

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Spring break

Help your middle grader find safe, educational ways to spend spring break. He might attend a school holiday camp, take a drama workshop, or spend extra time reading or practicing an instrument. *Tip:* Be sure he has free time to hang out with friends, play outside, and relax, too.

### A costly habit

Here's a reason for not smoking that may click with your child: it's an expensive addiction. Ask her to calculate the monthly cost of cigarettes (the price of a pack or a half pack times 30 days). Thinking about what that money could buy may convince her to leave cigarettes alone.

### Learn from others

Chances are, your middle grader admires someone famous (actor, fashion model). But good role models can be everyday people in your community, too. Mention a business owner who sponsors recycling drives or a neighbor who delivers meals to homebound seniors. Discuss how they do good deeds worth imitating.

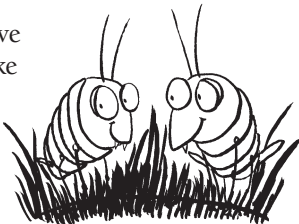
### Worth quoting

"Nothing is a waste of time if you use the experience wisely."  
*Auguste Rodin*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What did one flea say to the other?

**A:** "Shall we walk or take the dog?"



## Reports made easy

Writing reports gives your middle grader a chance to explore a subject and develop a clear way to present what she's learned. Share these steps for preparing an organized, well-written paper.

### 1. Focus

Before your child begins her research, she should know what her main idea will be. That way, she can find convincing facts to support it. When she starts writing, stating her central point in the first paragraph will let readers know immediately what the report is about (*example:* Professional athletes should have salary caps).

### 2. Plan

A diagram can give your middle schooler a big-picture view of her report. Suggest that she write her main idea in a large box in the center of a poster board or large sheet of paper. She can surround that box with medium-sized boxes containing subtopics (contracts, player motivation). Finally, she should connect each subtopic to small boxes with supporting details (average salaries, team statistics).

### 3. Write

Your child can write her paper logically by converting the ideas from her



diagram into paragraphs. The opening paragraph should contain her main idea, and the first sentence of each subsequent paragraph should come from one of the subtopics in her plan. Then, she can fill out each paragraph with facts from the small boxes.

### 4. Revise

Once your youngster has a draft, she'll need to edit for clarity. Have her read it aloud to hear how it sounds. She might want to tighten up sentences, substitute more precise or interesting words, or add transitions like "because" or "then." And she should proofread carefully for proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation. 👍

## Great expectations

Expecting your child to do his best and reach for goals can actually help him succeed. Use these ideas to set high standards and communicate them to your middle grader.

**Be clear.** Let him know what you expect ("I expect you to finish your homework every day"). He'll know at the outset what your standards are and that they're not open to discussion.

**Be realistic.** You might tell your middle grader that you know he can bring a C up to a B (rather than to an A). He'll be more likely to be successful if your expectations are reasonable.

**Be definite.** If you expect your child to get a job after he graduates or to go to college, for example, talk about it as if it's a given. "When it's time for college, we'll look at large and small schools to see which you like better." 👍



# Respectfully yours

Maybe your child used to cheerfully do what you asked, and now he grumbles. Or perhaps he used to listen to your stories with interest, and now he sighs like he'd rather be someplace else.

You can encourage your child to show more respect with these suggestions:

■ Discuss disrespectful behaviors, and ask him to think of a respectful alternative to each.



Instead of raising his voice, for example, he should speak in a normal tone.

When you talk, he should look at you and listen rather than sigh or roll his eyes.

■ If your child is disrespectful, discuss his behavior after he has calmed down. "It's not okay to talk back to me. Please find a nice way to ask for what you want, and then we'll talk about it." Let him know that you won't tolerate disrespect or give in if he treats you that way.

■ Set a respectful tone by showing your middle grader how you treat others. Say, for instance, you're busy and your spouse asks for your help. Let your middle grader hear you politely ask, "Can it wait a minute? I'm in the middle of something right now." 👍

## Screen time limits

Between TVs, computers, cell phones, and video games, some middle graders spend several hours a day glued to a screen. But too much screen time can interfere with schoolwork and family life. Here are some ways to cut down.

**Stock** your living room with crossword puzzles, coffee-table books, and games. Enjoy some daily low-tech family time after your middle grader finishes her homework.

**Limit** your child's access to electronics by keeping DVD players and handheld video games out of the car. If she has a cell phone, consider getting a



contract for a set number of text messages rather than having an unlimited plan.

**Reduce** your own screen time. You might put your cell phone away during dinner, check your e-mail just once a night, or read a magazine rather than play a computer game.

*Idea:* Declare an occasional screen-free day. Spend the time another way, perhaps doing a craft project or riding bikes. 👍



## Q & A

### Ready for standardized tests

**Q** My daughter is taking standardized tests later this month. How can I help her prepare?

**A** Knowing what's in store can help your daughter feel relaxed and confident on test day. Start by reading any materials her school has sent home about the tests, and discuss them with her. Talk with her about the kinds of questions she might expect, such as multiple choice or short answer. You can remind her to rely on strategies she uses for regular tests and quizzes. For example, she should look for key words, rule out unlikely answers, and reread directions. On a standardized test, these methods can help her work through complicated questions.

Finally, be sure your child gets a good night's rest and eats a full breakfast before each day of testing. 👍



## Parent to Parent Picturing history

While looking through family photos recently, my son found a picture of his great-grandfather in a military uniform. Jeff had studied World War II in school, and he wanted to know more about the photo.

We visited my mother, and she explained that her father was stationed in France during the war. She even shared some letters that he wrote her, and Jeff was amazed to hear how long it took to deliver mail in those days.



When my mother pulled out her parents' wedding photos, Jeff commented on how different the hairstyles and clothing were back then. My mom explained that her mother made all of her clothes, using material she ordered from a catalog. She really enjoyed talking about her experiences, and I think hearing a firsthand account made history seem more real for my son. 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

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

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