

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Conference time

As your youngster tackles tougher coursework in middle school, he needs your support more than ever. Make attending parent-teacher conferences a priority. You'll show him that you value his education, and you'll find out how he's doing. Be sure to tell your child what his teachers said, and follow up on recommendations they make.

Family ties

Staying close with relatives will help your child develop important family connections. Encourage her to call grandparents with news about school or sports—or just to say hello. Also, try to plan visits around her schedule when possible. She'll be happier going to her aunt's house if she doesn't have to miss dance rehearsal or a friend's party.

Lighten the load

Heavy backpacks can be a real pain—in the back, neck, and shoulders. Your middle schooler can limit the weight he carries by stopping at his locker throughout the day and using a separate bag for sports equipment. He should also wear both straps of his backpack to distribute the weight evenly.

Worth quating

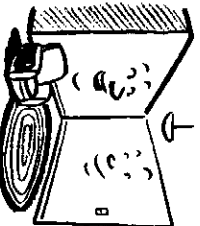
"The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it."

Alan Sapiota

Just for fun

Q: What did one wall say to the other?

A: Meet me at the corner!



Let's cooperate

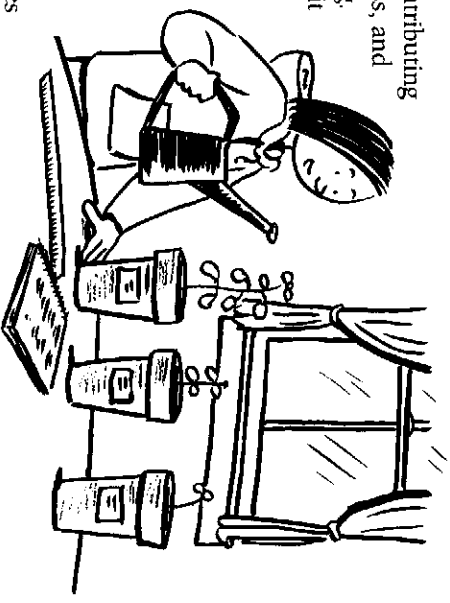
How can your child be a contributing member of your family, her class, and her community? By cooperating. Here's how to encourage a spirit of teamwork in your youngster.

At home

Understanding her role can motivate your middle grader to cooperate. For example, your family's goal every morning is to leave for school and work on time. Explain to your youngster that when she gets up and comes to breakfast without reminders, you can focus on your own morning routine.

At school

When your youngster is assigned a group project for a class, ask her to describe her part to you. Remind her that she has to do her job so that everyone can earn a good grade. If she's supposed to take care of plants for a group science experiment, for instance, she might need to water them daily or measure their growth weekly.



In the community

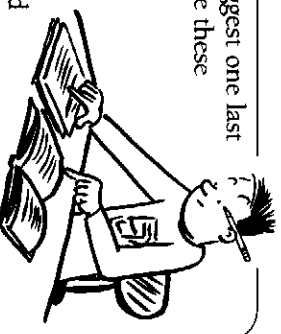
Find a volunteer project to do together. You might sign up for a neighborhood cleanup or serve spaghetti at a fundraising dinner. Your middle schooler can see how neighbors cooperate to make their community a better place to live.

Tip: Recognizing your youngster's contribution can encourage her to cooperate in the future. Look her in the eye, and thank her for something specific: "I appreciate your help with the leaves. Our yard looks really nice." 🐾

Polishing homework

Before your youngster turns in his homework, suggest one last way to make it shine: editing and proofreading. Share these ideas to help him do his best work:

- If he's answering textbook questions, have him flip back through the chapter to double-check spellings of names and places and to verify dates.
- Be sure that the work makes sense. When your child writes up an experiment in his science journal, he should reread it to make certain that he has included all the steps and that they're in order.
- For longer assignments (stories, essays), suggest that he look for one kind of mistake at a time. He can read through once for spelling, again for capitalization, and a third time for punctuation.
- Encourage your middle grader to allow at least 30 minutes between finishing an assignment and proofing it. Problems are often more obvious with a fresh eye. 🐾



Research skills

Your middle schooler has to write a report about a famous author. Help him find good information quickly with these research tips.

