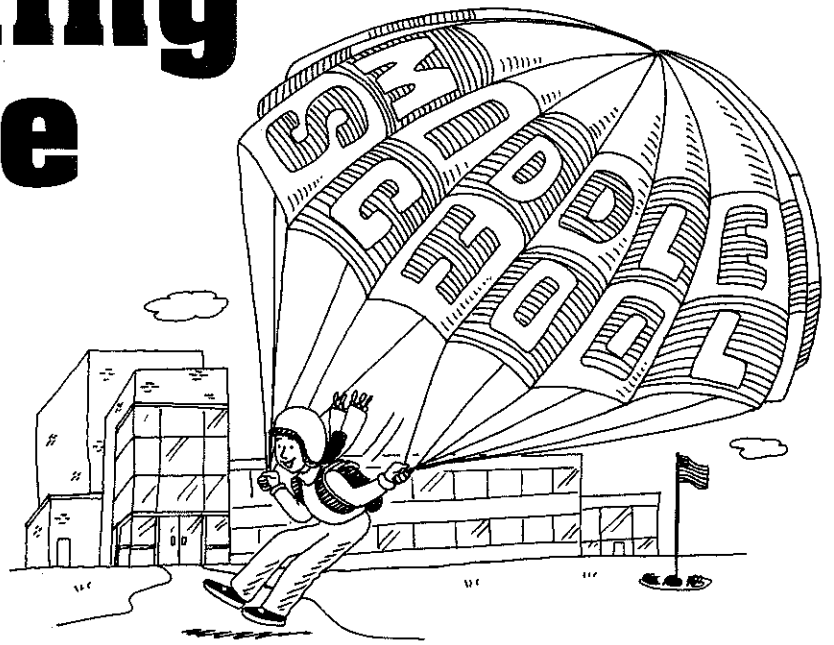


Succeeding in Middle School

The leap to middle school is a big one. But it doesn't have to be one that your child makes alone. With your guidance and the tips below, your youngster can stay organized, manage her time, and learn to study effectively. After all, doing well in middle school forms the basis for success in high school and beyond.



Routines

A new school year always brings new routines. And moving to middle school means even more changes to your youngster's daily habits. Help him get set with these suggestions.



Tame morning madness. Gym uniform, calculator, musical instrument... your child will have more things to remember each day. Suggest that he put everything in one spot (in his room or by the front door) and hang a checklist nearby to glance at before he leaves for school. *Tip:* To save time in the morning, he might eat breakfast in the cafeteria.

Switch classes smoothly. Middle school usually means a bigger building and different classrooms for each subject. To make it to every class on time, your youngster will need a routine. If he's struggling to be punctual, talk about how he can reduce trips to his locker. For example, he can take everything he needs for the first half of the day and then switch at lunchtime to what he needs for the afternoon.

Plan for homework. Encourage your child to use a student planner to keep track of his increased homework load. At the beginning of each class, he can open the planner to that day's page. He should leave it on his desk until he has written down the homework assignment and due date. At the

end of the day, he can scan the page and put everything he needs for homework (books, handouts, notebooks) in his backpack. Then, have him check off each assignment as he completes it.

Organization

Your child will need to be organized to stay on top of all the extras that middle school brings. Try these strategies.

Color-code subjects. Suggest that your middle grader come up with a system to keep track of multiple classes. One idea is to assign a different color to each subject. For instance, she could use a blue folder, notebook, and book cover for history, and green supplies for math.

Get locker ready. A well-organized locker will help your youngster quickly find what she needs. She might use a low-cost locker shelf or a sturdy box turned on its end. Or she could hang a basket on the inside of the door for holding pencils and a calculator.

Choose a homework spot. Work with your child to create a place where she can do homework and keep school supplies. She might study at a desk in her room or at the dining room table. Remind her to let you know when supplies (pencils, pens, highlighters, batteries) are running low instead of waiting until she's completely out.



