

February 2009

Middle Years

Work

Short Stops



Chores that score

Turn household chores into a friendly competition by assigning points to each duty. *Example:* Unloading the dishwasher equals three points; taking out trash is worth five. Track family members' progress. Each week's high scorer gets a free pass from chores for one day the following week.

Science projects

Choosing a science fair project early will give your middle grader lots of time to conduct his experiment and prepare a presentation. He might make a potato battery or explore how fast goldfish breathe. Suggest that he look for ideas online (try www.freesciencefairproject.com) or at the library (read *A+ Science Fair Projects* by Janice VanCleave).

Impulse control

Does your child think before she acts? Tell her to trust her instincts: if an impulse feels wrong, it probably is. Help her choose a "stop and think" signal. She might close her eyes briefly or touch her thumb to her finger while she asks herself, "Should I really share Megan's secret?"

Worth quoting

"You cannot do all the good the world needs, but the world needs all the good you can do."
Anonymous

Just for fun

Q: How does a biologist like to communicate?

A: With a cell phone.



Homework: Whose work?

Like an athlete or a musician, a student must practice her skills to stay sharp. Homework lets your child do just that, and it also shows teachers what she can do on her own. So where do parents come in? Keep roles clear with these tips for you and your middle schooler.

Parents:

- ✓ Support your child by quizzing her on test material or listening to her ideas for papers.
- ✓ Check daily to see that homework is complete. Read comments on graded work so you know how your middle grader is doing.
- ✓ When your youngster is frustrated, suggest that she check her notes or textbook, call a classmate, or take a break. If she struggles with homework on a regular basis, get in touch with her teachers.
- ✓ Take your middle schooler shopping for tools and supplies (graph paper, calculator, highlighters, rulers). When she has research to do, make sure she can get to the library.

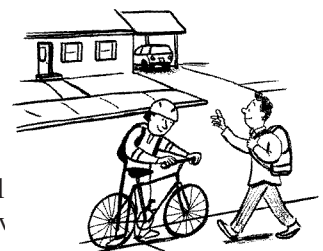


- ✓ Study every day. If you don't have any homework, work on long-term assignments or review your notes.
- ✓ Remember to take home all the materials you need (homework assignments, textbooks, worksheets).
- ✓ If you miss or lose an assignment, call your school's homework hotline or a classmate, or check the teacher's Web site. Ask your teachers for help when you need it. Try approaching them between classes or before or after school.
- ✓ Before beginning an assignment, read the directions carefully so you understand what to do. Write neatly, and turn everything in on time. 👍

Ways to go green

To make a big impact on the environment, think small! Try these simple ideas to become an earth-friendly family and teach your child to respect the planet:

1. Save landfill space. Give unneeded household items (toys, furniture, books) and electronics (old computers, cell phones) away through www.freecycle.org. Or take items to donation sites at your community center or the Salvation Army.
2. Reduce pollution by combining car trips. Walk, bike, or take public transportation when possible.
3. Keep canvas tote bags in your car, and use them instead of plastic or paper bags when you shop.
4. Conserve power. Unplug chargers for cell phones and iPods when they're not in use. Turn off and unplug small appliances and computers overnight—energy is spent even when they're off. 👍



Solve sibling squabbles

Brothers and sisters can exist in harmony one minute and start shouting at each other the next.

Whether your children argue over which channel to watch or who ate the last slice of pizza, your response can help keep the peace.

Listen to their feelings. Avoid trying to get your child out of being upset with a sibling. Hear each one out, and then tell them what you think.



...you're saying ("It sounds like you're really hurt that Lizzie didn't include you"). Ask them what they'd like to happen.

Let them work it out. If no one's getting hurt, let your youngsters solve their own conflicts. Try using a time limit plus a consequence ("I'll be back in five minutes. If you can't decide what to watch by then, the TV goes off").

Step in when needed. Let your children know that hurting someone—naturally—is never okay. If they can't resolve their differences peacefully, separate them so they have time to cool off. Then, bring them together to work out their problem. 👍

Help for underachievers

You think your middle grader could do better in school if she would just apply herself. How do you know if she's underachieving—and if so, what can you do?

Your child may be an underachiever if her teachers say she doesn't try, her grades reflect missing or incomplete work, or she doesn't talk about school except to complain. Try these suggestions:

■ Ask your youngster why she isn't doing her best. Maybe the work is too hard or too easy, or she doesn't see how it relates to "real life."

■ Work on solutions. Meet with her counselor about switching to lower or higher classes. Share your own experiences (math skills help you make smart buying decisions; science classes led to your career as a nurse).

■ Praise progress. Small rewards, such as a night of bowling or a sleepover with friends, may encourage your child. Let her know that her hard work will pay off now and in the future. 👍

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Q & A Hobby time

Q I've always enjoyed my hobbies, and I'd like my daughter to find one she would like. How can I help?

A You're right to encourage a hobby—it can boost your child's self-esteem, help her learn, and give her a useful way to spend spare time. Start by thinking about what she is drawn to. If she talks about the stars, you might suggest that she read books about astronomy and go outside to look at constellations. If she doodles while watching TV, she could take an art class and sketch outside on weekends.

If an interest doesn't come to mind, ask your middle grader about her friends' hobbies. She could join a pal who makes candles or collects coins. Or share your own hobby (scrapbooking, cooking) with her. Finally, be patient. Your daughter may try several hobbies before she finds one that fits. 👍



Parent to Parent Connected to school

I went back to work full-time when my son started middle school. At first, I wasn't sure I could still volunteer as I'd done when I stayed home.

I called the school to ask about opportunities for working parents. The office secretary had quite a few suggestions.

She said some parents serve on a welcome committee for new students, calling families at night to offer information and answer questions. Others work at

the snack bar during home games, chaperone school dances, or help advisors with clubs and after-school activities.

I thought the snack bar and welcome committee ideas sounded good for my new schedule, so I volunteered for both. I've gotten to know more families, and I'm glad I can still be an active part of my child's school. 👍

