

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Starting over

When you and your child have a disagreement, a friendly greeting the next day can help erase bad feelings. Try sending her off to school with a hug or a warm wish ("Good luck with your speech!"). Chances are, you'll both feel better all day.

### Ready, set, study

Encourage your middle grader to choose a time to start and stop his studies each day. Students who plan homework time with a beginning and an end (say, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.) often do a better job staying on task. Your child will accomplish more and learn to pace himself.

### Waiting wisely

Learning to wait for what you want is part of growing up. One way you can help your middle schooler is to teach her to distract herself. For example, if she wants to grab a snack just before dinner, suggest that she concentrate on something else, like reading a magazine.

### Worth quoting

"I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving."  
*Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What do porcupines say after they shake hands?

**A:** "Ouch!"



## Taking the reins

Your middle grader is blossoming into the adult she'll one day become. By taking charge of more parts of her life, she'll gain confidence and learn to stand on her own. Here are three areas where she can take more responsibility.

### 1. Communicate with teachers

Encourage your child to check in with teachers from time to time to see how she's doing in each class. She can ask the teacher in advance for a couple minutes of her time or stop in before or after school. The teacher may have suggestions for ways she can challenge herself (join the science club) or things she can do to be more involved in class (take part in classroom discussions).

### 2. Set goals

Your child has the exciting responsibility of deciding what she wants to achieve. From making the lacrosse team to starting her own business, she is in charge of finding out what she needs to do to meet her goal. For example, she can ask the



lacrosse coach when tryouts are and make time to practice. Or she can take pet-care classes and create flyers to advertise her pet-sitting service.

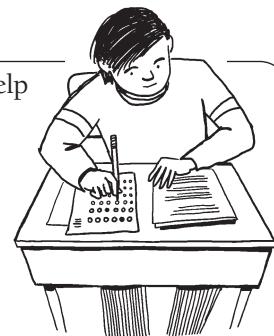
### 3. Handle friendships

Say your middle grader has been invited to two different friends' homes the same night or has a friend who has been "annoying" her lately. Rather than telling your child what she should do, ask questions to guide her so she can find her own solutions. *Examples:* "What are your options?" "Why do you think she's acting that way?" 🍊

## Standardized tests? No sweat!

For many students, spring brings standardized tests. Help your child prepare with these suggestions:

- Participate actively during review sessions, and take practice tests. Your middle grader will find out what subjects will be covered and practice answering different types of questions (short answer, essay).
- Put the test in perspective. It's a chance for your child to show what he has learned and how well the school is doing. Explain that you want him to do his best, but it's only one piece of his performance.
- Read all instructions before starting. He should ask about anything he doesn't understand so he'll know exactly what to do.
- Use test-taking strategies. *Example:* solving multiple-choice math problems before looking at the possible answers. 🍊



# Secrets of strong writing

When putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard), following a few basic rules of good writing can make your middle grader's work clear, concise, and accurate. Share these guidelines.

**Be clear.** The point of writing is for readers to understand what the author is trying to say. When your child can choose between words with similar definitions ("brighten" vs. "irradiate"), encourage him to use the most specific one.

The shorter ones should get to the point more quickly.

**Be accurate.** Your child needs to be sure his facts are correct. Encourage him to reread his writing and pick out details that he should confirm, such as statistics, quotes, or proper names. 👍

*Tip:* Suggest that he check a thesaurus and dictionary for options and meanings.

**Be concise.** Effective writing uses fewer words rather than more.

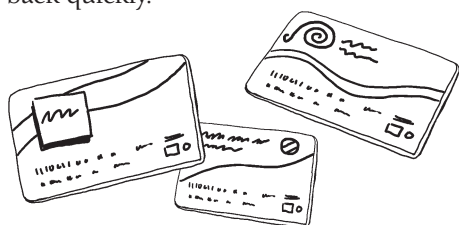
For practice, challenge your middle grader to shorten long sentences you make up or that he finds in newspapers or books. Have him read them aloud so he can hear the difference.



## Q & A Paying for credit

**Q** When I recently told my son I couldn't afford to buy him something, he suggested that I use a credit card. How can I teach him that credit isn't "free" money?

**A** Credit cards can seem like unlimited cash to children. Help your son understand how credit really works. Explain that, although it's a convenient way to pay for something, it's a loan you must repay—often with an extra amount (interest). Point out that you shouldn't charge more than you can afford to pay back quickly.



You might also give your son a chance to practice using credit. When he wants something within reason (say, a used video game), offer to loan him the money at 10 percent interest. If he borrows \$15, for example, he'll pay back \$16.50—and he'll learn that credit comes with a cost. 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

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

Resources for Educators,  
a division of Aspen Publishers, Inc.  
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630  
540-636-4280 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com  
www.rfeonline.com  
ISSN 1540-5540

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## Active fun

Being together and being healthy can go hand in hand. Stay connected and keep moving with these ideas for family fun:

- "Walk" across America. Post a map of the United States on the wall or refrigerator. Choose a route for your family to "walk" (North to South, East to West, for example). Every time you walk (in your neighborhood, on a nature trail, around a track), color in a state. When you've colored all the states, celebrate with a trip to a bowling alley or skating rink. Then, pick another route to walk.
- Combine golf and baseball. Lay out four hula hoops for bases, and have each player mark a softball or small plastic ball with her initials. Take turns standing in the home circle, tossing a ball in the air, and trying to hit it with a bat into the first-base circle. If a player makes it, on her next turn she tries to hit from first base to second base, and so on, until she reaches home. If she misses, she tries to hit it from where it landed to the next base. The player who reaches home with the fewest hits wins. 👍



## Parent to Parent Dropout warning signs

My daughter Theresa was failing math and English and misbehaving at school. I called a friend whose son had dropped out in junior year. She said that looking back, she missed some early warning signs and wishes she had stepped in sooner.

So I made an appointment with the school counselor, and he asked me to bring Theresa along. He started by telling my daughter that he felt she wasn't doing her best. She said she knew she had messed up, but she just felt overwhelmed.

He explained that the school would work with her to help her get back on track—but she had to do her part.

With Theresa's teachers, we developed a plan for her to turn in missing work and get after-school tutoring. The counselor also assigned a peer mentor for her to touch base with daily.

It hasn't been easy, but Theresa is slowly turning things around. Her behavior has gotten better and her grades are improving. 👍

