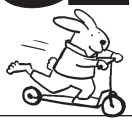
Seneca Valley School District

November 2020

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Attendance matters

Missing even a few classes—whether they're in person or online—can have a snowball effect. Not only does being absent make it hard for your child to keep up, but chronic absenteeism is linked with a higher dropout rate. Make sure your middle grader knows you expect him to be in every class every day, unless he's sick or there's a family emergency.

Digital manners

Before your tween sends a text, post, or email, suggest that she ask herself, "Is this nice? Would I say it in person?" If the answer to either question is no, it's a good idea to reword. *Tip:* If she feels the need to type a disclaimer like "No offense, but … " she probably shouldn't hit "send."

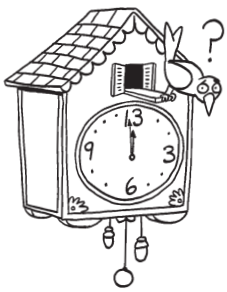
When parents disagree

Children who hear their parents arguing can feel stressed and insecure. Try to avoid topics that cause tension when your middle schooler is within earshot. If he does overhear an argument, offer reassurance: "We were upset, but we worked it out. And we still love each other and you."

Worth quoting

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams!" *Henry David Thoreau*

Just for fun



Q: What time is it when the clock strikes 13?

A: Time to get a new clock.

Fine-tune your study routine

A good study routine helps your middle schooler manage her workload and make the best use of her time. Use these ideas to help her develop one that works for her.

Set the scene

For one week, challenge your tween to do "quality checks" of her study sessions. She can write down distractions (TV, text messages), note how she feels when she loses focus (fidgety, hungry), and pinpoint time wasters (searching for school supplies, choosing a snack). Together, brainstorm solutions. Maybe she can silence electronics, set a timer to take breaks, and gather supplies and snacks before she starts working.

Always have a plan

Your middle grader could find a regular time to study each day that fits with mealtimes and other activities. It might be at 5 p.m. most days and 7 p.m. on Wednesdays when your family eats dinner early. Then, she can start each session by listing specific tasks and how long she expects them to take. "Do 12 algebra practice problems (30 minutes)" instead of "Study for math test."

Personalize the approach

The "right" way to study is different for every student. Suggest that your child experiment with study methods to find her favorites. She might notice whether she stays on task better when she studies alone or if she learns more in a study group. Or maybe she'll try reading notes silently and out loud. She may realize that silent reading is faster but that she remembers more when she sees *and* hears the material.

On common ground

As your child gets older, you can stay close by discovering routines and activities to share. Here's how:

■ Choose things you do regularly, like eating and exercising, and try to do them with your tween. For instance, have breakfast together before he leaves for school. Or if he's doing online school, aim to sync your lunch breaks. Invite him to join you on your next run, or offer to shoot baskets with him.

■ Look for common interests. Does your middle grader like music you enjoyed at his age? Play "Name That Tune" to see who can shout out titles and artists first. Or did he stream a TV series you loved when it originally aired? Make up trivia questions about the show, and try to stump each other.

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Focus on mental health

Strong coping strategies can help your tween navigate difficult situations—including a pandemic. Share these techniques for boosting his mental health.

Let it out. If your middle grader feels anxious or sad, writing may make his feelings more manageable. Suggest that he keep a journal, write poetry or song lyrics, or jot concerns on slips of paper to drop in a "worry jar." Also, talk to him regularly about his feelings, and share your own thoughts. ("I miss working in the office with my colleagues, but it's nice to work in comfy clothes.")

Look for the good. When your tween is stressed, encourage him to close his eyes, take deep breaths, and visualize one positive thing that happened today. Maybe he got to video chat with a friend he hasn't seen in a while. Thinking about good times can make worries seem less intense.

Find humor. Laughter is a proven mental health booster. Your middle schooler might decorate his bedroom wall with things that make him chuckle, such as comic strips or funny pictures. He could even draw his own comics or write silly captions for photos. Ask him to show you the jokes, and enjoy a good laugh together.

Parent-teacher conferences

There are many great reasons to take part in conferences with your middle grader's teachers. Here are four.

1. You'll help your child succeed. Students do their best when parents and teachers work together. Making a personal connection sets the stage for a strong partnership.

2. You'll get to share information. Hearing about life at home gives the teacher insight into your tween. ("Lucy's two younger siblings are also doing remote learning.")

3. You'll learn what's expected. Knowing what your middle schooler needs to master helps you support her. Ahead of time, ask if she has questions for her teachers.

4. You'll send a good message. Taking time to attend conferences shows your tween that school is important to you. *Tip:* Share teachers' nice comments with her. ("Mr. Walker said you make excellent points during class discussions.")

Parent to Parent: A STEM-powered race

My son Tony loves STEM club, and he asked if we could do STEM challenges at home. So we decided we'd hold a family competition to engineer the best balloon-powered car.

Tony used a paper cup for the body of his car, chopsticks for the axles, and wagon-wheel pasta noodles for the wheels. He poked a hole in the bottom of the cup and threaded an uninflated balloon through the hole. Then, he blew it up and let go—the car whizzed across the room as the air left the balloon.

I made my car out of an empty cream cheese tub, knitting needles, and thread spools. It didn't go as far as any of my kids' cars—but Tony helped me redesign it so it would go a lot farther.

Next, we're going to see who can build the biggest house of cards that stands on its own.

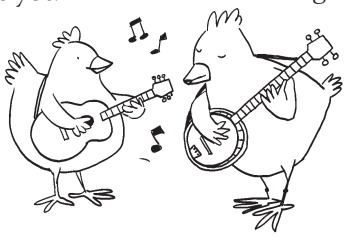
Q&A: Raise a lifelong learner

Q *My daughter told me I'm lucky that I don't have to do schoolwork or take tests anymore. How can I help her understand that learning is lifelong?*

A Knowing that she'll keep learning throughout life can motivate your daughter to do better in school.

Share with her what you learn each day. You might mention a new cash register system you're being trained on at work, an article you read about the Mars rover, or a podcast on food trends that you listened to in the car. Show enthusiasm for learning new things—it may rub off on your child!

Then, talk about how she'll keep learning outside of class. If she wants to get a puppy, she'll need to research training tips. Or if she loves playing guitar, maybe she'll teach herself to play other instruments like the ukulele and the banjo.



OUR PURPOSE

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

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