Get focused. Picking a topic is one thing. Deciding on an angle is another. Say your child is researching author Sharon Creech. He should browse through books, articles, and Web sites and jot down main points. Then, he can choose one idea to focus on (what led her to write *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, how her writing style has changed over the years).



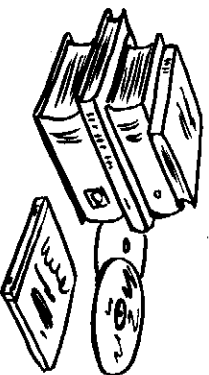
Use reliable sources. Your youngster will need to make sure his report contains only factual information. An author's official biography or Web site is more reliable than one written by a fan, for instance. He can verify facts by finding them in more than one publication (an encyclopedia *and* a journal article).

Slay organized. Suggest that your child sort facts as he conducts research. This will help him make sure he includes all the important information. He might take notes on index cards and use paper clips to keep cards with similar ideas together (the author's childhood, novels she wrote). ☞

Rediscover the library

When your child was younger, she may have loved library story time. Now that she's in middle school, she can enjoy the library in different ways. Here are several ideas:

- Your middle grader might explore her interests on library computers, borrow movie versions of her favorite books, or check out books on tape or CD.



- She can meet other students by signing up for a book club or creative-writing forum. Suggest that she ask at the reference desk about meetings and programs.

- Have your child check into library volunteer opportunities for students. She may be able to read to younger children or shelve books. ☞

O U R P U R P O S E

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

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Parent to Parent

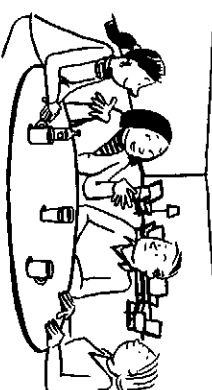
Single-parent solutions

Raising a middle schooler on my own was becoming a challenge. When my son David

questioned my rules or wanted more freedom, I had no one to discuss it with. I mentioned my dilemma to a friend who's active in the PTA. With her help, I placed a note in the PTA newsletter to see if other single parents would be interested in getting together and talking over problems. A handful of people responded.

For our first meeting, we met at my house. We chatted about everything from setting curfews to handling homework. I especially appreciated one mom's advice to take time for myself, like going out for coffee or taking a walk with a friend.

Everyone has a busy schedule, but we've decided to meet once a month. Our next meeting will be at the community center. I think that just knowing I'm not alone will help me be a more confident parent. ☞



Q & A Saving a friendship

Q My daughter and her friend haven't been getting along. What advice can I give her?

A All friendships have ups and downs. Explain to your daughter that in good relationships, positive factors—like having fun together—outweigh negative ones, such as dealing with the other person's moodiness.

To decide if the friendship is worth saving, suggest that your child ask herself some questions. Do

they argue over minor issues (which movie to see) or major ones (putting each other down)? Do they enjoy the same activities? Do they like to talk about the same things?

If your daughter decides to try to work it out, encourage her to talk to her friend. You might help her brainstorm things to say. ("I feel like we usually do what you want. Sometimes, I'd like to choose.") A true friend will want to listen and try to solve the problem together. ☞



Homework Help

Your child probably has more homework now that she's in middle school. Head off complaints by helping her develop habits that will pave the way to success.

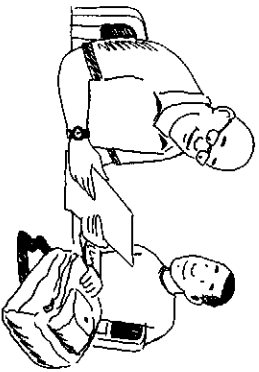
The result will be better grades—and strong time-management and organizational skills to carry her through high school and beyond. Now that's a win-win!

