

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Think on your feet

Improv comedy can provide fun with friends or family and challenge your tween's creativity. Have a group form a circle. One person steps in the middle and starts acting out a scene, such as a monkey swinging in the jungle. Then, the others join in the acting, perhaps throwing the monkey a banana.

In order

Organizing information in a sequence will give your middle schooler practice with critical thinking—and another way to review material when she studies. She might put historical events in order from least to most important, for example. Or she could plot character development in a book from the most life-changing actions to the least.

Driver-in-training

It's still a few years before your child will be behind the wheel of a car, but it's not too early to start "pre-driver's ed." Point out ways that you drive safely and stay calm in stressful situations. If it's raining, you might say, "I'm driving more slowly because the roads are slick."

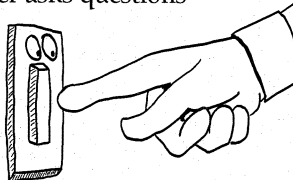
Worth quoting

"There is something delicious about writing the first words of a story. You never quite know where they'll take you." *Beatrix Potter*

Just for fun

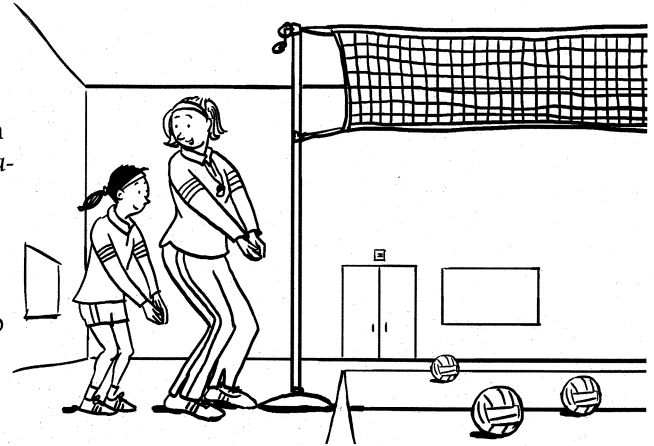
Q: What never asks questions but is often answered?

A: A doorbell.



Motivated from the inside

Danielle joined the swim team because she likes to swim and wants to see what she's capable of. Her motivation comes from within. This *intrinsic motivation* will help her do her best—not only in swimming but also in whatever she puts her mind to. Help your middle grader develop that kind of motivation with these tips.



Choose wisely

Maybe you hoped your child would try out for the math team, but she wants to be on the student council. She'll be more naturally motivated if you allow her to choose what matters to her. Also, giving her a say in how she pursues her interests will spark her enthusiasm. For instance, let her decide whether to run for office or be a committee member.

Challenge yourself

The more your tween sees her skills improve, the more encouraged she will be to push further. Suggest she ask teachers and coaches what she can do to reach the next level. Her volleyball coach might say she should practice

returning serves to become more consistent. Then, she could set a goal for her practice sessions—and aim for more successful returns during games.

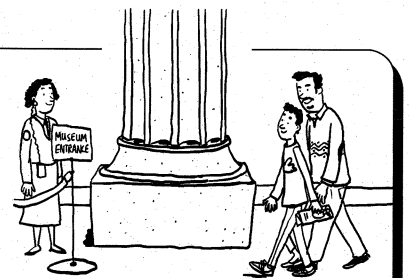
Find a purpose

Have your youngster look for reasons why school subjects or after-school activities are relevant to her life. That will make them more appealing and increase her motivation to tackle them. For instance, she might think about careers that interest her and how she would use the information she's learning. *Example:* A nail salon owner uses math to set prices and order nail polish. 👍

Parents (still) wanted!

