

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops

### Quiet time

To improve your middle grader's concentration, try to cut down on distractions during homework time. For example, turn the television off—even if your child is not the one watching. Ask younger siblings to do quiet activities, such as coloring. A calm home will help your youngster stay focused.

### Say thank you

Have your child thank teachers with a note describing a way they helped her (spent extra time explaining a project). Suggest that she deliver the note in person, with a smile and a sincere "Thank you." Teachers will appreciate the gesture, and your middle grader will learn a lesson in gratitude.

### Neat habits

Encourage children to keep the house neat by posting a simple list of "If" household rules. Together, brainstorm ideas. *Examples:* "If you open it, close it" (drawer). "If you take it out, put it away" (milk). This practical approach will teach your youngsters good habits for a lifetime.

### Worth quoting

"You learn something every day if you pay attention." *Ray LeBlond*

### Just for fun



**Jimmy (on phone):**  
My son is sick and won't be able to come to school today.

**School secretary:**  
Who is this?

**Jimmy:** This is my father speaking!

## Smarter summers

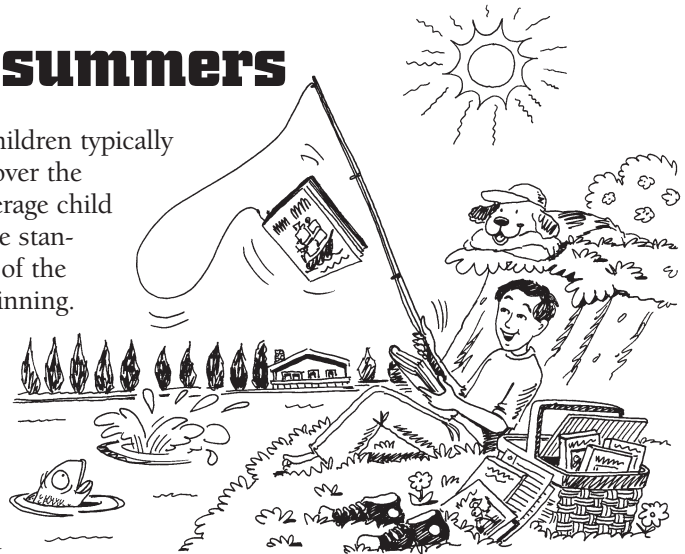
Did you know that children typically lose some school skills over the summer? In fact, the average child scores lower on the same standardized test at the end of the summer than at the beginning. Help keep your middle grader's skills strong with these ideas.

### Read, read, read

Set up a family reading program. You can keep a log of books read and finish the summer with a party. Or find a library, bookstore, or online reading program for your child to join. Reading just four to five books over the summer can keep skills from slipping.

### Stick with math

Find ways to put math into your middle grader's day. Have him figure the cost of summer activities (park admission for four people, swimming lessons for three weeks). When clothes shopping, let him tell you how much



you'll save with a 20 percent discount. By using math all summer, he'll hit the ground running in the fall.

### Write it down

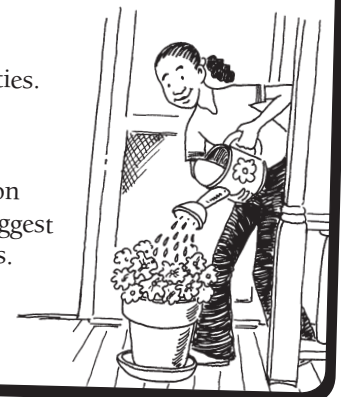
Give your child reasons to write. Does he want to join the swim team? Ask him to write you a letter explaining why. Has it been awhile since he's been in touch with the neighbor who moved away? Encourage him to dash off a letter. Is he a poetry lover? Suggest that he write a poem a week. Writing regularly will keep your youngster's vocabulary growing and his grammar skills intact. 👍

## Getting to work

The middle years are a great time to begin gaining work experience. Help your child choose a rewarding summer job—one that will build responsibility and put a few dollars in her pocket.

