

February 2007

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Using new words

To help your middle grader learn a new vocabulary word, encourage him to use it throughout the day. Ask playful questions that call for the word (“How do I look in this shirt?” “*Suave*, Dad”). Using a word 10 to 20 times will store it in your child’s memory bank for good.

Small steps

Being a stepparent can be challenging, as most parents in blended families know. Try befriending your stepchild slowly to earn her trust. Go to a movie together, or offer to help with homework. You could consider letting the biological parent take the lead on discipline while everyone adjusts to the new arrangement.

“You’re great!”

Self-confidence can drop when kids enter the middle years. Help your child feel better about himself by encouraging him to develop a talent, such as karate or guitar. Being good at something can help him build his own identity—and boost confidence in the process.

Worth quoting

“Prepare your mind to receive the best that life has to offer.”
Ernest Holmes

Just for fun

Q: Why do birds fly south?

A: Because it’s too far to walk.



Time for reading

Friends... sports... computers. Middle graders have many activities competing for their time.

Find a way to put reading on your child’s schedule, and you’ll help her become a life-long learner. Try these ideas from parents who have gotten their middle graders excited about reading.

Weekend event. “Every Sunday our family has a reading night. My children pick the books or news articles that interest them. We lounge on the couch and read to each other. Sometimes we light candles to set a nice mood. Reading together has helped bring us closer as a family.”

Reading spot. “My kids and I created a reading corner in our living room. We dug a bookshelf out of the garage and filled it with books and magazines. We added a comfortable chair and—presto!—we have a nook that’s fun to use and makes reading a real treat for them (and me).”

How do you...? “My child is a ‘hands-on’ type of learner. I get him to read by helping him find information about his hobbies—model planes and skateboarding. We look for magazine articles, Web



sites, books, and even instruction manuals. This gets him reading, but it also shows him why reading is important. Just the other day, he asked, ‘Mom, can we go to the library? I want to learn how to do a new turn on my skateboard.’”

Motivated to learn

Kids who *want* to learn will naturally be more successful in school. Help motivate your child with these tips:

- Show excitement when he learns something new. Your enthusiasm will be contagious.
- Set standards for learning. Challenging—but realistic—expectations can inspire your child to work harder. If you expect less, he may not do his best.
- Provide opportunities to showcase your youngster’s new knowledge. If he’s studying government, for example, ask his opinion about an upcoming election.
- Recognize effort when your middle schooler tries hard, even if he fails. Your praise is a great motivator for him to do better next time.



Off the couch

You may have noticed your child spending less time running around and more time on the couch as he has gotten older. Help him get the exercise he needs with these suggestions.

Family time

Look for activities you can do together. Try ice skating, hiking, or swimming at the community pool. A nightly walk after dinner is a good way to get in chat time, along with exercise.



Daily life

When doing errands with your middle grader, take the stairs instead of the elevator. Add extra steps by parking the car at a distance from the grocery store entrance. Assign active chores, such as sweeping, vacuuming, or cleaning out the garage.

Special treats

Use physical activity as a reward. "Finished your homework before dinner? Let's take a bike ride!" Think of exercise when getting your youngster a birthday gift. You could give a jump rope, Frisbee, or football.

Note: Aim for 60 minutes a day of physical activity for your child. It doesn't have to be all at once—every little bit adds up. 👍

Q & A Dating dilemma

Q I think my son Andy has a girlfriend. Should I talk to him about it?

A Having a girlfriend is a natural part of growing up, so try to stay relaxed about the situation.

Show interest by asking general questions about his girlfriend ("What is she like?" "Is she in any of your classes?"). Be open to discussing the relationship with your son, but try not to embarrass him by talking about it with your friends or at family gatherings.

This is a good time to tell your middle grader your feelings about one-on-one dating. Let him know what you're comfortable with.

Perhaps his girlfriend could come over for dinner, or they could go to adult-supervised parties. If you take the relationship in stride, chances are Andy will, too. 👍

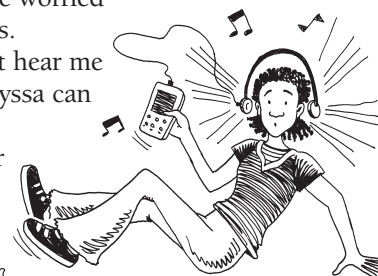


Parent to Parent Turn the music down!

My middle grader loves music, but Alyssa used to turn the stereo up so high that I couldn't hear myself think. When she started using headphones, she couldn't even hear me call her to dinner. That's when I became worried about hearing loss and decided to set some guidelines.

Music must be at a safe level, I told her. If she can't hear me talking, her music is too loud. I also limit the time Alyssa can wear headphones to an hour each day. I suggested she break up that hour to give her ears a rest. The car radio has to be lower, too. If we can't have a conversation comfortably, the volume has to go down.

I told Alyssa that I'm glad she appreciates music. I just want to make sure she can enjoy it her whole life! 👍



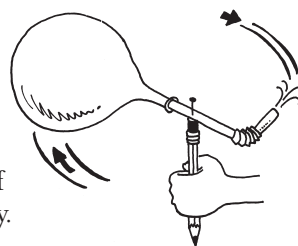
Activity Rocket launch

Here's a fun experiment to help your middle grader learn how rockets are launched. She'll witness the action-reaction principle—for every action, there is an opposite reaction.

Materials: round balloon, flexible plastic straw, tape, straight pin, wooden pencil with eraser

1. Stretch the balloon by inflating it several times.
2. Put the long end of the straw in the neck of the balloon. Tape tightly.

3. Bend the straw's short end at a right angle. Push the pin through the middle of the straw's long end and into the pencil's eraser, so the straw can spin freely.
4. Hold the pencil with the straw at a right angle, and blow hard.
5. Stop blowing, and watch the balloon spin.



What's happening?

When your child blows into the straw, the air is forced around the bend. The straw—and balloon—react by spinning. 👍

OUR PURPOSE

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

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