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Establish a routine

Make homework a priority by having your middle grader schedule it into his daily routine. Here are some suggestions:

- Start by discussing the best time to do homework. Does your child need downtime before settling into homework (say, after dinner), or does he prefer getting his work done right after school? Let him experiment with each time to see when he works best.
- Have him try different homework conditions, too. Some students work better in silence, others with background music. If your middle grader has trouble concentrating at the kitchen table, he might like stretching out on his bed.
- Make homework a daily event. If your child has nothing due the next day, he can use the time to study for a quiz or work on a long-term assignment.

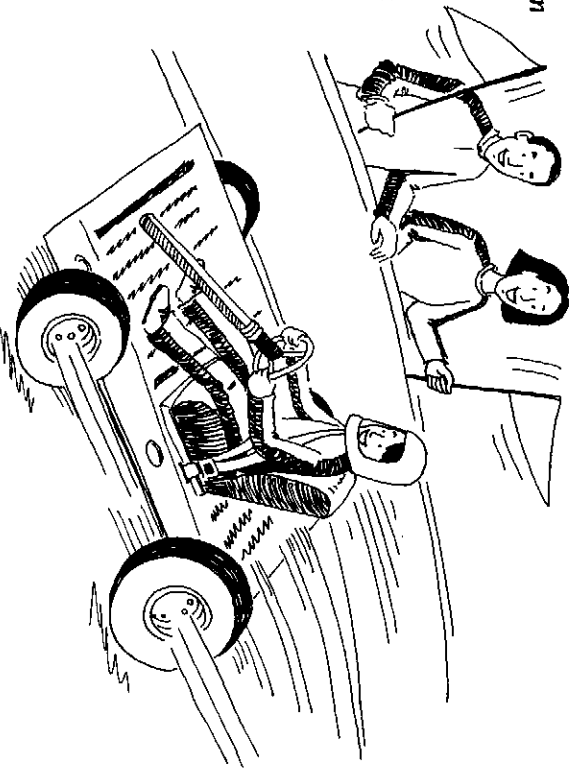


■ When your youngster chooses extracurricular activities, have him consider his homework load. Remind him to allow extra hours for projects and tests.

- Middle graders love to hang out with friends. Suggest that they get together after finishing homework or on days when he has less work, such as Friday.
- Decide if and when television, video games, and computer play fit into the schedule. Consider limiting screen time to an hour a day.

■ Keep school supplies handy, and make sure your youngster knows where to find them. Include basics like pencils and paper, as well as a dictionary, a calculator, a thesaurus, and an atlas. For writing and research assignments, give him time on the family computer, or take him to the library to use a computer there.

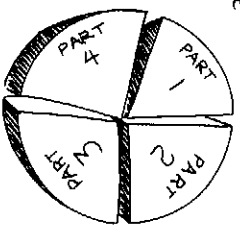
■ Be sure your child has a plan for bringing home assignments and books. Suggest a calendar or an agenda book for jotting down homework as it's given. Then, at the end of the school day, he can see at a glance what he needs.



Provide support

To get the most out of homework, your child needs to complete the work herself. Resist the urge to leap in and solve problems for her. Use these ideas for supporting her efforts:

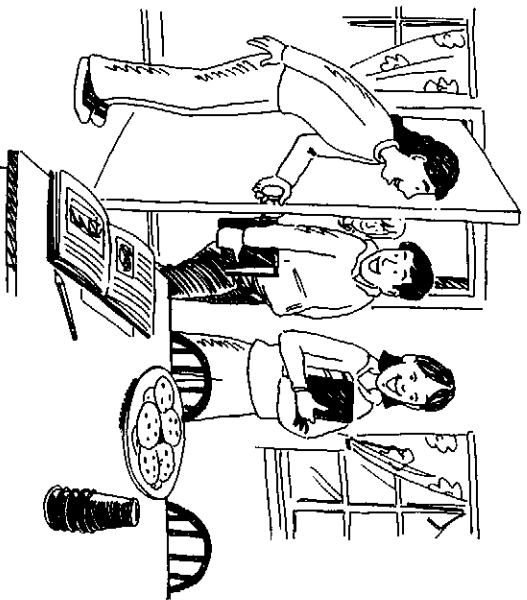
- Before she begins, have your middle grader explain the directions to you to make sure she understands them. Encourage her to reread them when she finishes. Did she follow the instructions exactly?
- Help her answer her own questions when she gets stuck. If she asks, "What's the difference between a physical change and a chemical change?" you can say, "Let's read the chapter together and see if you can spot it."
- Review homework to make sure it's complete. Let your youngster find mistakes herself. For example, if you notice a math error, have her show you how she did the problem.
- Discuss a plan for tackling her work. She might do harder assignments first and save easier ones for later. Or she might start with her least favorite subject and save the best for last.
- Help your child break large projects into smaller chunks. *Example:* For a geography report, she would do research first, then make an outline, write the report, and finally revise and proofread it. Suggest that she schedule each task in her planner.



