Seneca Valley School District

December 2020

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

The power of zero

Help your child understand the importance of turning in every assignment. Have her add up several of her grades (97 + 89 + 93 = 279) and divide by the number of grades to get her average (279 ÷ 3 = 93). Then, ask her to change the last grade to zero and average again—suddenly, the 93 becomes a 62.

Great advice!

Want to raise the odds that your middle schooler will actually follow your advice? Get his input. Instead of saying, "Setting your alarm 10 minutes earlier will keep you from scrambling to get ready every morning," try, "I've been running late in the mornings, too. What ideas do you think could help us?"

DID YOU KNOW? Just a few minutes of physical activity can immediately improve your middle grader's concentration. Remind her to use her distance-learning or study breaks to move around. She could write quick ideas on slips of paper ("Dance to a song," "Do 5 jumping jacks") and pick one to do between classes or subjects.

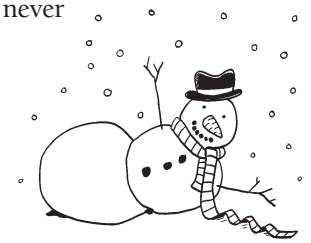
Worth quoting

"The mind that opens to a new idea never returns to its original size."
Albert Einstein

Just for fun

Q: What falls in winter but never gets hurt?

A: Snow!



Kindness makes a difference

Clue your middle schooler in on this formula for a happier, more successful life: When he is kind and sees kindness in others, he will feel better about himself and the world around him—and other people will view him more favorably, too. Try these ideas.

Be a detective

Challenge your tween to spot kind acts throughout the day and jot them down in a pocket notebook. He might notice someone stepping aside to let him pass on the sidewalk, for instance. How many kindnesses can he find in one day? Make it a point to call out his kind acts, too: "It was kind of you to offer your seat on the bus to that woman holding her baby."

Watch for opportunities

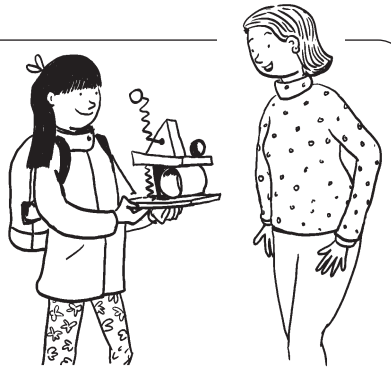
Suggest that your middle grader think of safe ways to assist people who are struggling or lonely. Maybe he'll make cards or bookmarks for nursing home residents or have a virtual game night with younger cousins who miss seeing their friends.

Play bingo

Your child can create a bingo card to fill with kind acts (donate clothes you've outgrown, let someone go ahead of you in line, do a chore for a sibling). Make a copy for each family member, and cross off acts you complete. Who will get bingo (five in a row) first? Can everyone finish their cards?

Look on the bright side

Having a good attitude toward school can help your tween learn more. Here's how to nurture positive thinking.



■ **Use upbeat language.** Encourage your child to reframe negative remarks. "We get too much homework in math" becomes "All this practice means I'll remember the formulas." Let her hear you talk up school, too. ("Your art teacher gives really interesting assignments!")

■ **Act as a cheerleader.** Show your tween that you believe in her and expect her to do well. Regularly ask to see or hear work she's proud of, such as a poem she wrote in English or a solo she's working on in chorus.

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Plan ahead for better essays

Like going for a hike, writing an essay requires advance planning. In both situations, your tween needs to know where she's headed and how she'll get there. Share these steps to map out a well-written paper.

1. Choose a destination. Suggest that your child list at least three ideas for her essay topic. Say she's asked to write a personal narrative about an obstacle she overcame. Possibilities might include moving to a new town or recovering from a soccer injury. Then she can pick the one she believes will make the most compelling narrative.

2. Make a map. Your middle grader could draw a big soccer ball in the middle of her paper and write her essay title inside ("Getting Back in the Game"). Then, she can surround it with medium-sized balls for subtopics (her injury, physical therapy) and add small balls with supporting details (recovery milestones, teammates' support). Now she can refer to her map as she writes her essay.

Q&A Screen addiction?

Q *I think my son is addicted to screens. He only wants to play video games in his free time and can't seem to go a minute without checking his phone. What should I do?*

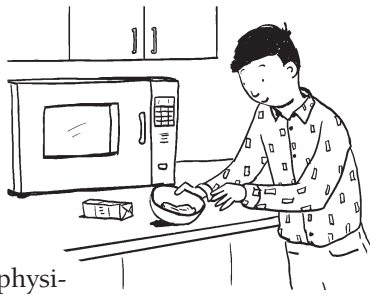
A While "screen addiction" isn't an official diagnosis, excessive screen use can be connected to anxiety and depression.

Ask yourself whether your child's usage is so all-consuming that it's having a negative effect on him. Consult his pediatrician if you notice any of these red flags:

- He can't control his screen use or lies about it.
- He has lost interest in other activities.
- His screen time interferes with sleep, school, or relationships.
- Screens are his main source of happiness or comfort.

You can help your son cut back by setting limits for the whole family. That way, he's not watching others play on their phones when he can't use his. Finally, encourage him to fill downtime with screen-free activities he enjoys, perhaps running or drawing.

Kitchen chemistry



Holiday baking is a science—literally! Talk about these physical and chemical reactions while making treats with your middle grader.

What happens when you melt butter?

When energy (heat) is added to a solid, like butter, it causes the atoms to speed up—and the butter becomes a liquid. This is an example of a physical reaction. Together, observe what happens when melted butter cools again. It turns back into a solid because the atoms slow down.

What makes cakes rise?

Have your tween mix 1 tsp. baking soda with 1 tbsp. vinegar. He'll see bubbles, signaling a chemical reaction. In a cake recipe, baking soda reacts with acidic ingredients like vinegar, lemon juice, or buttermilk to release carbon dioxide, and the expanding gases make the cake rise.

Parent to Parent Peer pressure: Trust your instincts

My daughter Rosa went to the mall with friends when they were supposed to be at the park. Because she broke our pandemic-safety rule about no indoor socializing, I told her she had to stay home for two weeks.

When I asked Rosa why she went somewhere she wasn't supposed to, she said, "Because everyone else did." Then she admitted to feeling nervous and guilty inside the mall.

I encouraged her to think of feelings like those as "alarms"—when an alarm goes off, that's a sign to "wake up" and think for herself.

Next, we brainstormed responses she could have used like "My parents would ground me" or "My family is careful about indoor spaces."

My daughter wasn't happy to be grounded—but next time she's pressured to do something that sets off alarm bells, I hope she'll make a better choice.

OUR PURPOSE

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

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