

December 2006

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Lend a hand

To get involved at your child's school, just ask what you can do. Most principals and staff welcome assistance, such as answering phones in the office or distributing notices to go home to parents. Pitching in can help ensure that your youngster's school remains a great place to learn!

Cold remedy

Help your child thrive during cold season by boosting her natural resistance. Turning the home thermostat down a bit and using a humidifier can protect the nose and throat, where colds generally develop. Also, encourage your youngster to stay strong by getting daily exercise and enough sleep.

Up-front learning

Is your middle grader eager to raise his grades? Suggest that he move to the head of the class. Sitting in the front row limits distractions and can improve concentration. Plus, asking to sit up front will show his teacher and classmates that he's serious about learning.

Worth quoting

"No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted." *Aesop*

Just for fun

Q: What do you call an elephant at the North Pole?

A: Lost!



The road to independence

Kirsten wants a wild haircut. Jack insists on staying out later on week-ends. And Ben thinks the state of his room is his business.

What do these three children have in common? They're all normal middle graders asserting their independence. Use this "stoplight" approach to help you figure out when to let go and when to hold your ground.

Green: Go

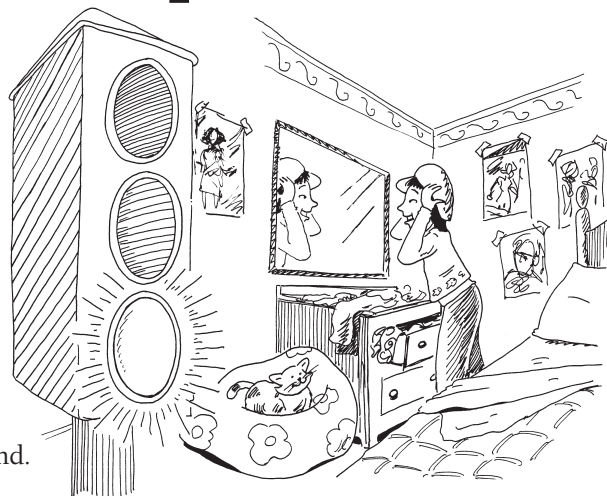
Middle graders are ready to do more on their own. Give your child a green light to get herself ready in the morning or decide which school club to join. The idea is to let her make decisions where a slip-up won't hurt anyone. Remember that mistakes are part of growing up and will help her learn.

Yellow: Slow down

Use caution as your middle grader is out more. Know where she is and who she's with, and ask her to call if she goes somewhere else. Gradually allow her to be in safe places without parent supervision. *Example:* Drop her and a friend at a youth center dance, and pick them up when it's over. Giving your child more freedom will help her become independent.

Red: Stop

A middle grader is not ready to make the big decisions by herself. Let your child know that some



rules, such as those concerning bad language, school attendance, and dating, are yours to make—and are non-negotiable. Providing firm rules will help her feel safe and loved. 👍

Math-e-magic

Math is essential in many exciting careers. Astronauts rely on formulas to navigate in space, and football coaches use statistics to monitor performance. Have your child try these tips to boost math success—and maybe end up in an amazing career:

● **Use the Internet** to explore the wonders of math. Visit www.math.com/students/wonders.html to learn about patterns and mazes. Play math games at www.funbrain.com or www.aplusmath.com.

● **Write explanations** alongside class notes. *Example:* Next to " $y = x^2/a$," put "Find the value of y by multiplying x times itself, and divide by the value of a ."

● **Learn the language** of math. Look up words such as "mean" and "median," and type a list of definitions for easy reference. 👍

