

February 2012

Middle Years

Working together for school success



Short Stops

Games galore

Board games are entertaining *and* educational.

Simply having them lying around can make your middle schooler more likely to play. Leave chess, Monopoly, Clue, or Scrabble wherever family members tend to gather (living room, kitchen). Then, when you have free time, suggest that you play a game together.

After-school greetings

If you're not home when your child returns from school, you can still greet her with a cheerful "hello." Leave a note on the counter or a voice mail on her phone. ("Thinking of you. I'll be home around 5 p.m. We're having tacos for dinner!")

Volunteering from home

Too busy during the day to help out at your youngster's school? Ask in the school office about ways to volunteer outside the building (email parents about events at the school, do fund-raising paperwork). Let your child see you working on these projects—he'll know that you care about his school.

Worth quoting

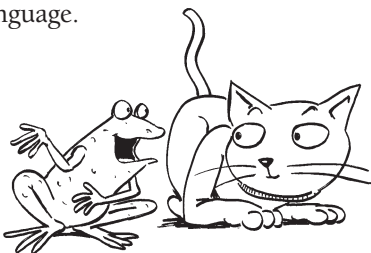
"Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference."

Winston Churchill

Just for fun

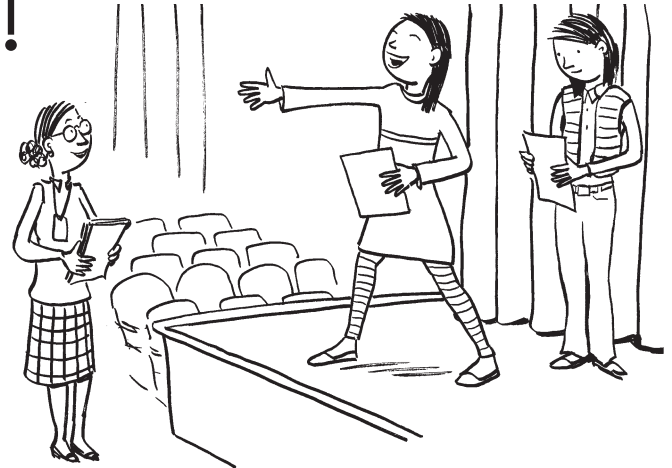
Q: Why did the frog say "meow"?

A: Because he was learning a foreign language.



I like me!

Middle schoolers who feel good about themselves have an advantage during the tween years. They're less dependent on impressing others, and they tend to face challenges with confidence. Here are some ways to build self-esteem in your child.



Be realistic. If your youngster is like many middle graders, her view of herself (outgoing or shy, artsy or athletic) is based on where she fits in among her peers. But instead of comparing herself to others, urge her to recognize her strengths and pursue them. If she has a knack for acting, for instance, suggest that she take drama classes, try out for school plays, or attend community productions.

Choose friends wisely. Encourage your child to spend time with people who build her up and to avoid those who put her down or talk behind her back. She might invite good friends home more often and stay away from

a lunch table full of classmates who are catty. *Tip:* She should also be a friend to herself. For example, if she misses shots in a basketball game, she can think about what she'd say to a friend in that situation. ("You were great on defense!")

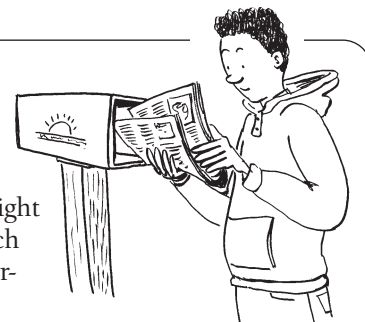
Help others. Making a difference in another person's life can boost your middle grader's self-confidence. She will take pride in being a leader and a role model. Suggest that she tutor younger students at school or volunteer with children's programs at a community center or place of worship. Or she could ask her school counselor about peer mentoring programs. 👍

In the know

From politics and business to health and entertainment, there's always something interesting going on in the world. Motivate your child to stay informed about current events with these ideas.

1. Start a habit. Stay up to date as a family. You might listen to morning news on the way to school, watch the evening news on TV after dinner, or email interesting articles to each other on a regular basis.

2. Make it relevant. Talk about how articles relate to your middle grader's life. For example, a new state law might determine when he can get a driver's license, while school lunch legislation could affect what he eats in the cafeteria. 👍



Bringing science home

Science doesn't have to take place in a lab. In fact, your middle grader can use science skills to solve household problems. Suggest these experiments.

Recommend a product. Next time your child comes home with grass stains on his pants, give him two brands of a stain remover. Ask him to try both and compare the results. For a controlled experiment, he needs to use an equal amount of each product—one stain remover on one pant leg and one on the other—following the directions on the bottles. Which one works better?



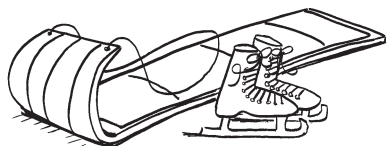
Conserve energy. Do family members leave electronics plugged in? Your youngster can help you save energy by only plugging in devices (laptop, iPod, phone) when they need to be charged. Have him let the items' batteries die completely and then fully charge them. He can write down how long it takes to charge each one, let the batteries die again, and write down how long each one lasted. Scientists use repeated trials for accuracy, so he should do this three times per device. Using the data, he can calculate the average life of each battery and draw a conclusion. ("My phone battery takes 45 minutes to charge and lasts about 50 hours. I need to plug it in every other day for 45 minutes.")



Family outings

Where does your family like to go during the winter? Here are a few free or low-cost outings to enjoy together.

■ **Stay fit.** Head to a local park and take advantage of hiking trails or sledding hills, or look for indoor activities like bowling and ice-skating. You might also consider taking a family class (martial arts, yoga).



■ **Plan a day trip.** Check out websites or call tourism offices in nearby towns for new ideas. Perhaps you'll discover a pet show at a convention center, a winter festival in a historic district, or a factory that offers behind-the-scenes tours.

■ **Watch sports.** Attend winter events at a local high school or college. Try gymnastics meets, basketball games, or wrestling matches.

Q & A Still creative

Q My daughter used to love arts and crafts, but she seems to have lost interest. How can I encourage creativity at this age?

A Creativity helps children express feelings and improves thinking skills. To rekindle your daughter's creative side, try suggesting projects that appeal to her age and interests.

For example, your youngster might enjoy making music videos with friends. Let them use a cell phone camera or laptop webcam to record themselves lip-synching to favorite songs. They can design different backgrounds or experiment with special effects on the computer.

If your middle schooler likes to take pictures, she could make a slide show of her favorite photos and set it to music on a laptop or tablet.

Or if cooking is her thing, suggest that she try cupcake decorating. She can use food coloring, toppings, and cake decorating tools to add creative touches to treats—and share them with the family when she's finished.



Parent to Parent Stand up to bullying

My son Lance came home laughing because some classmates shoved a student into a locker. When I asked Lance what he did about it, he looked surprised and said, "Nothing."

I told him what I had read in an article recently: when kids laugh or do nothing, they encourage bullies to keep bullying. Lance said he hadn't thought of it that way. So we talked about how he can respond when kids are picked on. If he feels

like he can help the victim without getting hurt, he should step in and then walk away with the victim to the nearest adult. If he's afraid, he should get an adult immediately.

Although this incident was unfortunate, I'm glad the topic came up. The next time Lance sees bullying, I hope he'll think twice. And if he has the courage to speak up, maybe he'll inspire other kids to show bullies that their behavior isn't acceptable.



OUR PURPOSE

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

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