

March 2009

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



Goodbye, bad habits

Middle schoolers may start biting their nails or chewing on pencils without realizing it. These habits can be triggered by stress or boredom. Suggest that your child offer herself an incentive to quit. For instance, if she doesn't bite her nails for two weeks, she might do home manicures with a friend.

Standardized tests

It's important that all students be in school for standardized tests. Put the dates on your calendar so you don't schedule appointments for your child that week. If he's sick, check on makeup days. Also, be sure he gets a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast for test day (and every day!).

Think summer

Now is a good time to start thinking about summer plans. Encourage your child to list possibilities. She might come up with programs to attend, opportunities for volunteering, or places to visit. The brainstorming will get her thinking—and give her productive ways to spend her days.

Worth quoting

"Teachers open the door. You enter by yourself."

Chinese proverb

Just for fun

Teacher: I thought I told you to stand at the end of the line.

Student: I tried, but someone was already there!



Kindness: It's contagious

While getting off the school bus, Ethan sees Abby trip and drop her books. He's in a hurry to get home, but he stops and helps her gather her belongings.

Ethan performed a random act of kindness—he did something thoughtful for another person just to be nice. Encourage your child to be kind with these ideas.

Model kind acts. Let your youngster see you hold the door for someone or motion another driver ahead of you in traffic. You might comment on how being considerate made you feel: "That woman was in a hurry. I'm glad we could help." Chances are, your child will want to feel that way, too.

Plan kind acts. Ask your middle grader to name 10 ways to show kindness, or have the whole family think of ideas together. Then, let everyone choose one to try. *Examples:* Weed a neighbor's flower beds, take treats to animals in a shelter, share CDs with friends.



Recognize kind acts. Attach an envelope to your refrigerator or bulletin board. When someone sees another family member act kindly, he can write a note about it ("Bryan helped Susie with her math homework"). Pull out the notes and read them aloud at dinner or during family meetings. 👍

Finding fun reads

Pages seem to fly by when you're reading a good book. Use these tips to steer your child to selections she'll enjoy.

Share with friends. If her friends like a particular book or author, your youngster might, too. Suggest that she set up an exchange with classmates so she can try many different books.

Look for "readalikes." Does your child have a favorite series? She can search the Web for similar titles. For instance, if she's a fan of Carolyn Keene's Nancy Drew series, have her type "Nancy Drew readalikes" into www.google.com.

Browse book lists. Librarians can provide recommended reading lists. Your middle schooler can also find suggestions and reviews in *Booklist* magazine or online at www.kidsreads.com. 👍



What's your style?

Your child is studying Vikings. When asked to describe their daily lives, would she rather write about the topic, talk about it, or act out a skit?

The answer is an indicator of your youngster's "learning style"—the way she learns best. Share these suggestions to help her make the most of her strengths.

1. Visual (learns by seeing)

Characteristics: Understands lessons better when material is written down. Takes good notes and likes sitting up front.

Study tips: Color-code notes (write dates in red and people's names in blue, for instance). Make outlines and flash cards. Draw graphs and charts.



2. Auditory (learns by hearing)

Characteristics: Remembers what the teacher says. May talk while writing.

Study tips: Read notes out loud. Make up songs or rhymes to remember facts and formulas. Explain ideas to a parent or friend.

3. Kinesthetic (learns by doing)

Characteristics: May doodle in class. Enjoys hands-on projects (science experiments, arts and crafts).

Study tips: Rewrite notes or type them on the computer. Take stretch breaks while studying. Use objects (pour water into measuring cups to explore fractions). 👍



Hold that place!

Just like your youngster uses a bookmark to save his place while reading, he can use online bookmarks to save links to Web sites he'll want to visit later. Show him how to use "online bookmarking" to get organized, share links with friends, and work on group projects.

To start, have him join a free bookmarking site like <http://delicious.com> or <http://ma.gnolia.com>. Then, he can save links to favorite sites and give each one a "tag," or label ("Science," "Sports"), so they're easy to find later.



If he adds friends to his account, they'll be able to access each other's collections. For group projects, classmates can save Web site sources under one tag ("History Project").

Safety Note: Be sure your child makes his account private and only adds people he knows to his network. 👍

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Parent to Parent I spy

My children love spy movies. So I suggested they do some research to find out more about real-life spies.

First, I took them to the library, and they checked out *Spy Science* by Jim Wiese. They had fun making invisible ink. We mixed ½ cup of water and ½ cup of baking soda together and used Q-tips to write messages. To read them, they "painted" the words with grape juice.

We also visited the CIA Web site and played a code-cracking game. Then, we made our own family codes and left notes around the house for each other to find. For example, we reversed the alphabet and used 1 for Z, 2 for Y, 3 for X, and so on.

Doing the activities together was fun, and the kids got reading and writing practice at the same time.

Editor's Note: You can find the CIA's Web site at www.cia.gov/kids-page/games/break-the-code/index.html. 👍



Q & A "Going out"

Q My son asked a girl at school to "go out" with him. What does that mean for this age, and what advice should I give him?

A In middle school, "going out" usually means talking at school and meeting each other for group outings like movies and basketball games.

You can remind your son to relax and be himself around his girlfriend. Help him get comfortable by

suggesting that he invite her home for dinner or to study.

Since this first relationship can help set the tone for future ones, teach your son to treat his girlfriend with respect. He should talk nicely about her to others, and show an interest in her by asking questions ("What kind of music do you like?"). Finally, let him know he can come to you for guidance any time. 👍

