

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Waiting patiently

Does your child expect everything to happen *now*? If a friend doesn't call back immediately or her teacher hasn't graded her project yet, encourage her to come up with possible explanations. Maybe her friend is at a movie or the teacher has 100 assignments to grade. Thinking reasonably can help her be patient.

### History lesson

When you're out with your middle grader, read historic markers together. These roadside plaques tell what happened in a particular spot (a trail was discovered, a famous person was born). Suggest that your child visit your library to learn more about an event. *Tip:* Read markers around the country at [www.historicmarkers.com](http://www.historicmarkers.com).

### After-school snacks

Your youngster can make healthy treats in a flash. Have him top apple slices with low-fat cream cheese and raisins or stuff a whole-wheat pita pocket with hummus and shredded carrots. For an on-the-go snack, he might make trail mix by filling a plastic bag with cashew nuts, pretzels, dried cherries, and cereal rings.

### Worth quoting

"Challenges are what make life interesting; overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."

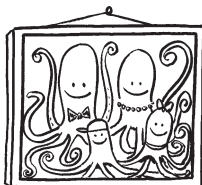
*Joshua J. Marine*

### Just for fun

#### Teacher:

What family does the octopus belong to?

**Student:** No family that I know!



## Plugged in—safely

Whether at home, in the library, or at a friend's house, your child is likely to be online these days. Use these guidelines to be sure he stays safe in cyberspace.



### Social networking

Sites like Facebook and MySpace are becoming more popular with middle graders. If your child has an account, have him add you to his list of friends. (*Note:* He must be 13 to join.) That way, you can see who his online friends are and keep an eye on his postings. Make sure his profile is private, and ask him to mark photos so that only friends (not "friends of friends") can view them.

### Surfing

Does your youngster browse sites about sports, celebrities, or other topics? The seemingly endless amount of information online is appealing to middle graders, but it's not always appropriate. Help your child create a list of safe "favorites," including kid-friendly search engines like [www.quinturakids.com](http://www.quinturakids.com) or <http://kids.yahoo.com>. You can also set

parental controls that limit what your middle grader can view. (For instructions, type "parental controls" into a search engine.)

### Instant messaging

Many middle schoolers love instant messaging—it's fast-paced and lets them talk to multiple pals at once. But "cyberbullies" also use IM, so your child should accept messages only from friends or relatives. If someone harasses him online, he should report it to the IM provider and block the person from his buddy list.

*Note:* If you have a computer at home, keep it where you can supervise your child. Check the sites he's on, and discuss what he's doing online. 👍

## Writing break

Writing for just five minutes a day can build your youngster's skills. Suggest that she:

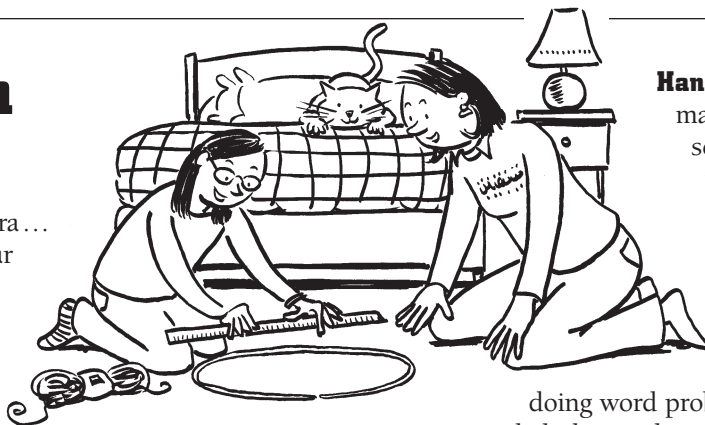
- Jot down song lyrics. Your middle grader may enjoy writing about what she thinks they mean or how they make her feel.
- Start a list of books she plans to read. She might include the title, the author's name, and a short description. When she finishes a book, she can add her opinion.
- Keep track of family news. Your child can record her softball stats or a younger sibling's progress in karate. She might use these reports to start a family newsletter to send to relatives. 👍



## Keys to math success

Basic math, pre-algebra, algebra... no matter what kind of math your middle grader is taking this year, these tips will help her succeed.

**Mental math.** Your child will solve math problems faster when she can do simple calculations in her head. Ask her to help you with everyday math. For instance, she can double a recipe to practice multiplying fractions ( $\frac{3}{4}$  cup  $\times$  2 =  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups). Or she can tally numbers while you shop to see whether you're carrying enough cash to pay the total.



**Hands-on practice.** Using hands-on materials will help your middle schooler visualize—and learn—math concepts. If she's working on geometry problems involving diameter, radius, and circumference, she can form circles with string or yarn and use a ruler to make measurements. If she's

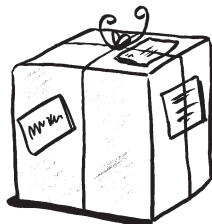
doing word problems, have her draw the story on paper to help her understand what the question is.

**Math terms.** Suggest that your child make a list of math vocabulary words. She can keep it handy at homework time and add to it as she learns new terms. Encourage her to define each word and give examples ("Integer: whole number, positive or negative, including zero. *Examples:* 1, -1, 0, 2, -2"). Writing down the terms will help her remember and understand them. 👍

## Be a volunteer

Your child can help people in your neighborhood or around the world by serving as a volunteer. He'll learn that one person really can make a difference! Share these three ideas to get him started:

**1.** Send a care package to a soldier you know or ask friends and neighbors for a name. Your middle schooler can fill shoe boxes with travel-sized hygiene items and non-perishable snacks. Find suggestions at [www.operationshoobox.com](http://www.operationshoobox.com).



**2.** Participate in a charity walk or run. Your youngster might choose a cause, like cancer or diabetes, that affects someone you know. Encourage him to raise pledge money by babysitting or shoveling side-walks. *Note:* Look for listings of events in the local newspaper.

**3.** Call a local elementary school to volunteer after school or at an evening activity. Your child could help set up for a science fair or play games with families at a math night. 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

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

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## Q & A Time to unwind

**Q** My son likes school, but he seems stressed out from the work. How can I help him cope?

**A** When children are stressed, they may feel they don't have time to relax. Taking time to unwind can relieve your son's stress and make the rest of his day more productive. For instance, he might listen to music before dinner or read at bedtime. Encourage him to spend an afternoon on a hobby, such as woodworking or baseball cards.

Also, be sure to share ways that you handle stress—perhaps by taking walks or chatting with friends. Finally, be alert for signs that the stress is too much for your son. If you notice major changes in his behavior, such as mood swings or difficulty eating or sleeping, call his doctor for advice. 👍



## Parent to Parent Learning a foreign language

When my daughter started Spanish class, she was excited to speak a new language. But Allison's interest faded as the vocabulary list grew. I thought it might help if I tried learning some Spanish words along with her.

When we went grocery shopping, I asked her to help me read Spanish product labels. That way, we both picked up new words, like *arroz* for rice and *jugo* for juice. Then, I suggested that she label

items around the house by writing the Spanish words on sticky notes. She put *la nevera* on our refrigerator and *el espejo* on a mirror.

I'm making a point of using the words she has posted. For instance, when I'm baking I'll ask her to get the eggs from *la nevera*. Allison is excited to be "teaching" me—and I notice that she's doing better on her vocabulary quizzes! 👍

