

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

- **Building Trust** – Encourage your child to imagine that when he keeps promises or is honest, he’s making deposits in a trust “bank.” When he’s dishonest, however, his “account” is “in the red” – meaning friends and family can’t rely on him. If that happens, ask him to think about ways he could begin refilling his account, perhaps by writing a letter of apology.
- **Learn Sign Language** – When your tween considers languages to study, she might add American Sign Language to her list. Knowing how to sign would let her communicate with friends or others who are hearing-impaired. Plus, demand is rising for interpreters, so the skill could lead to a career. Her school may offer the course, or she can find one online.
 - **Did You Know?** – The suicide rate for children ages 10-14 tripled between 2007 and 2017. Be aware of warning signs, which include changes in sleep habits, saying things like “I’m worthless” or “There’s no point anymore,” or withdrawing from family and friends. If you ever believe your tween is in immediate danger, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK.

Great Expectations

Setting expectations for your tween can motivate her to do her very best and tells her, “I believe you can do this!” Try these strategies to develop and share your expectations.

Know Where to Start – Think of your middle schooler’s goals as rungs on a ladder, with an ultimate goal (say, going to college) at the top. To set realistic expectations, start by considering where she is now (regularly getting C’s on papers, not keeping up with assigned reading.) Then, let her know you expect her to climb up at least one rung next semester or month (earning B’s on papers, reading 30 minutes a day).

Focus on Effort – Telling your child that you expect her to do better in art class because she’s “talented” can send the message that she can’t do better in subjects in which you don’t think she’s “talented.” Instead, try talking about how she raised her English grade last year after working hard. She’ll develop a growth mindset – the belief that she can succeed in anything she puts effort into.

Help Her Plan – When you set an expectation for your tween that she’s struggling to meet, ask what might be holding her back. Say you expect her to complete and turn in all assignments, but she often runs out of time. Help her come up with ideas like starting assignments sooner or finding strategies to avoid time-wasters.

Bring History to Life

History is woven from individual stories – just like your child’s! Help him expand his view of history with these activities.

- ✓ **Read a Personal Perspective** – Encourage your tween to read a first-person account from a time period he’s studying. In writing about the Civil Rights Movement, he might choose the autobiography of Rosa Parks. How does her story give him a better understanding of that moment in time?
- ✓ **Write Your Own History** – Challenge each family member to write a short summary titled, “A History of Our Family’s Year.” Compare each version, then discuss how each person’s viewpoint and experiences determined what they wrote. Together, combine the accounts into a more complete picture of your family’s year.

Keep the Peace at Home

Skipped chores, sibling squabbles.....most families have occasional conflicts. With everyone spending more time together these days, tempers are even likelier to flare up. Use these ideas to maintain the peace.

Choose Your Words Carefully – Speaking from anger can cause small annoyances (someone not emptying the dishwasher) to spiral into bigger issues (“You never do anything you’re supposed to do!”). Take a deep breath, then focus on the problem rather than the person. It’s also helpful to use “I” instead of “you” statements. (“I feel overwhelmed and angry when everyone doesn’t do their part around the house” vs. “Why can’t *you* keep track of your daily chores?”) You’ll lower tensions and open the door to finding a solution.

Negotiate and Compromise – View conflicts as problems to be solved. If siblings argue over borrowing each other’s things, for instance, encourage them to clearly explain why they’re upset. (“You borrow my baseball bat but won’t share your equipment.” “That’s because I’m afraid you’ll break my tennis racket.”) Then, help them find a solution they both feel okay about. (“We’ll share as long as we get permission first and take good care of each other’s stuff.”)

Dial Down Fears About Speaking Up

Taking part in discussions helps your tween connect with her classwork and her classmates. Not everyone is comfortable speaking up, though, especially during video classes; however, sharing the following ideas can make it easier.

Do Prep Work – Your middle grader will feel more confident if she already has ideas in mind. Before class, encourage her to preview the material that will be covered. She can write down questions or comments so she’ll be ready to jump in.

Practice At Home – Suggest setting up video chats with grandparents or friends for “dress rehearsals.” Have her ask for specific feedback: Is she speaking loudly enough? What can they see in the background? Hearing from people she trusts that she’s coming across very well (or making adjustments based on their advice) will help her feel more comfortable during class.

Parent to Parent: Test Taking Tips

My son Phillip studied hard for tests and knew the material. But, he still got nervous and didn’t do as well as he could have. Since his cousin Gina was succeeding in high school, I suggested that he talk to her.

First, Gina sent Phillip a link to a deep-breathing exercise she uses when she’s nervous before a test. At first, he felt silly doing it, but he had to admit that it helped him feel less stressed. His cousin also recommended glancing quickly through the whole test first, so Phillip would know how fast to work. Lately my son has been timing himself doing practice tests to get a feel for the right pace.

Finally, when teachers allow scrap paper, Phillip uses Gina’s strategy of jotting down formulas as soon as tests are handed out so he’ll have a reference. Phillip’s test grades have been trending up lately and he doesn’t seem quite as nervous on test days.

Our Purpose

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

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