Seneca Valley School District

March 2021

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

A to-do-*later* list

Here's a clever way for your tween to stay focused while he works. When he finds himself tempted to do something unrelated to his assignment, encourage him to write it on a to-do-*later* list. *Examples:* "Check Twitter." "Daydream about summer." Moving his thoughts onto paper may get them off his mind and help him concentrate on his work.

Math in the garden

Gardening can sharpen your middle grader's math skills. Consider letting her plant flowers, vegetables, or herbs in a container or the yard. Ask her to calculate how many cubic inches of soil will fit in a planter box. She could also measure and graph her plants to compare growth rates.

DID YOU KNOW? Starting the day in the sunshine helps to regulate the body's biological clock, making it easier to feel alert in the morning. On sunny days, suggest that your teen eat breakfast outside or by a window. *Bonus:* Sunlight is a great mood lifter!

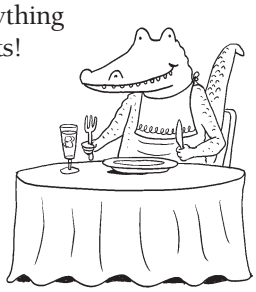
Worth quoting

"Find something you're passionate about and keep tremendously interested in it." *Julia Child*

Just for fun

Q: What do you feed an alligator?

A: Anything it wants!



Word up! Fun vocabulary boosters

A good vocabulary will make your tween a stronger reader, a better writer, and a more confident speaker. Try these activities to expand her world of words.

Play a game

Have each family member choose five unfamiliar words from textbooks or the dictionary. Write each word, along with its definition, on a separate index card. Illustrate your words on another five cards. Shuffle and deal the picture cards evenly to players, and stack the word cards facedown. Now take turns picking up a word card. Keep it if you have the matching picture card, or return the word card to the bottom of the stack if you don't. Match all your cards first to win.

Write poems

Encourage your middle schooler to get creative with words she's learning in school by writing a silly poem that defines each one. For electron, she might write, "Around the nucleus you zoom / Being so negative / Why all the gloom and doom?" She could read her poems aloud to study the words.

Make a word jar

Suggest that your middle grader label a clear jar "My Word Jar." When she comes across a word that's new to her (on a billboard, in conversation), have her write it on a slip of paper. Later, she can look up the definition, write it on the back, and drop the slip into her jar. *Idea:* Ask her to share the coolest word she finds each week. Challenge everyone to use the word in a sentence.

Avoid the blame game

Excuses, excuses. If you're hearing them from your middle grader, these tactics can help.

■ **Turn excuses into explanations.** If your child tries to justify a bad grade by saying something like "The teacher didn't remind us about the test," he's putting the blame elsewhere. Instead, have him give an explanation that begins with *I*. ("*I* forgot to write the test in my planner.")

■ **Applaud accountability.** Say your tween isn't allowed to eat or drink in the living room and admits he spilled orange juice on the carpet. You could reply, "I'm glad you told me." Then, talk about what will happen next. ("Look up stain-removal tips online so you can clean the carpet.")

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Concerns about fitting in

It's natural for middle schoolers to want to fit in with their peers—and hard when they feel like they don't. Use these tips to help your child handle his worries.

Right-size the problem. Not being part of the "in crowd" can seem like the end of the world to your tween. Acknowledge his feelings ("It must be tough to feel left out"). Then, let him talk to older siblings or neighbors who once struggled to figure out where they fit in. Knowing things will get better can take some of the pressure off.

Take small steps. If your middle grader longs to join a group of kids, suggest making one friend at a time instead. It's easier to form a relationship with one person than a whole group. Or encourage him to create his own circle of like-minded people by joining a club or taking part in other group activities that interest him. *Idea:* Ask him to imagine his classmates as pieces of many different puzzles. Not every piece fits every puzzle—and that's okay.

Parent to Parent: Follow the leader

My son Patrick prefers to sit back and let others take the lead, while my daughter Eliza likes being in charge. When Eliza mentioned the leadership roles she was including on her college applications, I realized that Patrick could use some experience being a leader, too.

When his school astronomy club was canceled this year, I asked what he might do instead. He decided to start a new virtual club with classmates. So far he has led virtual "watch parties" for special events like International Space Station flyovers, a meteor shower, and a lunar eclipse.

I also mentioned to Patrick that his younger cousins were struggling with distance learning, and he offered to lead virtual tutoring sessions. I could tell he was proud when one cousin got an A on a recent test—and I pointed out that taking the lead was really making a difference in other people's lives.

OUR PURPOSE

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

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Q&A: Dig deeper for research

Q *When my daughter does research for reports, she just Googles the topic and uses the first few links that pop up. How can she be more thorough?*

A There's a wealth of information out there beyond the first page of search results! Finding it can help your tween learn more about her topic—and write a better paper.

First, suggest that she do a targeted search for well-researched information. For instance, including "site:.edu" or "site:.gov" along with her search terms will give her sources from educational institutions or government sites. And Google Scholar (*scholar.google.com*) offers articles published in scholarly journals.

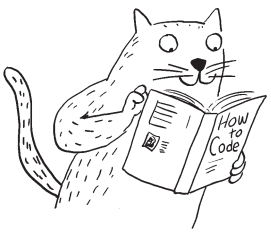
Also, encourage your child to use primary sources (personal narratives, photos, audio recordings) from the Library of Congress (*loc.gov*) and the Smithsonian Institution (*si.edu*). She may find it fascinating to take notes on an article written during the Industrial Revolution or from a news broadcast of the first moon landing.

Crack the code

Learning to code can sharpen your tween's logical thinking skills. That will help her in any career, whether it involves computer programming or not. Get her started with these free resources.

Scratch

This coding community developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology includes instructional videos. Kids of all skill levels can learn to program interactive games, animations, and stories. (*scratch.mit.edu*)



Code.org

At this site, middle graders will discover different programming languages as well as how to create apps and web pages. Encourage your tween to keep an eye out for videos on timely topics like voice assistants and self-driving cars. (*code.org*)

The Pack—NYSCI

This app made by the New York Hall of Science teaches computational thinking and other coding skills through puzzle-like game play. (*nysci.org/school/resources/the-pack*)