

January 2009

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



TV lingo

Want to help your child learn another language? Mute your television's sound and turn on the closed-caption feature. If your youngster speaks English, use Spanish captioning. If he speaks Spanish, use English captions. Increase his grasp of the language by trying this for news, documentaries, or his favorite series.

Mall math

If your middle schooler loves to shop, demonstrate how math skills will come in handy. Ask her to calculate the sale price of a pair of shoes ("What's 15 percent of \$25?"). Have her deduct that amount to get the sale price. Then, she can calculate the tax, and finally the total price.

Lifelong learning

Let your youngster see you discover something new, and you might inspire him to try something new, too. Join a garden club, take a pottery class at your community center, or visit a museum exhibit. Then, talk to him about what you learned. He'll see that education is all around us.

Worth quoting

"Where all think alike, no one thinks much."

Walter Lippman

Just for fun

Q: Why did the music teacher need a ladder?

A: To reach the high notes.



Stress busters

Early-morning alarms, a day of switching classes, after-school clubs, homework, sports practice ... what isn't packed into a middle grader's schedule?

Help your child handle everyday demands with these ideas for taking the stress out.

Down time

A few minutes to unwind after a long day can make evenings calmer. Together, brainstorm a few relaxing activities, such as reading magazines, listening to music, or playing with the dog. Get your middle grader to build at least one stress buster into every day.

Positive thinking

Help your youngster look at stressful situations from different points of view. Encourage him to find the positive side and concentrate on that. *Example:* If he doesn't make the competitive soccer team, he'll have a chance to shine on the neighborhood team.

Mind over matter

Teach your child a few anti-stress exercises. Suggest that he close his eyes and picture himself filling a balloon with his problems. He can breathe in deeply



and exhale to "blow" the problems away. Or he could choose an imaginary place (beach, mountains) to escape to. Ask him to imagine what he sees, hears, smells, and feels.

Writing

Give your middle schooler a journal to keep next to his bed. If a concern (say, a fight with a friend) is keeping him awake, he can get his feelings out in writing. He can also jot down things he's grateful for. Reminding himself of the good things in his life can put his worries in perspective. 👍

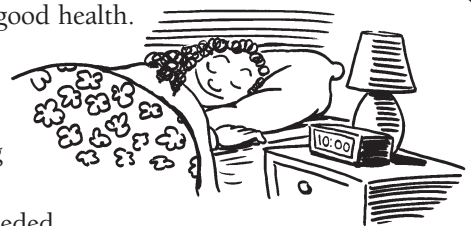
Tips for staying healthy

Your youngster can fight stress with good health. Here are some pointers:

- As your child gets older, she still needs 9–10 hours of sleep. Difficulty getting up or crankiness in the morning may be signs she's staying up too late.

- Regular meals and snacks provide needed fuel. Have your youngster eat fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and protein like lean meat, eggs, and beans.

- Workouts give your middle grader energy and make her feel good. Encourage her to get an hour of physical activity a day (go for a walk or run, rent a yoga video, take a family bike ride, play tennis). 👍



Word-wise fun

A good vocabulary lets your child soak up what she reads and hears, both in class and while she studies. Help her be a word whiz with these activities.

Act out words. Ask your youngster to write each word from her vocabulary list on a separate strip of paper. Family members take turns pulling them from a hat and acting them out. Players try to guess the word.

Sing words. Surprise your middle grader by printing out lyrics to her favorite songs



and posting them on the refrigerator. Highlight unfamiliar words and challenge her to learn their meanings. She might try using the context of the surrounding words, or she can look them up in a dictionary.

Compete with words. Hold a family vocabulary bee that works just like a spelling bee. Take turns giving each other words to define. You might use words from your child's social studies and science textbooks (*tip*: look for the words in bold type). Players stay in the game as long as they give correct definitions. 👍

Don't give up!

Thomas Edison once said he never failed at creating an invention—he just found 10,000 ways that wouldn't work! When your child doesn't succeed at something, share Edison's attitude to teach her the power of perseverance:

● Did she get a low grade on a quiz or lose a chess team match? Encourage her to focus on improving so she'll have a better shot next time. For example, she might attend study groups or play chess with a friend.



● Is your middle grader having a hard time learning an instrument? Suggest that she practice an extra 10–20 minutes daily or schedule a session with her band teacher. Take her to a high school concert or football game to show her what she'll be able to do if she sticks with it. 👍

Parent to Parent

Charts, tables, and graphs

Recently I noticed that my seventh-grader was missing test questions that asked him to choose answers by looking at charts, tables, or graphs. When I mentioned it, Sam said he had trouble understanding them, and he didn't see the point anyway.

I explained that people rely on tables and graphs for everything from reading train schedules to watching stock prices. Then, I showed him that day's newspaper with its weather chart and a graph tracking cell-phone usage.

We decided to start a daily routine. Each morning Sam scans the weather chart, and I ask questions like "What was the low temperature in Anchorage, Alaska, yesterday?" Now that he sees how charts and graphs are used every day, he's getting the hang of them—and hopefully he'll do better on tests, too. 👍



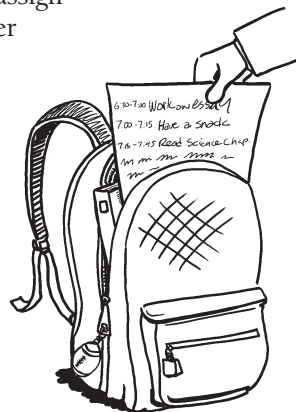
Q & A Learning with autism

Q My son has a mild form of autism and often gets frustrated while doing homework. How can I help?

A Start by looking over assignments with your youngster and helping him create a homework schedule. *Example:* 6:30–7:00, work on essay; 7:00–7:15, have a snack; 7:15–7:45, read science chapter. Have him set a timer so he knows when to move to the next assignment.

Check in with him from time to time to see if he needs help. Since many children with autism have trouble understanding abstract ideas,

try to make concepts more real for your son. If he's learning about atoms, he might create a clay model. If he struggles with comprehension, you can simplify textbook questions for him. For example, instead of, "Name a few reasons that earthquakes occur," ask him, "What causes earthquakes?" 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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