

March 2008

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Standardized test time

With standardized tests coming up, share this strategy for multiple-choice questions with your child. Read all possible answers before picking one. If you're unsure, narrow your choices by eliminating ones you know are wrong. Then, you can concentrate on finding clues in the selections that remain.

### Family meals

Want to boost your youngster's grades while reducing the likelihood that he will drink or do drugs? Try eating together as a family. Research shows that family meals lead to parent-child connections that can reduce risky behavior and improve children's self-esteem. Write dinner-time on your kitchen calendar so everyone knows it's a priority.

### Cell phone etiquette

Middle graders love their cell phones. Teach your child to be polite with hers by making sure she turns it off during movies and in restaurants. Also, encourage her to speak or text message only briefly (to make plans or see what someone wants) when she's with other people.

### Worth quoting

"To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe."  
*Anatole France*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What do lazy dogs do for fun?

**A:** Chase parked cars.



## Web of learning

News and discoveries. Books and stories. Opportunities to write.

Where can your child find all of that—and more? In the vast cyberspace that makes up the Internet. Try these ideas to get your child using the computer for more than instant messaging!

**Get news flashes.** Is your youngster fascinated by tornadoes and blizzards? Is she a basketball fanatic? Have her get regular news feeds that will fuel her interests. For instance, she can receive science updates from [www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/rss](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/rss) or sports news at <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/rss/index>. *Note:* Start by signing up for a free "news reader" at [www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader) or [www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com).

**Download information.** Your child can build knowledge and comprehension skills by listening to podcasts (recorded audio programs) on the computer or downloaded to an MP3 player. She'll find many topics at sites like <http://kids.learnoutloud> or books to download at [www.squidoo.com/child](http://www.squidoo.com/child)



*audiobook.* She can even create her own podcasts to share with kids around the world at [www.kid-cast.com](http://www.kid-cast.com).

**Write a blog.** Encourage your middle grader to practice writing and reporting by launching a blog. She might post entries about her hobbies, favorite movies, or family activities. Responding to posted comments will help her work on her communication skills. Suggest [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) or [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com) for setting up her free blog.

*Safety note:* Monitor your child's use of the Internet to make sure she visits safe sites and does not give out her name or other identifying information. 👍

## Being generous

Generosity is a wonderful character trait. Here are some ways you can help instill it in your middle grader:

- ★ Shoot hoops with a younger sibling.
- ★ Volunteer at the elementary school carnival or book fair.
- ★ Help a friend who's struggling with math.
- ★ Pick up trash along the sidewalk or at the park.
- ★ Bake cookies for a neighbor who has a new baby.
- ★ Donate a book to the school library.
- ★ Give part of his allowance to charity.
- ★ Join with friends to put on a talent show at a retirement home. 👍

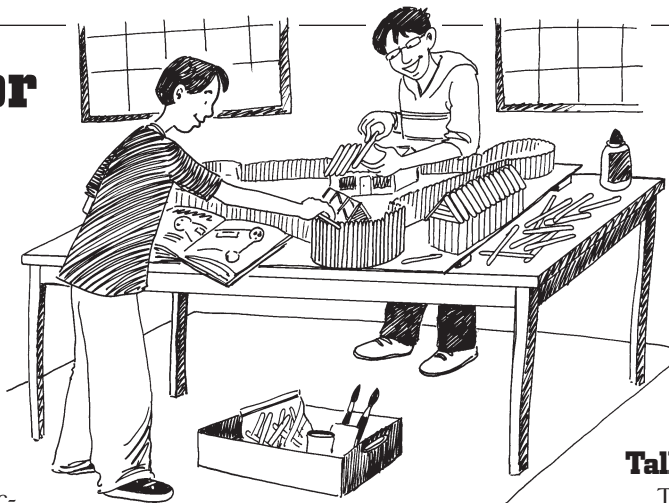


# Team up for success

Working with a partner on a school project gives your youngster valuable experience in cooperating with others. Share these tips for success.

## Choose a partner

Suggest that your child look for a partner who participates in class and finishes work on time. Let him know that best friends don't necessarily make the best partners—and friendship can even get in the way of “business” relationships.



## Divide and conquer

At their first meeting, the kids can use a calendar to write out steps (research the topic, build a model, write the report). Suggest that they draw on each person's strengths in divvying up the work. *Example:* The history buff might write the background section, while the more creative one designs the model.

## Talk it over

The children should touch base daily on their progress. If one falls behind, they can refer to their schedule and figure out how to get back on track. Discussing problems will give your child practice in working out conflicts. *Note:* Your youngster should notify the teacher of any unresolved issues before the assignment is due. 👍



# Stay organized!

Could your child use some help getting organized? Give her this daily checklist:

☑ Unload your school gear in a regular spot (beside the desk, by the bedroom door) to avoid losing things.

☑ List what you have to do each day. Cross off each item as you finish.

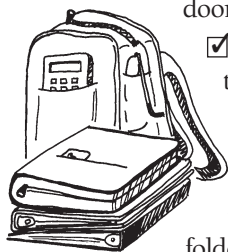
☑ File your school papers in notebook folders or binders so they're easy to find at study time.

☑ Keep supplies (pens, notepad, calculator) in a desk drawer or other convenient place.

☑ Clear off your desktop every night so you don't waste time getting started the next day.

☑ Return important items, like your glasses and agenda book, to the same backpack pocket each day.

☑ Before bed, pack up your backpack for the next day. 👍



# Parent to Parent Calming the nerves

My daughter had written a terrific report about Greek mythology. But, boy, was she nervous about presenting it in class! Luckily, my husband had some great advice for her.

He suggested that Maria summarize her report on a few index cards and rehearse her speech in front of a mirror. After a few tries alone, she practiced for us. She was making good eye contact, as her dad had instructed, but she was rushing through the whole thing. So he had her write “slow down” in big letters at the top of each note card.

We were glad to find out that all her preparation paid off. Maria got a good grade on her report—and on her oral presentation. I'm hoping that this experience will help her to be more confident the next time. 👍



# Q & A Classroom chatter

**Q** Justin's teacher called to say that he is constantly talking in class and distracting the other students. What should I do?

**A** Start by asking your son why he talks in class. Maybe he's bored or he doesn't understand the material. Or perhaps he is trying to make friends. Let his teacher know what he says so you can work together on solving the problem.

Then, make sure your son understands that his behavior is rude to his teacher and his classmates. You can mention that he has plenty of time to talk with friends before and after school, in between classes, and at lunch. A regular reminder (“Be sure to be quiet in class”) at bedtime or when he heads out to school can help, too. 👍



## OUR PURPOSE

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

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