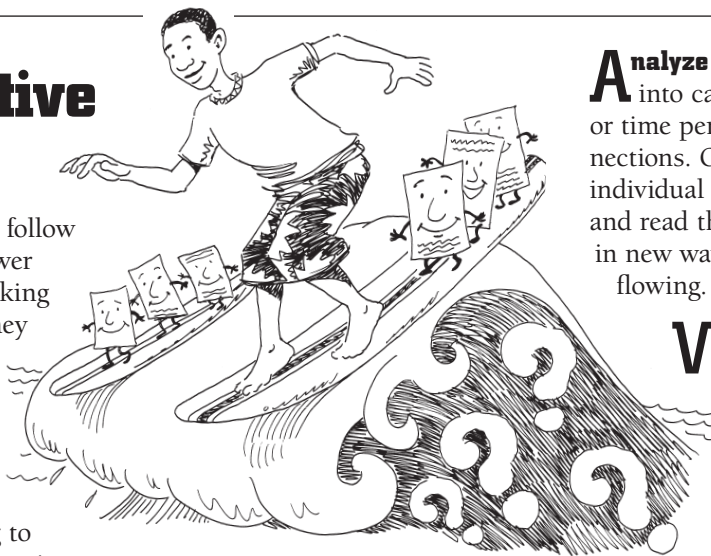


Encourage creative thinking

By middle school, most students can follow guidelines for typical question-and-answer assignments. But when it comes to thinking creatively about writing assignments, they often get stuck. Help your child “catch a W-A-V-E” with these strategies.

Write down all possible ideas.

Don't dismiss a thought because it seems silly. (Example: Do a report as a poem or a restaurant menu.) Stopping to evaluate each concept can discourage creative thinking. Keep going! A great idea may be moments away.



Analyze thoughts. Group ideas into categories, such as topics or time periods, to help make connections. Or write thoughts on individual pieces of paper, shuffle, and read them again. Seeing things in new ways will get creative juices flowing.

Vary surroundings.

Thinking in a different place can spark new ideas. Try the park, library, or bookstore. Brainstorm in several places to see if fresh ideas come to mind.

Expect more questions. Thinking creatively often uncovers more questions. (“Could graphics or pictures help?” “What would the main character choose?”) See questions as successes—you're thinking creatively and outside your comfort zone. 👍

No time for TV

Want to help boost your child's brainpower? Turn off the TV, and suggest fun, skill-building activities like these.

■ **Direct a movie.** Rather than watching a movie on TV, your middle grader could make a film herself. Let her use your camcorder (or borrow one) to record her sister's birthday party or a day in your life. She'll learn to use technology, and if she adds a script, she'll boost her writing skills, too.

Hear the beat.

Listening to music is not only relaxing, it can also help your child learn. Following along with lyrics (they're often in the

CD case) provides reading practice. Tapping to the rhythm develops math skills.

■ **Tell stories.** Hold a family “quiet night,” when storytelling replaces television. Let each person take turns making up a story. Creating characters and telling tales will give everyone's imagination a workout. 👍

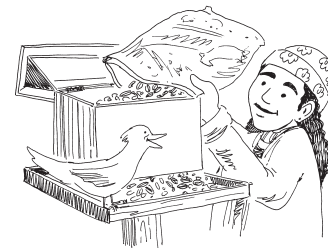


Parent to Parent Winter project

Last winter we came up with a great project to put a stop to our daughter's complaints of “I'm bored. There's nothing to do.” Cary has always liked birds, so we decided to give her a bird feeder to fuel her interest—and teach her responsibility at the same time.

It wasn't long before the neighborhood birds were flocking to the feeder. Every few days, Cary added birdseed so her feathered friends would come back for more. She learned a lot about birds' habits as she watched them come and go.

I'm happy to say that taking care of the birds in our backyard cured Cary's winter boredom. She even saved her allowance and bought a book about birds so she could learn to identify the different kinds. 👍



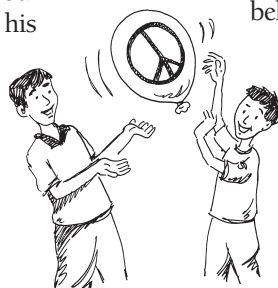
Q & A Bullying in the family

Q My older son is bullying my younger one when I'm not around. How can I get him to stop?

A Start by talking with your older son alone. Listen to his side, and try to find the source of his frustration. Perhaps he is feeling insecure as he grows older. Maybe he is the victim of a bully at school and is taking out his anger on his brother.

Explain that deliberately hurtful behavior harms the victim and also hurts the bully by making him feel more powerful than he is. Make it clear that bullying behavior (teasing, hitting, or threatening to hit) is not acceptable under any circumstances. Let your child know what consequences will follow.

Tip: Try to keep your son from watching violent shows or playing violent games, since they can teach bullying behavior. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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