● **Camp counselor.** Have your youngster check local nursery schools or community centers for opportunities. She'll have fun playing with small children and learn valuable lessons about caring for others.

● **Start a business.** Your child can practice motivation and self-discipline by providing services to others. Suggest that she create a flyer and give it to family and friends. *Ideas:* walking dogs, feeding pets, mowing lawns, watering flowers, and collecting newspapers and mail for neighbors who are on vacation. 👍



# Stay connected

The longer days of summer can bring extra chances to bond with your middle grader. Try these suggestions.

**What's next?** Each evening, have your child decide on something she will do the next day. *Examples:* "practice my jumpshot" or "work on my scrapbook." Asking about her choice will give you an easy way to start a conversation. You'll also stay in touch with her interests and be able to choose family activities she'll like.

**Hang out here.** Make your family room or basement kid-friendly. You can stock a shelf with board games, puzzles, and CDs so there is always something to do. Try putting throw



pillows on the floor or blankets on the couch so kids can lounge comfortably. Having your child's friends in your house will help you get to know them—and your own child—better.

**Show you care.** Chat with your middle grader throughout the day. Respond warmly when she calls you at work, and thank

her for phoning. This shows you like hearing from her and care about what she's doing. Going places together on weekends (movie, ice cream shop) will show her that you enjoy her company, too. 👍



## Q & A Video game limits

**Q** My middle grader spends way too much time playing video games. How can I set limits?

**A** You might start by insisting that all video games be played in the living room. That way you'll have a better idea of how much time your child spends playing games.

Also, talk with your middle grader. Let her know if you think gaming is keeping her from playing outside or doing homework. Listen to her suggestions. Then, decide on rules for time limits and the types of games she may play.

Finally, encourage your daughter to develop other interests. Perhaps she could join a club,

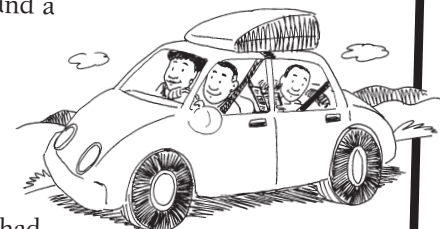
try out for a team, or volunteer at an animal shelter. After all, if she gets involved in more activities, she will have less time to play video games. 👍

## Parent to Parent Travel research

When we planned our last camping trip, I decided to include our son Peter in the process. I told him he could be our "tour guide." So Peter called the campground and asked for brochures about the region. He printed photos, maps, and articles from the Internet. At the library he found a travel guide with interesting places to visit.

During our drive, we played a geography game. Peter would give us a name, and we'd have to guess if it was a mountain, town, or river. Then he'd fill us in on the details. He had pages of information to keep us busy!

Needless to say, our trip was a success. We had a great time camping, and I think Peter enjoyed the research as much as the nightly marshmallow roasts. 👍



## Home alone

Middle graders like to think of themselves as grown up, but they still need a parent's guidance to stay safe if they are home alone. Consider these strategies:

☑ Have your child practice answering the phone so the caller does not know he is home alone. For example, he can say, "My mother can't come to the phone now. May I take a message?"

☑ Set clear rules, such as "Don't open the door for anyone."

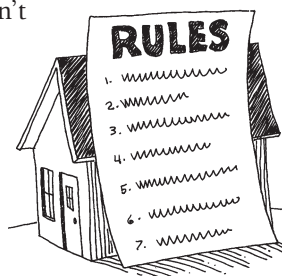
☑ Create a routine for when your middle grader arrives home from school or activities. *Examples:* lock the door, call to check in.

☑ Let him know what you expect him to do around the house (put dishes in sink, feed the dog).

☑ Give guidelines on computer use and television watching.

☑ Discuss possible emergencies and make plans for each (fire escape route, first-aid kit).

☑ Leave telephone numbers of one or two neighbors your child can call if he needs help. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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