Note: If your middle grader is struggling with homework, call or e-mail her teacher. She will have ideas to help.

Middle Years

continued



Keep it interesting

Your child may never love homework, but there are ways to make it more enjoyable. Try these tips:

- Encourage your middle grader to start a homework group. Having friends around will make homework more fun, and he'll learn more, too. Quizzing each other and explaining material helps children remember facts.

Look online

How can you help your middle grader find answers when she's stumped on her homework? Help may be as close as a computer screen. Here are a few places to look.

General

- **Homework Spot** • www.homeworkspot.com

Visitors to Homework Spot can click on a subject, from foreign languages to technology. The site also links to reference materials and public libraries, allows your child to ask experts questions, and offers an online note-taking section.

Math

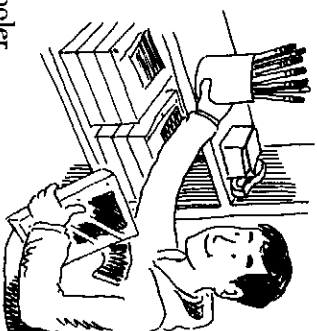
- **Web Math** • www.webmath.com

Kids will get advice on everything from basic arithmetic to percents, square roots, and algebra. Your child can type in a problem and receive a step-by-step method for solving it.

Language Arts

- **Big Dog's Grammar: A Bare Bones Guide to English** • <http://aliscot.com/bigdog>

Big Dog is a quick guide to understanding parts of speech, putting sentences together, and solving common writing



- Suggest that your youngster view assignments from a different angle. He might present an oral history report like a newscaster doing the evening news. Or he could turn a book report into an e-mail exchange between two characters. *Note:* Make sure he checks with his teacher before taking a new approach.

- Involve the whole family with games like "Social Studies Jeopardy." Have your child write questions and answers on index cards and act as the host. Making the cards and checking answers are great ways to study.

- Suggest that your middle schooler take breaks, especially when tackling long or tough assignments. He might work for 30 minutes and then take a 10-minute break to shoot baskets or eat a healthy snack.

- Plan a family activity to celebrate the end of a big assignment. For example, visit an aquarium when your child finishes a science project on sea life.

- Find different places to do homework. Try the library, a coffee shop, the bookstore, or outside by a stream. Or see if your school, community center, or YMCA offers homework clubs.

problems. Plus, the site includes topics such as using parallel structure and active voice. (Also available in Spanish.)

History

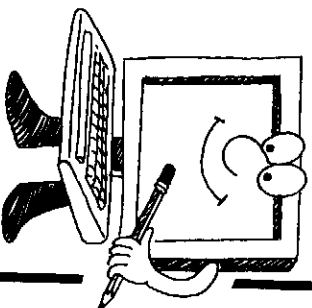
- **Eyewitness to History** • www.eyewitnesstohistory.com

Does your youngster need an inspiring idea or a source for a history paper? Encourage her to browse through dozens of first-person accounts of history from ancient times to the present day.

Science

- **Mad Sci Network** • www.madsci.org

A team of scientists answers questions submitted by students. Your child can search by subject, grade level, or keyword to find thousands of answers. She can also browse the Mad Library, which has links to Web sites and recommends books on science topics from anatomy to zoology.



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