

January 2013

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### On course

The classes your child takes now will help determine what he can sign up for in high school. For example, if he chooses introduction to computing in eighth grade, he could take a more advanced computer course as a freshman. Suggest that he ask his school counselor about prerequisites as he picks next year's classes.

### Winter weather plans

As winter gets under way, stay informed about weather-related delays and closings. Sign up for phone, text, or email alerts, or follow your school district on Facebook or Twitter to see emergency announcements. Also, give your middle grader a backup plan, like riding the bus home if after-school activities are canceled.

### Look for good character

Good character can be taught *and* caught. Find examples of values you consider important, and point them out to your tween. *Example:* "I gave a customer too much change, but she was honest and gave it back." Discussing others' good deeds can inspire him to do the same.

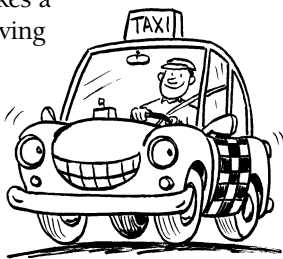
### Worth quoting

"Learning is not a spectator sport."  
*Anonymous*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Who makes a living by driving customers away?

**A:** A taxi driver.



## Goal-getters!

You can motivate your child to aim higher and accomplish more this year by having her set goals that she can really achieve. Here are some characteristics of effective goals.

### Positive

Framing goals this way can help your middle schooler have a good attitude toward them and encourage her to get started right away. She might say, "I will bring assignments home every night" instead of "I won't forget my books at school" or "I will eat healthy on a regular basis" instead of "I won't eat junk food."

### Realistic

Your tween will be more motivated if she comes up with her own goals that she feels are doable. You might want her to get an A in English, but she may decide that aiming for a B will keep her from feeling discouraged.



### Specific

Have your youngster list the steps that will help her reach a goal and give herself a deadline for each step. For example, she might want to be in two plays this year. She can put audition dates on her calendar and set aside time to practice her lines.

*Tip:* Suggest that your middle grader write down her goals and keep the list where she'll be reminded of them. She might put them inside the cover of her planner or post them on the ceiling above her bed. 👍

## Time to disconnect

Too much technology can prevent your tween from interacting with people in real life. It can also interfere with sleep and physical activity. Consider these suggestions for keeping his tech time in balance:

- Make a ratio rule. For example, you could say for every half hour your child spends on the computer, he should spend an hour doing something else, such as playing in the snow with a friend or sibling.

- Create digital-free zones. You might say no cell phones or tablets at the dinner table or in restaurants.

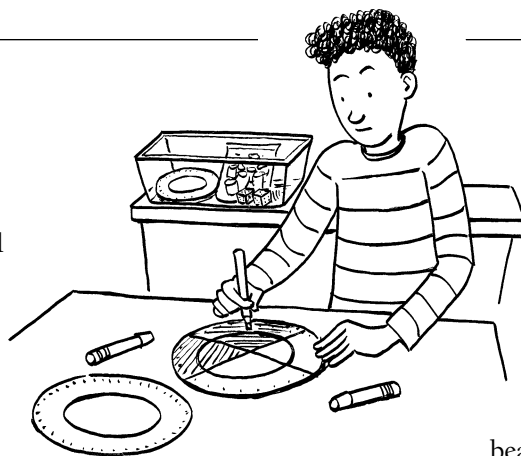
- Insist that devices go off at bedtime. Children could stay up for hours playing games or watching videos. They can also be awakened by texts or sleep lightly in anticipation of them. *Idea:* Try setting up a family charging station where everyone must leave their devices. 👍



# Be a better problem-solver

From addition to algebra, math is full of problems! Your middle grader can solve them more easily with strategies like these.

**Speak the language.** Understanding math vocabulary makes problem solving easier. For instance, your child needs to know what *congruent* triangles are in order to draw them. Suggest that he keep a list of words and their meanings above his desk or in his math notebook. For each word, he can add a picture or real-life



example that will help him remember it. *Examples:* “The ratio of boys to girls in our family is 2:1.” “The floor is like the *x* axis and the wall is like the *y* axis.”

**Make it real.** Using objects to solve math problems can help your tween visualize solutions. Encourage him to make a math toolbox.

In a shoe box or plastic bin, he can store items like paper plates, dice, dry beans, toothpicks, and marshmallows. He can use them to “see” the math as he works it out. For example, he might use plates to draw fractions, dice to test probability, beans to represent variables in equations, and toothpicks and marshmallows to find the surface area of solid shapes. 👍

## Helping with homework

Middle graders should do their own homework—but they also need their parents to play a supporting role. Here’s how:

- Have your tween choose a regular study time so she gets into a routine.



She might prefer to work after school or after dinner. You could help by working quietly nearby (paying bills, preparing for a meeting the next day).

- Let her know when you’re available to quiz her for a test, proofread papers, or sign off on her planner. Choose a time that works for both of you, like when you get home from work or in the evening before bed.

- Ask to see her finished work. Avoid correcting it, since her teacher needs to know where she needs help. But you can check that it’s neat and complete, and you might suggest that she look it over again if you find careless errors. 👍



## Q & A Try drugs? No way!

**Q** I know that some children experiment with drugs in middle school. How can I keep my daughter from trying them?

**A** Children whose parents talk to them about drugs are about half as likely to use them. So bring up the topic with your daughter—not just once, but again and again.

You might point out that some tweens believe trying drugs is a normal part of growing up. Make it clear that it *isn’t* normal (most people don’t use drugs) and that drugs can cause serious harm to her health and even lead to being arrested. Instead, help her understand that growing up is about learning to make good choices, like saying no to drugs.

Also, look up information together online (try [girlshealth.gov/substance/drugs/sayno.cfm](http://girlshealth.gov/substance/drugs/sayno.cfm) or [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org)) or at the library. And remind her that she can come to you with questions or concerns, especially if a friend gets involved with drugs. 👍



## Parent to Parent Learning to lead

I had always believed the saying “Leaders are born, not made.” So at a recent work seminar, I was surprised to discover that leadership can be learned.

My son Jack had been wanting to start a neighborhood softball team, and I realized it would be a good way for him to practice leadership skills. I suggested he call the local league and ask what to do.

They told him that he needed to find players and a coach and

then get a local business to pay the league fees (in exchange for putting the company logo on the players’ jerseys). When I explained that a good leader delegates tasks, he asked three other neighborhood kids to help him hang flyers and recruit players.

Jack has been working hard on this project, and he has enough kids for a team now. Next, he is calling a players’ meeting to work on finding a coach and a sponsor. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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