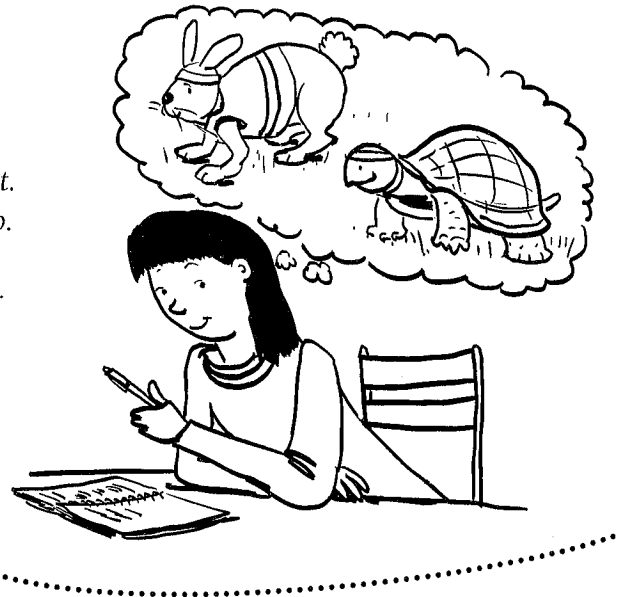


Character Traits for Success

Lily doesn't give up, even when a school subject or sport is difficult. James is determined to reach his goals—and has a plan for doing so. These students possess positive character traits like grit and drive. Here are ways to develop these and other important qualities in your middle grader.



GRIT: mental toughness and courage

Be the tortoise

Remind your middle grader of the story “The Tortoise and the Hare.” The hare is a faster animal, but the tortoise had grit: He kept going even when the race was tough—and he won. Encourage your tween to collect “tortoise moments” from her own life. She can write about them in a journal or take photos of her successes. For instance, she might snap a picture of an awesome test grade in her toughest subject. Or she could describe her sense of accomplishment when she learned a difficult new dive.



Take good risks

Middle schoolers like to take risks. Encourage your child to channel this adventurous spirit in positive ways. He might submit a painting to an art exhibit or enter a STEM competition, for example. Whether or not his artwork is accepted or he wins the contest, he can feel proud that he had the courage to try!

DRIVE: energy and determination to succeed

My motto

Encourage your child to come up with personal mottos that remind him to stay determined. Suggest that he keep them simple and fun so they're easy to remember—for instance, “I'm going to rock this!” He could write each motto in big, colorful letters on poster board and decorate it with drawings and designs. Then if he's struggling with a class project or having trouble learning his lines for the school play, he can glance at his poster for motivation to keep going.

Imagine the future

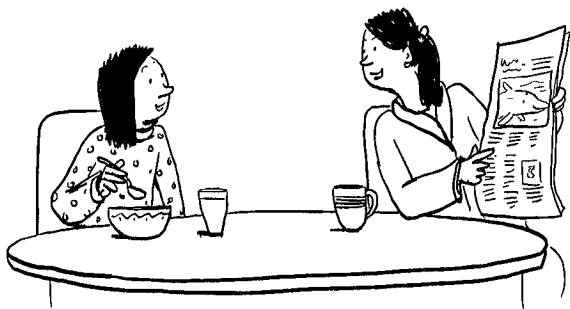
Where would your youngster like to be in 10 years? Have her write a letter to her future self outlining goals she's determined to achieve. Thinking about the future can inspire her to stay driven. *Example:* “Dear Future Self, I am 12 years old. I love using apps, and I dream about developing new ones myself. I hope you have created and sold at least five cool apps by now.”



OPTIMISM: *a feeling or belief that good things will take place*

Seek out good news

Show your middle grader newspaper or magazine articles about good things like a dolphin rescue or a school that raised money for cancer research. If troubling issues do come up, point out a silver lining if possible. (“Look how the whole community came together after the storm.”) *Idea:* Start a nightly ritual of sharing positive news from each of your days.



Start on a positive note

When your tween starts a new class or joins the debate team, encourage him to list all of the positive things that could happen. In his class, he might discover a new favorite author, learn about a job he may consider in the future, or make a friend. On the debate team, maybe he’ll find a cause he’s passionate about, or perhaps the public speaking practice will help him give better presentations in school.

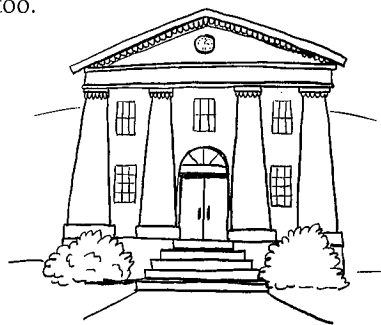
CURIOSITY: *the desire to learn or know more about something*

“I wonder...”

Wondering out loud on a regular basis can spark curiosity in your tween. While driving, you might say something like “I wonder what would change if everyone drove electric cars.” That might lead him to wonder about what would happen to gas stations or whether we would still need sound barriers on highways. Encourage him to share his “wonderings,” and follow up on his questions, too.

Build on interests

Know what your middle grader is into—and use those interests to boost her curiosity in other areas. For instance, if she loves architecture but says history is



boring, encourage her to notice buildings in her history book and on websites. She can investigate why they were designed as they were, leading her to learn more about society during that time period.

INTEGRITY: *honesty and fairness*

Encourage honesty

Tell your tween about situations where you show integrity. Maybe you served on a jury and, as instructed, didn’t discuss the case with your family, even though it was an interesting one. Or explain to her how you keep track of business receipts carefully so you make sure you pay taxes fairly.

Plan ahead

Help your middle grader practice ways to show integrity in the face of peer pressure. Together, come up with things he could say if a friend asks him for test answers or encourages him to sneak out to a party. (“It’s not right, and besides, we’ll both fail if we’re caught” or “No way, my parents trust me, and I’m not messing that up.”)

FLEXIBILITY: *the ability and willingness to adapt to new or changing circumstances*

Roll with the punches

Do pop quizzes or rained-out softball games throw your child for a loop? Share situations where you’ve been flexible, such as when you had to cover for a colleague who called in



sick or when you ran out of an ingredient while making dinner. Then, when your tween is faced with an unexpected challenge, help him brainstorm alternatives. Say the neighbor he babysits for moves away. He could look for a new family to sit for or think of different ways to earn money, such as mowing lawns or walking dogs.

Change your strategy

Flexible people are willing to try different approaches. When your youngster has to do a science fair project or a creative writing assignment, suggest that she list various ideas for topics. She’ll see that there’s more than one way to do something—and she’ll have ideas to fall back on if her first one doesn’t pan out.

Middle Years