

December 2017

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Appreciate art

Visit an art museum or gallery over winter break for educational family fun. Encourage your tween to read descriptions of the exhibits. He'll learn about artists and their techniques. He may even want to try his hand at some artwork when you get home! *Note:* Check for free-admission days or holiday coupons.

### On top of grades

If your child's school offers an online grade book, check it every week or so. That way, you will stay in the loop and can spot problems early. Try not to overreact to one low score—it could be one small blip or just a tiny fraction of your tween's grade. Instead, look for patterns, and contact the teacher if you have concerns.

### Excited about tweens

It's normal to feel a bit sad as your middle grader grows up. But it helps to remember that you have a lot to look forward to. You may discover mutual interests and enjoy discussing various topics as her opinions develop. Plus, you get to witness the excitement of her first school dance, volleyball game, or other milestone events.

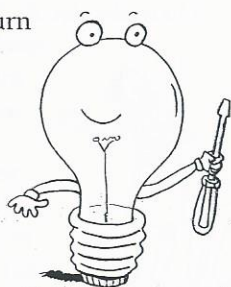
### Worth quoting

"A hunch is creativity trying to tell you something." *Frank Capra*

### Just for fun

**Q:** How do you turn on the light in a room with a broken light switch?

**A:** By fixing it!



## Be productive!

Homework? Check. Take pictures for photography class? Check. Do the dishes? Check.

Knowing what to do and getting it done will make your tween's life run more smoothly and help her be more successful. Share these four strategies.



### 1. Pick what's important

Suggest that your child make a daily to-do list—with priorities. She might divide her list into what must be done today and what can wait until the next day. *A good tip:* Encourage her to keep her list manageable. Writing down everything she needs to do all month may just lead to frustration.

### 2. Use "prime time"

Maybe your tween is a morning person and concentrates better then. If so, she could review for tests on the bus or do projects on weekend mornings. If she's more alert after school or at night, however, she can focus her energies then.

### 3. Snap into a positive mood

If your middle schooler isn't feeling motivated, encourage her to do something that puts her in a good mood. She might watch birds at the bird feeder, take a walk around the block, or play with slime. Changing her frame of mind can help her get started.

### 4. Put away distractions

While technology is supposed to help us be productive, it often gets in the way. Have your child place any devices she's not using for homework across the room and shut off. (After all, it's easier to procrastinate with a video if her tablet is powered on and within reach!) 👍

## Operation "reset"

Winter break gives your child the gift of extra time. Encourage him to use it wisely with a mix of relaxation and preparation for the new year.

**Refresh.** Suggest he do enjoyable activities he hasn't had time for. Perhaps he'll read a graphic novel that's been sitting on a shelf or create a workout routine to do with a friend.

**Catch up.** Ask your tween to think about how he can hit the ground running next semester. If he has assignments due when school begins, he could work on them a little each day. Or he might empty his subject folders by filing returned papers at home and start with a fresh slate in January. 👍



# Writing for the real world

As your tween grows up, he'll need to write for all kinds of reasons, whether he's drafting papers for school, writing college essays, or preparing a resume. He can practice by writing for real purposes at home.

**Summarize the facts.** Writers need to get to the point quickly, because there's so much information competing for people's attention. For practice, your child could write a newscast recapping 2017 family highlights and



send it to relatives. To sum up each event, he should focus on key facts like who, what, when, where, and why. ("Maggie, age 10, joined the Safety Patrol in September at Beacon Elementary School.")

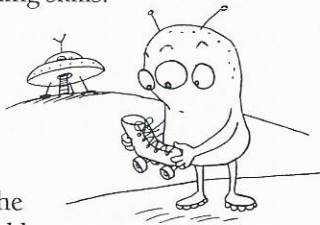
**Target your audience.** Focusing on who will read his writing helps him make sure it is understandable and includes relevant details. For instance, a student's version of a textbook contains different information than a teacher's. To understand the

difference, your middle grader might create a "how-to" guide for different groups. For example, he could write step-by-step directions for using a remote control, but make one for tech-savvy family members and one for those who aren't. 👍

## Nice thinking!

Becoming a good thinker will help your middle grader solve problems and make daily decisions. Use these fun family activities to grow her creative and critical thinking skills:

- If an alien came to Earth and found a roller skate, what might he think it could be used for? Take turns calling out answers. For example, your child may say the wheels would make a good back massager. Continue until no one can think of a new answer.



- Secretly think of an object, and imagine you are holding it. "Pass" it to another person, who tries to guess your item based on how you handle it. For example, how would you hold and pass an ice cube, a bowling ball, a hot potato, or a Frisbee? After guessing, the catcher pretends it's something different and passes it to the next family member. 👍



## Q & A

### Handling friendship changes

**Q** My son no longer wants to hang out with one of his new friends, but he doesn't want to hurt the boy's feelings. What advice can I give him?

**A** It's common for middle graders to try out new friendships—and just as common for one or both to decide it doesn't work. Let your son know it's okay as long as he's kind about it.

If the other boy invites him to do something, he should respond rather than ignore him and politely decline without a long explanation ("Sorry, I can't").

Also, suggest that he avoid committing to hang out later, so the boy doesn't get the wrong impression that your son wants to get together in the future.

When they see each other at school or events, he should say hello. That can prevent hard feelings and leave the door open for being better friends again later. 👍



## Parent to Parent

### No price tag on giving

My 12-year-old daughter, Katie, always wants to give presents at the holidays, but she doesn't have much money. This year, I suggested she think about what could she *do* for people rather than what she could wrap in a box or bag.

We brainstormed, and I was surprised by where our ideas led. Since Katie likes to sing, she thought of serenading her grandmother with

her favorite song from the 1950s. I suggested she offer her younger brother a "chore-free day," letting him pick a day for her to take over his chores.

Then, she decided to give her favorite teacher a handmade card with an offer to help around the classroom.

It's good for Katie to see that she can be generous without spending money. And I'm hoping that focusing on giving will keep her less focused on getting. 👍



**OUR PURPOSE**

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

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