Seneca Valley School District

September 2020

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Family mood lifter

Want to learn about your tween's day while putting a smile on everyone's face? During dinner, pose upbeat questions like "What made you happy today?" or "What are you looking forward to this week?" *Idea:* Ask your child to come up with tomorrow's questions.

Clean = safer and healthier

Remind your middle schooler that she has a key role to play in keeping her environment (and herself) as clean as possible. That means washing her hands frequently—especially now. She should also toss trash in bins and wipe up anything she spills so she doesn't make extra work for busy parents or school custodians.

Rice and ratios

The kitchen is a great place for your tween to brush up on ratios and percentages. For example, while cooking rice, ask him what the ratio is of dry rice to liquid (1:2, or 1 cup uncooked rice to 2 cups water). Or suggest that he use percentages to mix up his perfect batch of trail mix. Maybe he'll use 50 percent nuts, 30 percent dried fruit, 10 percent seeds, and 10 percent chocolate chips.

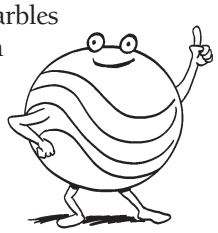
Worth quoting

"No matter what people tell you, words and ideas can change the world." *Robin Williams*

Just for fun

Q: How many marbles can you put in an empty jar?

A: One. After that, the jar isn't empty anymore.



Back-to-school questions, answered

The start of a new school year is an exciting time. But the disruptions this year may have left you wondering how to help your tween do her best. Here are answers to questions from parents like you.

Q: My tween is struggling to get back into learning mode this school year. What can I do?

A: Children—and adults—face many distractions in the era of COVID-19. Help your child get on track by showing enthusiasm for what he is learning, whether it's in school or online. You might watch a movie that's set in an era he's studying in history or ask him to explain an engineering project he's working on.

Q: With all the COVID-19 news, my daughter is a little nervous about school. What should I say?

A: Getting the facts may help your child feel better. Ask what, specifically, she's concerned about. If she has a question you can't answer, look it up together. Explain that by following rules—even hard ones for middle graders like social distancing from friends—she reduces her risk of getting sick or spreading germs to you, her grandparents, and others.

Q: My child is concerned that she won't remember what she learned last year. How can I help?

A: Explain to your tween that her classmates are in the same situation. Teachers know that students may need to review last year's work, such as math formulas or Spanish vocabulary, before moving on to new material. If your child doesn't understand something, encourage her to speak up. Her teacher will understand—and provide support.

Q: When my tween does schoolwork online, how do I know he's doing what he's supposed to do?

A: Have your tween close any apps or tabs not related to his work. That will help him stay focused. Also, look over completed online work just as you might look at paper-and-pencil assignments and projects. You may be able to monitor grades online and see whether he has any missing work. And you can always contact teachers if you have questions about your child's progress.

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Organized from the start

In middle school, staying organized is one of the most important steps to success. Help your child stay on top of his schoolwork with these strategies.

Use a planner. Make sure your tween has a planner—and takes advantage of it. He should write in assignment deadlines, study sessions, and test dates. Then he could estimate and enter the time he'll spend on each task. That will help him plan work sessions.

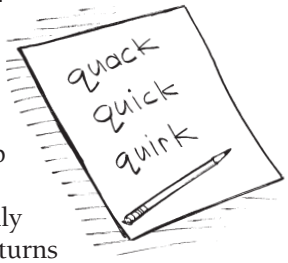
File everything. Setting up and using a filing system means your tween will always find what he needs. He might choose a different-color folder for each class. Or he could have one folder for notes and assignments and another for completed work. *Tip:* Suggest that he turn a shower caddy into a portable school-supply station.

Invest 10 minutes each day. Encourage your child to take five minutes before school to consult his planner and check that he has what he needs for that day. After school, he can spend five minutes filing papers and throwing away anything he doesn't need.

Word games

Word games are not only fun, they help build vocabulary and spelling skills. Here are two to try.

Word morph



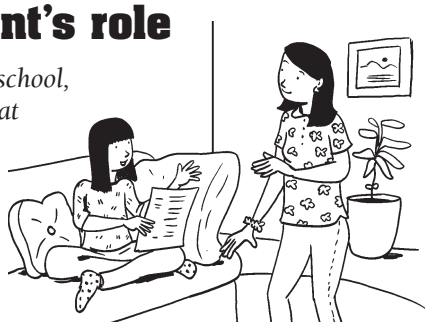
Have your youngster write a five- or six-letter word at the top of a sheet of paper. Let family members take turns making a new word by changing one letter in the last word written. *Example: quack, quick, quirk.* When you can't make any more words, pick a new word and play again.

Word staircase

Each player writes the numbers 4 to 12 down the left side of her paper. One person picks a two-letter combination that often begins words (*en, cr, ph*) and sets a timer for five minutes. Next to each number, write a word with that many letters and beginning with the letters chosen. *Example:* For en, put *envy* beside 4 and *enact* by 5. To win, come up with the most words that no one else used.

Q&A Middle school: A parent's role

Q *When my daughter was in elementary school, I was very active in her school life. Now that she's older, should I still be so involved?*



A Research shows that students of all ages do better when their parents are involved. But that involvement may look a little different now that your daughter is in middle school.

For instance, she's expected to take more responsibility for her learning. So you might offer to brainstorm ideas for a project, but let her choose the topic. Or if she's not sure how to approach an assignment, encourage her to ask her teacher for help rather than having you reach out for her.

On the other hand, some things will look the same. Attend back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences, just as you did when she was in elementary school. Introduce yourself to your child's teachers, and ask how they prefer to be contacted. Finally, visit the school website and sign up to receive emails—then be sure to check the site and your inbox regularly for news.

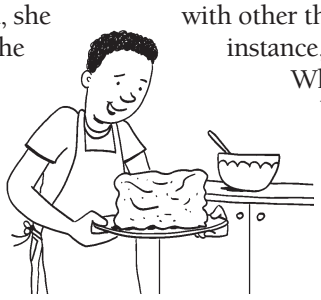
Parent to Parent Helping tweens bounce back

My son Matthew can be really hard on himself. When he was eliminated early during last year's spelling bee, he called himself a "failure" and said he wouldn't enter this year.

His English teacher told Matthew she hoped he'd try again. In fact, she encouraged him to look at the setback as an opportunity to build "resilience" (the ability to bounce back from tough situations).

Following the teacher's lead, I asked Matthew to tell me what he'd learned from the spelling bee. He said he had trouble with the words that came from French. Then he said he guessed he could spend more time studying those words for this year's bee.

To try to build up his resilience, I'm encouraging Matthew to take chances with other things that interest him. For instance, he recently took up baking. When he frosted his first cake before it cooled and the icing melted down the sides, he learned that slipups aren't the end of the world. That messy cake still tasted great!



OUR PURPOSE

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

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