

Middle Years

Working together for school success



Short Stops

Happy New Year!

New Year's resolutions can help your child form good habits. This year, have her think of resolutions for your family, like exercising together once a week. Then, come up with a plan, such as walking on Saturday mornings, and motivate each other to stick with it.

Internet pledge

To help protect your middle grader when he uses the Internet, consider creating a safety contract. Put rules in writing ("I will not give out personal information," "I will not talk to strangers"). Then, have him sign the pledge and post it near the computer. *Tip:* Find sample rules at www.safekids.com/contract.htm.

Promptness, please

Being at her desk when the bell rings means your child won't miss important announcements or class instruction. Suggest that she add a five-minute "cushion" to her morning so she has time to deal with the unexpected (a missing shoe, an early bus).

Worth quoting

"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions."
Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.

Just for fun

Q: A man went out in the rain without an umbrella or a hat, yet not one strand of hair got wet. How is that possible?

A: He was bald!



Friendly reading

Looking for a way to motivate your children to read regularly and enjoy books? Have them turn reading into a social event! Sharing reading with friends can improve comprehension and keep youngsters motivated to read through the middle years. Try these ideas.



Reading buddies

Your children might plan to read with friends at libraries or at one of their houses. Suggest that they each take a novel to read or share some magazines. This is also a good way to tackle books they're assigned for class. They can discuss passages they like or ask for help with parts that aren't clear.

Book clubs

Encourage your youngsters to find out whether the public library or school media center offers book clubs. Or they could start their own groups with several classmates. The students can choose a book to read and pick a date to get together and talk about it. Each member could take

several titles to the meetings so the group will have plenty to choose from.

Social networking

Online reading communities are fun places for kids to swap book recommendations and express opinions about what they read. They can rate and review books at www.goodreads.com. Using the site regularly is a good way to keep track of titles they've read, too. At www.youarewhatyouread.com, each reader can leave a "book-print"—a list of all-time favorite books. They'll also be able to see which books their friends like best, and why. 👍

Go, team!

Cheering on the home team with good sportsmanship shows class. Your child can help her school and team earn a nice reputation with these suggestions:

- Show school pride by wearing team colors on game days and to sporting events.
- Hold up signs that encourage the home team. ("Go, Hawks!") Avoid slogans or messages that put opponents down.
- Join in positive chants and cheers to spur on your team ("De-fense! De-fense!"), and don't boo the other team.
- Respect referees' and officials' calls by keeping negative thoughts to yourself. Remember that just one angry fan can turn the tide of a crowd.
- Be courteous to fans, players, and coaches of other teams if you run into them before or after a game. 👍



Let's talk!

Something seems to be on your middle grader's mind, but you can't get her to open up. Or you've disagreed about a decision, but she's not interested in talking about it.

The words you choose can make a difference in whether discussions take off or end quickly.

Starters

These comments invite further conversation by showing you care about what your child has to say. They also demonstrate that you're willing to listen rather than interrupt with your own opinions or solutions. Try conversation openers such as:

- "Tell me more about that."
- "How do you feel about it?"



- "I can tell this really matters to you. Why do you think that is?"
- "What would you like to see happen?"

If your youngster knows she can talk without being judged or lectured, she will be more apt to share her feelings.

Enders

These phrases can give your middle schooler the impression you're not interested in a two-way conversation or that you don't respect her feelings. Try to avoid saying things like:

- "I'm the adult."
- "Don't argue with me."
- "You shouldn't feel that way."
- "You don't know what you're talking about."

If your child is afraid you'll criticize, she'll be more likely to keep her thoughts to herself. 👍



Fun with electives

One exciting thing about middle school is that your child gets to take electives. Here are ways he can decide which subjects to choose—and get the most out of them.

Start by scanning the course offerings together. Look for classes that match his interests (photography, poetry) or that help him explore careers (computer programming, journalism). He can ask his school counselor about specific courses or get input from teachers on what kind of assignments he'll have.



Then, when your tween takes electives, ask him to introduce your family to what he's learning. You might take family "field trips." For example, visit an art museum if he's taking painting, or head to a local creek if he's studying environmental science. Also, you can show support by attending a school play if he's in charge of sound effects, or you might display a table that he built in shop class. 👍

Q & A

Jump right in!

Q My son waits until the last minute to start school projects. Then, he ends up stressed out and doesn't do his best. How can I help him change this?

A When it comes to projects, getting started might seem like the hardest part. But the longer your child puts it off, the tougher it can be to do a good job and finish on time.

As soon as he knows about a project, he should write the steps in his planner, making sure to allow enough time for each one. For example, to do a science project, he'll need to gather materials, set up the experiment, collect and record data, and analyze results. If he sees the steps broken down, getting started might not seem overwhelming.

Let him know that the important thing is to do something each day, no matter how small, so that he keeps moving forward. 👍



Parent to Parent

Smart spending

When my daughter Alyssa reached middle school, she started asking for money to spend on things like weekend outings and trendy jeans. These extras usually weren't in my budget, and I wanted her to learn about making good spending choices for herself.

I started giving her a small allowance so she could pay for non-necessities and get comfortable managing money. We talked about ways to be responsible with her allowance, like shopping

around for the best price and thinking carefully about each purchase. I suggested that she ask herself if she'd rather save the money for something else, if the purchase was something she could wait for, or if she could live without it altogether.

Alyssa's been getting her allowance for a month. Last Saturday, she invited a friend over instead of meeting at the mall for lunch so she could save for jeans. I'm glad she's learning to make these choices now so she'll be more prepared to manage her own budget when she's older. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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