

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Find the similarity

Play this game to stretch your youngster's thinking. Take turns naming two unrelated objects (flower, skyscraper). Encourage him to think about each object's attributes and come up with creative ways that they're alike (both stand up tall).

### Language volunteer

If you speak a second language, consider sharing your skill with your child's school. Offer to translate at a PTA meeting or help parents fill out forms. Families will appreciate being connected to someone who knows their native language, and the school will value your participation.

### Perseverance

Is spring fever making your youngster drag her feet at homework time? She can learn to stick with it by dividing the work into short blocks (say, 30 minutes each). Give her a timer, and when it goes off, she can go outside for a short walk or bike ride.

### Worth quoting

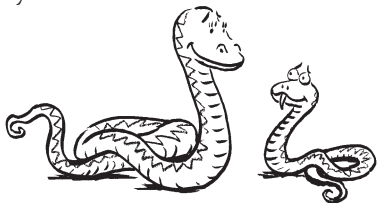
"Great people are those who make others feel that they, too, can become great." *Mark Twain*

### Just for fun

**Baby snake:** Am I poisonous?

**Mother snake:** Why do you ask?

**Baby snake:** Because I just bit myself.



## Building family ties

Good news for parents of middle graders: children this age *do* need and want to be with their parents, even if they don't say so. By letting family time change along with your child, you can help him enjoy doing activities with you. Here's how.



**Plan ahead.** Ask your middle schooler what he might like to do and when. For example, he may want to go to a movie but would prefer a Sunday afternoon matinee to a Saturday night show (when he's more likely to have plans with friends). Giving him a say will probably make him more cheerful about going along.

**Keep it simple.** Together time doesn't have to be elaborate or expensive. For example, hold a homemade mini-pizza night and see who can come up with the tastiest "crazy topping" combinations. Or browse yard sales, flea markets, and thrift shops as a family. What's

the best thing each person can find for a dollar?

**Start a ritual.** A family tradition will give your child something to look forward to—and a sense of belonging. You might play cards on Sunday nights, jog together on Saturday mornings, or watch a TV game show together every Wednesday evening.

*Tip:* Put family events on a wall calendar, or e-mail a reminder to your middle grader about upcoming plans. He'll see that you value his company—and he won't be surprised when the time arrives. 👍

## Excellent extras

Electives like music, art, or yearbook let your child explore interests, and they add variety to her school day. Encourage her to make the most of them with these ideas:

- Help her connect what she's doing in elective classes with real life. She'll get practical experience and do better in school. For instance, if she takes creative writing or art, she might enter a story or painting in a contest.

- Provide support at home. If your child takes band, for example, listen while she practices, and help her remember to take her instrument to school. Ask about projects or homework in elective classes, and be sure she turns them in on time. 👍



# Ready, set, read!

Motivate your child to read for pleasure by making books a convenient and fun part of her life. Consider these suggestions.

## Make it accessible

Your middle grader can keep books handy by organizing a collection. She might arrange colorful plastic crates or do a “makeover” on her childhood bookcase (remove the toys and paint the shelves). Then, she can group books by type (fantasy, adventure, graphic novel). *Tip:* Have her leave space for library books, too.



## Make it a habit

Give your child regular opportunities to read aloud. You might ask her to read an article or a movie review from the newspaper during breakfast or after dinner. Set a time each night when she “drops everything and reads” (DEAR time) for 15 minutes. Or suggest that she read nursery rhymes to younger siblings at bedtime.

## Make it fun

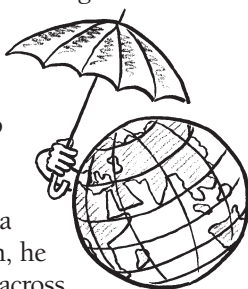
Have your youngster find new reading material by inviting friends to a book-exchange party. She can ask each guest to bring books they’ve finished and a snack to share. Everyone will go home with free reading material. Plus, being around others her age who love books may inspire your child to read more. 👍

# World weather



Weather watching can teach your youngster geography, science, and math. Suggest that he track worldwide weather with these steps:

1. Have him use a map to pick one city from each continent (*examples:* Cape Town, Sydney, Beijing).
2. Your middle grader can find each city’s daily weather in a newspaper or at [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com). Suggest that he record rainfall, snowfall, and high and low temperatures.
3. Encourage him to graph each city’s data so he can watch trends and make comparisons. For a temperature graph, he could write dates across the bottom and temperatures up the left side. Then, have him plot high and low temperatures in different-colored ink (*example:* red for highs and blue for lows).
4. Finally, ask your child to report his findings to your family. He can tell which cities had the highest and lowest temperatures or the most and least precipitation in a week or a month. 👍



## Q & A “The talk”

**Q** I know I need to talk to my 12-year-old son about sex, but I’m not comfortable. What can I do?

**A** It’s wise to start talking to your son now so you can help him make good choices. Children who talk to their parents about sex are less likely to engage in risky behavior.

Instead of a one-time discussion, make it an ongoing conversation. First, look for ways to bring up the topic. For example, you might open a discussion after watching a movie or television show involving a relationship. Also, your pediatrician may be able to recommend a book that will make your conversation easier.

During your chat, you can find out what your son already knows by inviting him to ask questions. Try to answer them as honestly as possible. Explain your views about sex, and encourage him to come to you anytime he has more questions. 👍



## Parent to Parent Chores without nagging

When I returned to work this year, my children had to help more with the housework. I explained that there would be less work if we did it as a team.

My daughter Anna suggested that we do a different chore each day of the week. So I made a list of our jobs, and we assigned one to each day. We decided to wash laundry on Sunday, iron on Monday, vacuum on Tuesday, mop on Wednesday, dust

on Thursday, and clean bathrooms on Friday. And if we got everything accomplished for the week, our reward was a chore-free Saturday!

Of course, we still had daily chores, like dishes and making beds. But with the bigger jobs out of the way, those didn’t seem like much work, and I found I didn’t have to nag my kids to do them. 👍



**OUR PURPOSE**

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

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