

May 2009

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### A strong finish

If your middle grader has spring fever, she may suddenly realize she hasn't prepared for an upcoming exam or presentation. Let her know that she can still give it her best shot. Suggest that she list the steps needed to get ready. Using her planner, she can schedule them for the time she has left.

### Family entertainment

Parents and kids can find common ground with music and TV. When your child mentions a song he likes, take time to listen with him. Then, introduce him to music you enjoyed at his age. Or watch a family-friendly reality show together. Each person can pick a favorite contestant to follow.

### Changing schedules

Summer goes more smoothly if you start with a plan. Decide ahead of time what your youngster's bedtime and curfew will be once school's out. Keep in mind that middle graders need about nine hours of sleep a night. You'll have fewer struggles if everyone knows what to expect.

### Worth quoting

"Winning doesn't always mean being first. Winning means you're doing better than you've ever done before."  
Bonnie Blair

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why do mother kangaroos hate rainy days?

**A:** Because the kids have to play inside!



## Summer learning



Summer vacation gives students a chance to relax and recharge for a new school year. But studies show that children can lose one to two months' worth of skills during the break. Luckily, parents can help keep their middle graders learning all summer long with ideas like these.

### Read great books

Encourage your child to start on summer reading right away. Library waiting lists for popular books can grow quickly, so have him sign up early for ones he wants to read. If he's stuck for ideas, he can ask friends what they've enjoyed. Or suggest that he look online at Web sites such as [www.bookadventure.org](http://www.bookadventure.org) or [www.bookspot.com](http://www.bookspot.com) for best sellers, reviews, and book clubs.

### Explore how things work

Does your youngster know how planes fly? He can find instructions for making paper airplanes at <http://science.howstuffworks.com>. He and a friend might experiment with different designs and then hold a paper airplane contest. For explanations of how things like

metal detectors, polarized sunglasses, and fax machines work, have him check out *The New Way Things Work* by David Macaulay.

### Discover your town

Look for unusual, educational places to visit. You might tour a factory that makes interesting products (candy, glass). Find a list at [www.factorytoursusa.com](http://www.factorytoursusa.com), or have your child call local plants to see if they offer tours. You can also ask your local chamber of commerce about historic sites in your town, such as battlefields and famous birthplaces. 👍

## The great outdoors

Did you know that the outdoors provides lots of opportunities for learning? Here are some activities your child may enjoy:

- Help her create a garden to attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Have her ask at a garden center which flowers work best. Suggest that your youngster keep a journal to record the kinds of birds and butterflies that visit.
- Improve your youngster's sense of direction. Explain that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. Take a walk and ask her to tell you, based on the sun's location, what direction you're heading. She can check a compass to see if she's right.
- Observe nature by going outside after dark. Encourage your child to try to identify night noises (crickets, owls, frogs). Also, look in the sky for constellations. 🌌



# Be yourself

It's normal for middle graders to want to fit in. But trying too hard to win the approval of peers can cause your child to make unsafe choices. Here's how you can help her think for herself.

**Encourage her to get involved.** Point your child in the right direction by steering her toward kids who share her interests (community theater, tennis). Enjoying activities with friends can give your middle grader confidence—which can help her stand up to peer pressure.



**Teach her to say no.** Your youngster may fear losing friends if she doesn't give in to requests. If a classmate asks to copy her paper, she can stay true to herself by saying, "I wouldn't feel right doing that, but I'll help you find some good sources."

**Watch for clues.** Is your child too worried about what her peers think of her? Look for red flags, such as frequently putting herself or others down, drastically changing her appearance, or giving up favorite activities.

**Discuss dangers.** Middle graders need its' feelings about dangerous behaviors for children, like drinking and sex. If your youngster knows where you stand, she'll be less likely to cave in when it counts. 👍

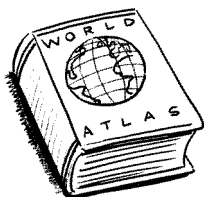
# It's a big, big world!

In today's global economy, it's important for youngsters to understand how countries work together. Try these activities to get your child thinking beyond our borders:

- Encourage your middle grader to use at least one foreign source for each school project. Or if he's asked to share a current event, he might find two articles on the same topic—one from an American Web site and another from a foreign Web site (e .com, www.bbc.co.uk).

- Have dinnertime conversations about how our nation is linked with others. For instance, when the value of the U.S. dollar goes up, the cost of foreign goods and services drops. Or when there's a natural disaster, many countries come together to help. Ask your youngster to think of other examples.

- Maybe there's a city your child has always wanted to visit, such as Dublin or Venice. Have him do research as if you're moving there. He might look into schools, public transportation, jobs, and the weather. 👍



## Q & A Home alone after school

**Q** My son will be too old this fall for the after-school day care he's been using. Can he stay home alone until I get off work at 6?

**A** It depends on several things. First, check your state's laws about when children can be left alone and for how long.

If your middle grader feels confident and you have trusted neighbors he can call in an emergency, you might do a trial run. Make rules about whether friends can visit and which appliances he may use. Tell him not to answer the phone or door unless he knows who's there. And call periodically to check on him.

If your trial run doesn't work out or if you or your youngster feels uncomfortable about his being alone, consider other options. For instance, you might look into after-school programs for older children at recreation centers or martial arts schools. 👍



## Parent to Parent Thanking teachers

When my daughter Lisa was in elementary school, we always bought an end-of-year gift for her teacher. This year she has six teachers, so I wasn't sure what to do.

Lisa had the idea to make something for each one. That way, the gifts would be personal, and we wouldn't spend a lot of money. She made a list of possibilities—baking cookies, making a scrapbook of the school year,

writing a funny poem about the class, or creating bookmarks.

Then, Lisa decided which gift to make for each teacher. She's going to give cookies or homemade bookmarks to most of them. But she chose to make a scrapbook for her English teacher, who gave her extra help when she was struggling. Lisa is excited, and I know her teachers will feel appreciated. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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