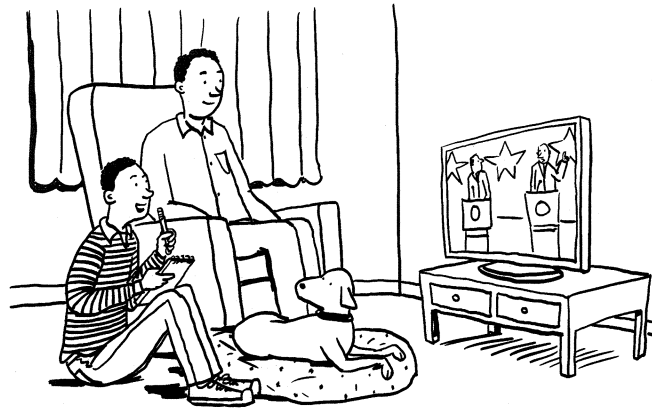
Research shows that tweens want to spend more time with their parents, even though they may act the opposite way. Consider these ideas for enjoying time together:

- Look for activities to do side by side. You might try out new recipes in the kitchen, do Sudoku puzzles, or play chess or checkers.
- Build in daily "solo time"—just you and your tween. Perhaps take a nightly walk together after dinner, or go into his room for a chat at bedtime.
- Make a date. Once a month or so, go to a movie, a museum exhibit, or anything else that appeals to the two of you. 👍



Summing things up

Summarizing is a skill your middle schooler needs when taking notes during class, doing reading assignments, and researching papers. Suggest strategies like these.



Read, then tell. Encourage your youngster to tell you about a biography he read by giving you three main facts. *Tip:* To keep his summary short and to the point, he could jot key words on a sticky note while reading.

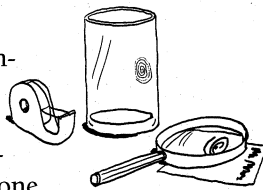
Listen, then repeat. Ask him to repeat the important points when you give him directions (like what to do after school if it's different from his usual routine). That will help him practice listening for crucial details. And it has the added benefit of letting you know he got the message!

Watch, then highlight. Have your child summarize a political debate or sporting event he's watching on television. He can take notes during the broadcast and then pretend to be a news analyst or sportscaster. His "on the air" updates should highlight the most important happenings of the debate or game. 👍



Activity Corner Follow the clues

Does your middle grader enjoy reading mysteries or watching detective shows? With this idea, you can set up an imaginary "whodunit" and let your child use real-world forensic science skills to crack the case.



1. Have each family member press her right thumb to a separate glass. Place one of those glasses at the "crime scene."
2. Lift the fingerprint from that glass by sprinkling on cocoa powder and gently dusting with a brush. Press clear tape to the print, lift, and press onto an index card. Label this, "Evidence."
3. With a pencil, shade in a square of paper for each family member. Have each person press her right thumb on a square. Use tape to lift the prints, press onto separate index cards, and label each card with the person's name.
4. Compare the fingerprints to the one left at the scene. Who is the culprit? 👍



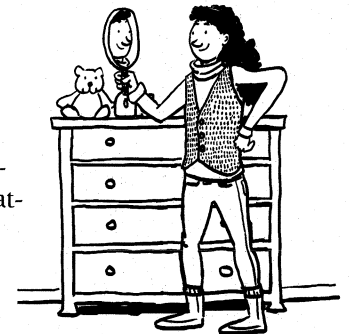
No more self-putdowns

Q My daughter used to be so confident. But lately I keep overhearing her put herself down. What should I do?

A It's normal for kids to become more critical of themselves as they approach the teen years. But there are strategies you can use to keep this from becoming a habit.

First, be sure you're kind to yourself in front of your daughter. Try to avoid making negative comments about your appearance ("I look fat in this") or abilities ("I'm not good with numbers"). Instead, let her overhear confident, self-motivating statements, such as "I'm going to have a great workout" or "I know I can figure out this spreadsheet formula."

Then, ask her to pay attention to how she talks to herself—out loud *and* in her head. Together, you could come up with "code words" to use if you hear a self-putdown. *Examples:* "I don't think so!" or "We need a redo!" 👍



Working with teachers

When my son's Spanish teacher called to say Carl was disrupting class by talking too much, I was not happy. Mrs. Anderson said she had moved Carl's seat and made sure he doesn't sit near his good friends, but she wanted me to be aware of the problem so we could work together.

I thanked her for letting me know and asked how I could help. She suggested that I mention to Carl that we had

spoken. Also, she said if things didn't improve, she would want to meet with both of us.

I told Carl I was disappointed to get the call. And I made sure he knew he was being disrespectful to both his

teacher and his classmates. Carl knows that I'm going to follow up with Mrs. Anderson—and I'm hoping that our teamwork will encourage him to stop interrupting in class. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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