice creative thinking, and you'll enjoy a fun game together. Score one point for each one you get right.

Idea: If you need hints, sketch pictures to go along with the clues. 🎨



Try these!

- 50 S on the F
- 27 A in the C
- 52 W in a Y
- 101 D
- 1 F 2 F RF BF
- A the W in 80 D

- Around the World in 80 Days
- Blue Fish
- One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish,
- 101 Dalmations
- 52 weeks in a year
- Constitution
- 27 amendments in the
- 50 stars on the flag

Answers