

April 2020

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Where in the world?

Sleuthing skills can help your child explore geography and current events. When a city, state, or country comes up in the news, challenge him to dig for little-known facts about it in books or online. He might be fascinated to find, for instance, that Minnesota's Mall of America is the size of 78 football fields.

### Digital moods

Tweens may not be aware of how electronic devices affect their moods. Encourage your middle grader to notice how she feels when she's online. For instance, a virtual pottery-making app might be relaxing. But a drama-filled group chat could stress her out. Suggest that she stick to activities that make her feel good—online and in real life.

### DID YOU KNOW?

April 22 is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day.

Your family can celebrate by adopting new planet-friendly habits. You could pack snacks in reusable containers and take regular silverware rather than plastic. Or save gas by having your tween walk or bike to school or friends' houses if possible.

### Worth quoting

"If there is a book you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, you must be the one to write it." *Toni Morrison*

### Just for fun

**Q:** How do you get a squirrel to like you?

**A:** Act like a nut!



## Nonfiction reading: The real deal

What can your tween learn from nonfiction?

- A. Information to use in school
- B. How to reach personal goals
- C. Ways to handle tough situations
- D. All of the above

The answer? D! Here's how your child can take advantage of what nonfiction has to offer.

### Explore school subjects

Suggest that your middle grader check out nonfiction library books related to topics she studies in school. She might find a travel guide to a place she's learning about in history or a book of fun chemistry experiments to try at home. Reading these books will put facts in context and deepen her understanding of the topics.

### Learn new skills

Maybe your tween dreams of becoming a singer or wants to learn how to quilt. Visit the library, and let her find how-to books that will help. She could discover vocal exercises to improve her range or step-by-step quilting instructions with photos.



### Gain perspective

A friendship dilemma, a divorce, the loss of a pet ... no matter what your child goes through, there's likely a book that can make a difference. Search the library database together, or ask a librarian for recommendations. Your child might read a self-help book for tweens or a biography of a famous person who faced a similar situation.

*Bonus:* Reading nonfiction will give your tween plenty of new things to talk about during conversations. 👍

## Respect on-the-go

Being respectful in public teaches your child to interact with people in all parts of his life. Point out these ways to show respect:

- When a server, cashier, or barber speaks to your middle grader, he should make eye contact and listen. Remind him to politely answer questions, such as whether he'd like water, rather than shrugging or saying, "I don't care."
- Encourage your tween to use mobile phones respectfully. If he must take a call in public, have him keep it quiet and quick, stepping outside if possible. Set an example by putting away your phone when you're out together. 👍



# Problem-solving strategies

When your child faces a problem, is his first instinct to get upset—or to search for solutions? Give him tools to handle challenging situations with these three ideas.

## 1. Write a problem statement.

Suggest that your tween describe the problem he's having, who it affects, and the benefits of solving it. ("I'm sometimes late to swim practice. This affects me,



my coach, and my teammates. By being on time, I won't get in trouble or let people down.") The written statement will give him something specific to focus on as he considers solutions.

## 2. Use a sounding board.

Discussing ideas with others may spark ideas your middle grader wouldn't think of alone. Friends or trusted adults might point out pros and cons of alternatives based on how they've solved similar problems.

## 3. Sleep on it.

While your tween sleeps, his brain is busy organizing information. When he wakes up, he may be surprised that the answer is much clearer. If he's struggling to find a solution and the situation can wait, encourage him to go back to it a day or two later. 👍

## Q & A Dangers of vaping

**Q** A couple of my friends recently found their kids vaping. How can I keep my daughter from trying e-cigarettes?

**A** Vaping has been on an alarming upswing among young people. Start by asking your tween what she has heard about vaping. Has anyone she knows tried it?

Then, tell your child that buying or using a vaping device is dangerous, as well as illegal for anyone under 21. Also, explain that e-cigarettes get young people hooked on nicotine. In fact, kids who try e-cigarettes are four times more likely to end up trying regular cigarettes.



Finally, keep an eye out for signs that your tween may be vaping. Devices often look like pens or flash drives, and they can be packaged to resemble snacks, candy, or juice boxes. Also, kids may carry them concealed in specially designed backpacks, hoodies, or phone cases. 👍

## OUR PURPOSE

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

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## Parent to Parent

### Stay focused in spring

My son Sebastian has trouble doing schoolwork on nice days. I sometimes struggle to concentrate at work when I'd rather be outside, too, so I thought planning ways to enjoy the sunshine might help us both stay focused.

During the week, Sebastian does homework on the patio or at a picnic table in the park. For my part, I've held a few "walking meetings" with colleagues. We talk through projects while getting exercise outdoors.

Also, my son and I try to go outside more on the weekends. Sebastian and his friends played badminton in the backyard last Sunday. Then, he and I sat outside together—he worked on his engineering project while I caught up on work.

It's surprising the difference a little fresh air can make. We don't feel like we're missing out on nice weather, so we're able to buckle down and get our work done. 👍



## Brush up on spelling

Wordplay makes your tween a better speller, and it's fun! Have her grab a word list from class or a dictionary and try these activities.

**Mix and match.** Choose 10 long words to break into syllables. Write each syllable on a separate index card, and mix up all the cards. How many words can you create using syllables from different words? For instance, combine parts of *re-con-sti-tute* and *de-ac-ti-vate* to make

*re-ac-ti-vate*. Then, put the cards back together to spell the original words.

**Crack the code.** Assign a number to each letter of the alphabet (A = 1, B = 2, and so on, all the way to Z = 26). Have each person secretly write a word in "code," swapping numbers for letters. What does 19-15-22-5-18-5-9-7-14 spell? (Answer: *sovereign*.) Trade papers, and decode each other's words. **Bonus:** Can your child read the cat's message in the illustration to the left? 👍

