Seneca Valley School District

February 2021

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Fair vs. equal

Your middle grader may think "fair" means "equal." To help her understand the difference, try this: Ask her to imagine a class full of different kinds of animals. It would be equal to make a squirrel and a turtle take a tree-climbing test—but would it be fair?

Thanks for being my kid!

Want to boost your middle schooler's self-confidence? Mail him a thank-you card telling him how proud you are to be his parent. List all the things you want for him in the future. The note will remind him of your love—without embarrassing him.

Home STEM lab

Let your tween set aside a spot to do science experiments or engineering projects. She could stock her "lab" with supplies like cardboard tubes, plastic cups, duct tape, scissors, a ruler, and a magnifying glass. When she's ready to work, she'll save time by having many of the items she needs in one spot.

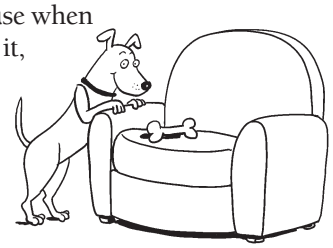
Worth quoting

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have."
Maya Angelou

Just for fun

Q: When you're trying to find something, why is it always in the last place you look?

A: Because when you find it, you stop looking!



Rethink thinking

One of the most important skills your middle grader can develop is how to think critically about issues and decisions. Sharpen his thinking with these activities.

Explain it to an alien

Take turns thinking of something that's common on Earth (sports, books) and explaining it to family members as if they're aliens. ("People cheer when their favorite team wins.") Let the "aliens" ask questions. ("Why aren't Earthlings happy for whoever wins?") Your child will learn to recognize his own assumptions (team loyalty is important) and realize that not everyone necessarily shares them.

Look for middle ground

Say your tween's homework is to write an opinion piece on school uniforms. He might argue that uniforms make getting dressed easier because you don't have to decide what to wear, while choosing your own outfit shows your personality. Maybe he could combine the pros and suggest that students be able to put together their own uniforms from a limited selection of styles.

Flip the script

Present family members with a choice like "Which ice cream is better, chocolate or vanilla?" Have your child argue *against* his own side. If he prefers chocolate, he might say, "Vanilla goes better with desserts like apple pie or chocolate cake." He'll practice considering other viewpoints.

Scheduling strategies

Juggling obligations can be a challenge, especially if your family's schedule changes from day to day. Try these ideas to keep everyone on track.

Avoid conflicts. Hang up a calendar, and assign each person a different-color marker. Each family member uses her color to write her obligations. ("Conference call, 2:30 p.m.") Or create a shared electronic calendar with automatic reminders.

Be consistent. Encourage everyone to go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even if school or work hours vary. You'll feel more alert on early-start days. On other mornings, use the extra time to eat a leisurely breakfast together.

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Take a stand against cyberbullying

With tweens spending more time online this year, cyberbullying is a big concern. Use these steps to help your middle grader make things safer for herself and her classmates.

Know what's not okay. Spreading rumors, singling out people for their differences, and posting embarrassing photos are all examples of cyberbullying. Ask your tween to imagine that the person being targeted is sitting next to her. Would she say the same thing out loud or hold up the photo in front of a crowd? If not, she shouldn't post it.

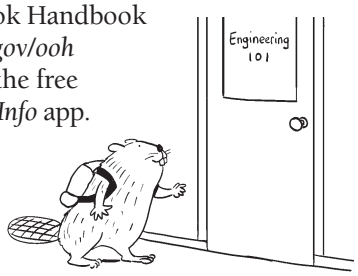
Reach out. Middle graders who witness bullying can feel stressed and sad. Let your child know there are safe ways to help. She could type something positive about the person being bullied in a group chat, change the topic, or send a supportive private message.

Get help. Whether your tween is being bullied or notices someone else is, she should come to you right away. You could have her block the person who's bullying her. Or suggest that she urge a friend who's being bullied to talk to the school counselor.

Steps toward a bright future

While a career might seem far off to your middle schooler, the schoolwork he does now will give him knowledge and skills he'll use in the future. Share these possibilities for him to consider.

Software developer? Marine biologist? These careers are among many that focus on STEM skills. Doing well in math and science classes today can prepare your tween for the classes he'll need in high school and college. *Idea:* Encourage him to explore the educational requirements for his dream careers in the Occupational Outlook Handbook at *bls.gov/ooh* or on the free *CareerInfo* app.



Entrepreneur? Business executive? If your child wants to start a company or work for a major corporation someday, he could sign up for marketing or business electives. *Idea:* Suggest that he volunteer to help with a school fundraiser or look into joining (or starting) an entrepreneurship club.

Q&A Midyear check-in

Q *My middle grader's classes are online this year. How can I help him kick off his second semester on a high note?*

A Start by checking in with your child to find out how he felt about the first semester. What was easier to do remotely? What was more difficult? He might say it was convenient to work in his own space all day, but hard to stay focused during online classes.

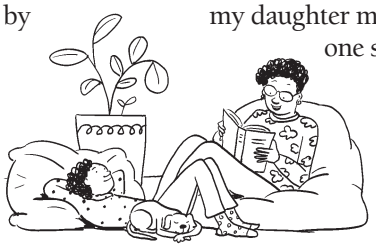
Then, consider what you hear from teachers or see on report cards. You could also email teachers to ask how your tween is doing. Is he giving his best effort? Does he participate in class?

Finally, ask teachers for advice in areas where your child could improve. If he sometimes has missing assignments, a teacher might suggest he create alerts to check his student portal daily. To boost concentration during class, he could set up his laptop so he can work standing up.

Parent to Parent Reading aloud to middle schoolers

During a library story hour for my kindergartner, my tween whispered that she missed having me read to her. So I told her to go pick out a novel and we would have our own story time at home!

Kelly chose *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. After I read aloud, we had an interesting discussion about issues the book presented, like individuality and freedom. And my daughter learned how to pronounce a few new words from listening to me read.



Now Kelly and I have regular story times after her little sister goes to bed. We take turns picking the book. When it's my turn, I ask the librarian for books my daughter might learn from, perhaps one set in another country or one that's slightly above her grade level. We're on our fourth novel now, and she'll often ask for "just one more chapter."

OUR PURPOSE

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

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ISSN 1540-5540

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