

September 2009

Middle Years

Working together for school success

Short Stops



DID YOU KNOW?

Children who read regularly do better on standardized tests. Encourage your youngster to read whatever he likes (books, magazines, comics, Web sites). He will build vocabulary and reading comprehension—skills that will help him in everyday life and at test time.

Family meals

Eating together gives parents and children a chance to chat about the day's events. It also strengthens family relationships. Whether you have time to cook or are picking up carry-out on the way home from work, try to sit around the table and enjoy each other's company while you eat.

Show compassion

Teach your youngster compassion by pointing out ways she can help people going through tough times. For example, she might carry books for a friend on crutches or gather clothing to donate to hurricane victims. She'll learn to understand other people's problems and to pitch in with a helping hand.

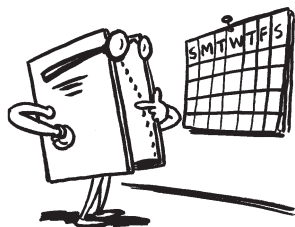
Worth quoting

"Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it. Autograph your work with excellence." *Anonymous*

Just for fun

Q: When does Friday come before Thursday?

A: In the dictionary!



Charting a course

Christopher says he wants to do better in school this year. His friend Sarah has the same idea—but she has written down a list of goals for herself. Who is more likely to succeed?

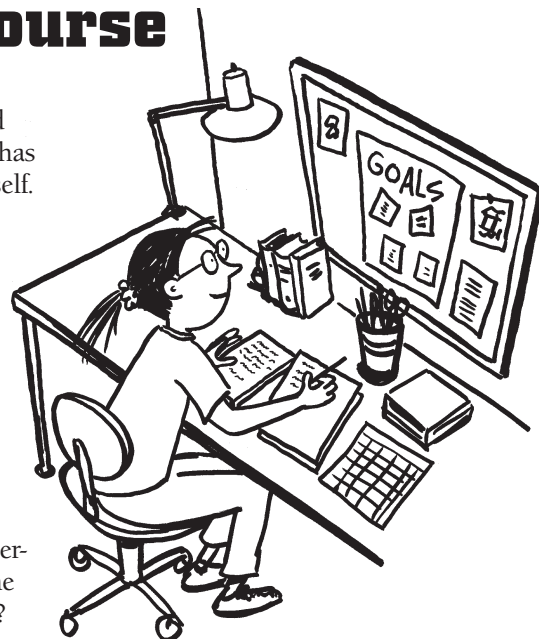
Sarah. That's because setting goals gives students something specific to aim for. Use these ideas to encourage your middle grader to set her own goals for this school year.

Whose choice?

You may want your child to get an A in algebra, but she'll be more motivated if she chooses her goals herself. First, ask her to picture what she struggled with last year. Pop quizzes? Keeping a journal? Then, have her create goals to address those problems (get a B average on quizzes, turn in journal entries on time).

List steps

Under each goal, she can write steps to take. For example, if she wants better quiz grades, she might list, "Read textbook chapters and review class material each night. Make flash cards and quiz myself every week. Go over corrected quizzes to see what I got wrong."



Be realistic

Goals should be challenging but within reach. If your child aims for top grades in every subject, she may get discouraged. Instead, she might strive to improve in several classes.

Tip: Suggest that your youngster tape her goals over her desk or in the front of her binder. Seeing them every day will inspire her to reach high all year long! 👍

School: The place to be

When it comes to succeeding in school, there's no substitute for showing up. These tips can help your child get to every class every day:

- Encourage him to follow a regular morning routine (shower, eat, brush teeth). Knowing what to do next will save time and help prevent tardiness. If family members share a bathroom, make a schedule so everyone has a time slot.
- Help your middle grader stay healthy to avoid absences. Be sure he washes his hands often, gets enough sleep, eats a balanced diet, and exercises regularly.
- Let your youngster know that skipping class is unacceptable. Read the school's attendance policy together, and go over the consequences for skipping. 👍



Support learning

Wanted: Middle schoolers who enjoy school, work hard in class, and complete homework.

How can you encourage your child to be such a student? Show you're interested in his education! Here are three ways.

1. Build enthusiasm. Make school a topic you discuss regularly. Ask, "What are you learning in geography?" Or say, "I noticed a play on the school calendar. What's it about?" Then, follow up by watching a movie about a country he's studying or attending the play together.



2. Stay informed. Keeping in touch with teachers can encourage your middle grader to do well in class. At back-to-school night, find out how you can check on your child's assignments and grades (homework hotline, online grade reporting). Ask for the best way to contact each teacher (e-mail, phone).

3. Limit technology. Homework will be easier if your child isn't tempted by the TV, the Internet, or video games. Decide

how much screen time he's allowed so it won't interfere with learning. *Example:* one hour on school nights and two hours a day on weekends. 👍



Moving toward independence

Part of growing up is becoming more independent. Here are ways you can teach your child to rely on herself as she gets older:

• **Invite** her to think of areas where she can take on a bigger role. If she enjoys cooking, put her in charge of dinner once a week. Suggest that she look at cookbooks or recipe Web sites, and then let her plan and prepare the meal.

• **Support** your middle schooler as she takes on new responsibilities. For example, if she's upset about a



grade, encourage her to handle the situation on her own. She could list the reasons she thinks she deserves a higher grade and then meet with her teacher. Remember to ask her how things went.

• **Provide** backup when necessary. For more serious matters, your child may need you to step in. Suppose she's worried that her best friend is using drugs. You might help her talk to her friend, her friend's mother, or a school counselor. 👍

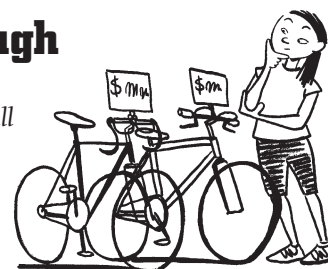
Q & A Thinking it through

Q I've read that critical thinking is an important skill for children. What is it, and how can I help my daughter learn to think critically?

A Kids who think critically can analyze and evaluate information. They also learn to think for themselves, which can help them resist peer pressure.

You can give your child practice by asking her open-ended questions that contain words like *explain*, *compare*, *imagine*, *if*, and *summarize*. *Examples:* "Can you explain why the Civil War started?" "How would you compare the features and costs of these two bikes?"

Asking your middle grader questions can also teach her to form her own opinions and decide whether information is fair, accurate, and logical. For instance, if she mentions an article she saw in a tabloid magazine or read online, ask her, "How can you find out if it's true?" (Check other newspaper or online sources.) 👍



Parent to Parent Mobile manners

I was in line with my son at the store the other day when his cell phone rang. He proceeded to carry on a conversation while the cashier rang up his purchase.

After we left, I told James it was rude to talk on his phone while he was being waited on. When he answered, "Everyone does it," I knew it was a good time to discuss cell phone manners. I said people tend to talk loudly on their phones,

disturbing others and turning private conversations into public ones.

James said he hadn't thought about it that way. He agreed to put his phone on "vibrate" when we're out so he can check his calls and return them later. My son can't imagine what it was like growing up without cell phones. But I'm trying to make him understand that just because we have cell phones, we don't have to use them all the time! 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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