

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

It's a date

As 2015 gets under way, hang a family calendar in the kitchen, and tell everyone to mark their appointments and activities. Have each person use a different-colored pen so you can see at a glance who has what when. Or try a free electronic datebook like Google Calendar that everyone will update.

Stuck on art

Duct tape isn't just for household fixes anymore. It comes in fun colors and patterns—and can let your middle schooler stretch his imagination and explore art. Encourage him to make something like a book cover, a wallet, or even a 3-D sculpture. To get started, he could look online or ask an art teacher for ideas.

Fighting hunger

Many people donate to food banks during the holidays, but the shelves need to be stocked year round. Suggest that your tween call a local pantry to ask how to help. She might start a canned food drive at her school or hold a hockey "tournament" where the price of entry is a can of food per player.

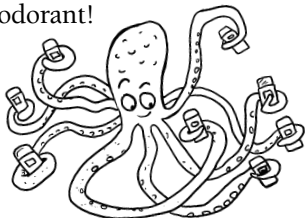
Worth quoting

"Don't wait for extraordinary opportunities. Seize common occasions and make them great." *Orison Swett Marden*

Just for fun

Q: What does an octopus spend all its money on?

A: Deodorant!



Test-taking strategies

When it comes to tests, different formats call for different strategies. Share these tips to help your tween shine in the following types of tests.

Multiple choice

Encourage her to come up with an answer before reading the choices. If her answer matches one that's listed, it's probably right. When she's not sure of the answer, she should eliminate options that are obviously wrong and pick the one that makes the most sense.

True or false

Make sure she realizes that if any part of a statement is false, the entire thing is false. A good strategy is to watch for words like *all*, *every*, *always*, *never*, or *none*—they often indicate a false answer. And point out that guessing is okay: She has a 50 percent chance of being right!

Essay

Suggest that your child organize her thoughts by sketching an outline first. As she writes, she should include as many details and facts as possible—and only give her opinion if the question asks for it. If she doesn't know an exact number or date, she could give an approximate one ("about 500" or "in the 1950s"). Also, remind her to leave a few minutes to proofread her essay at the end.

Open-book

Even though your tween can use her notes or textbook, she still needs to understand the material and know where to find key information. Have her practice looking up material in the index or by scanning boldface words. And tell her to reread chapters and go over her notes in the days before. She could mark important pages with sticky notes or paper clips. 👍



Ways to volunteer

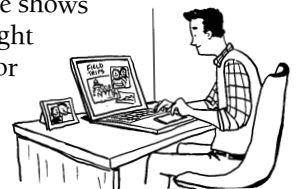
You don't have to be available during school hours to volunteer for your child's school. There are plenty of ways to get involved after hours. Consider these ideas.

Are you good at organizing?

- Set up school, club, or team fundraisers like spirit nights at local businesses.
- Coordinate teacher appreciation lunches, booster club dinners, or class activities.

Are you computer savvy?

- Create slide shows that highlight field trips or special events.
- Help maintain school or teacher websites.



Do you enjoy crafts?

- Sew costumes for the drama department.
- Make decorations for display cases. 👍

Sibling harmony

Parents want their children to get along, but sometimes that seems like a tall order. Try these ways to encourage good relationships that your children can take into adulthood.

Manage bickering. Middle graders tend to be easily annoyed—and that includes with siblings. When your kids bicker, try to stay out of it so they learn to problem solve with each other. (Of course, if things escalate, you'll need to separate them.) Or do as one parent advised and set up “bickering chairs.” Every night, the children have to sit down



and bicker for 15 minutes. Chances are they'll eventually dissolve into laughter after trying to come up with things to argue about.

Avoid comparisons.

Comparing kids often leads to jealousy and sibling rivalry. Resist statements like “Why can't you be more like your sister? She listens!” Instead, point out what's special about each child—and look for ways those traits could benefit one another. For instance, if Andrew is a good listener, Emma might talk to him about a problem. And if Emma's strong in science, she could help Andrew with his science fair project. 👍

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Ready, set, goal

“Mom, I really hope I do well in school this semester!”

Encourage your tween to turn her “hopes” into reality with a written plan. Suggest these steps.

1. Define your goals

Have her write several specific goals. *Example:* “I want to feel more comfortable giving oral presentations and get better grades on them.”



2. List actions to take

Next, she should jot down ways to reach each goal. *Example:* “Read through my paper enough times until I'm confident I know the material.” “Practice at least three times in front of others.” “Find a focal point in the audience.”

3. Chart progress

Your child can make a log listing her oral presentations. After each one, she should note her preparation (“well prepared,” “moderately prepared,” “could have done better”), rate her comfort level during the speech (on a 1–5 scale), and enter her grade. 👍

Parent to Parent

Inspired by quotes

Last month, I had to do a work project that I was dragging my heels on. Then, I stumbled across a quote that inspired me: “The secret of getting ahead is getting started.” I taped Mark Twain's saying to my computer, and it helped me dig into my work.

If one quote could energize me, I wondered if other sayings would influence my family. I asked everyone, including our seventh grader Marcus, to keep an eye out for motivating quotes. When we found them, I suggested we display copies in the hallway. At first Marcus didn't seem interested, but the other day he surprised me. He posted one by Albert Einstein he found in his math textbook: “It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer.” He said it reminded him to keep going on tough assignments.

Our “quote wall” is filling in. And we're enjoying seeing what “speaks” to other family members. 👍



A jump on college planning

Q My child is already talking about going to college. She would be the first in our family! Should we be doing anything now to help her prepare?

A It's great that your daughter wants to go to college. You can help her get the ball rolling just by discussing it and being supportive. Maybe even visit a nearby community college or attend a campus play to show her college life.

Meanwhile, talk about what she enjoys and careers she might like to pursue. Then, have her ask her school counselor what courses would lay the groundwork for college.

For instance, if she takes algebra by 8th grade, she'll be able to take more higher-level math classes in high school. And since many colleges require foreign language courses, beginning in middle school will give her a head start. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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