Succeeding in Middle School

Time management

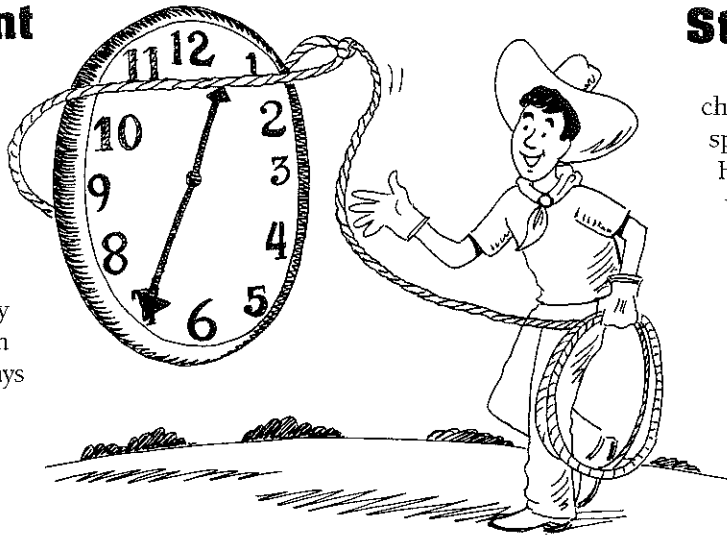
Everyone has the same amount of time—it's how we use it that makes the difference. Share these ideas to help your middle grader set priorities.

Make time for activities.

Middle schools usually offer more after-school activities than elementary schools do. If your child wants to run track or play chess, help him find ways to make time. Suggest that he get a head start on his homework if he has time between his last class and his activity. Also, have him add his activities to his planner. That way, he'll see which days he has more time to work on long-term projects or study.

Avoid distractions. When your child sits down to do homework, he should turn off his cell phone and stay off instant messenger, MySpace, or Facebook. Also, talk to him about polite ways to turn down invitations for times when he has work to do. For example, if friends want to go skating one afternoon, he might ask if they can go another day.

Don't procrastinate. Postponing work on an assignment will make your youngster feel pressed for time and not allow him to do his best work. Show him how to break a big job into smaller chunks, and teach him to stick to a schedule. He can write each task on a separate page of his planner. For example, if he has a book report, he could set aside a certain number of nights for reading the book, creating the draft, writing the final report, and polishing it.



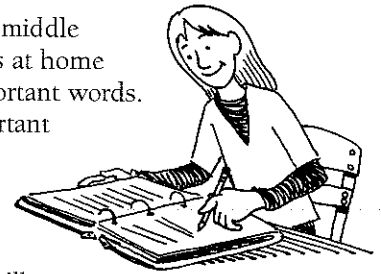
Study skills

In middle school, your child will find that she has to spend more time studying. Here are several tips that will help her.

Take good notes. Let your youngster know that taking good notes in class will make studying much easier. Explain that note taking doesn't mean copying down every word the teacher says. Instead, she should lis-

ten carefully and write down the main points. If she didn't catch something, or if she's not sure she understood correctly, she should ask the teacher.

Write and highlight. Your middle grader can go over her notes at home and underline or circle important words. Suggest that she write important facts and formulas on index cards. Encourage her to answer end-of-chapter questions or to do practice math problems. She'll remember more and be better prepared for tests.

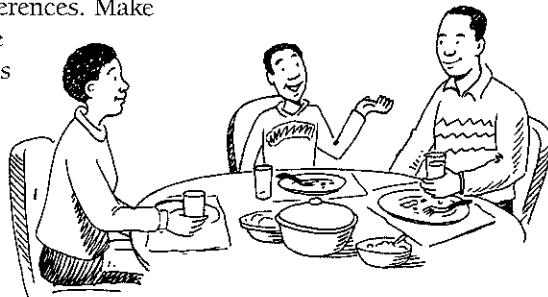


Find study buddies. Studying with friends can motivate your child. Recommend that she find other students in her class who might be easy to work with. They can share ideas, discuss tough concepts, and quiz each other in study sessions at each other's houses or at the library.

Stay involved!

Did you know that it's important to stay involved in your child's education as he gets older? Here are three ways to show him you care about school:

1. Know the teachers. Attend back-to-school nights, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences. Make sure you meet all of your middle schooler's teachers, as well as his guidance counselor. It will be easier to discuss problems if you've established communication from the start.
2. Talk about school. When your youngster gets home,



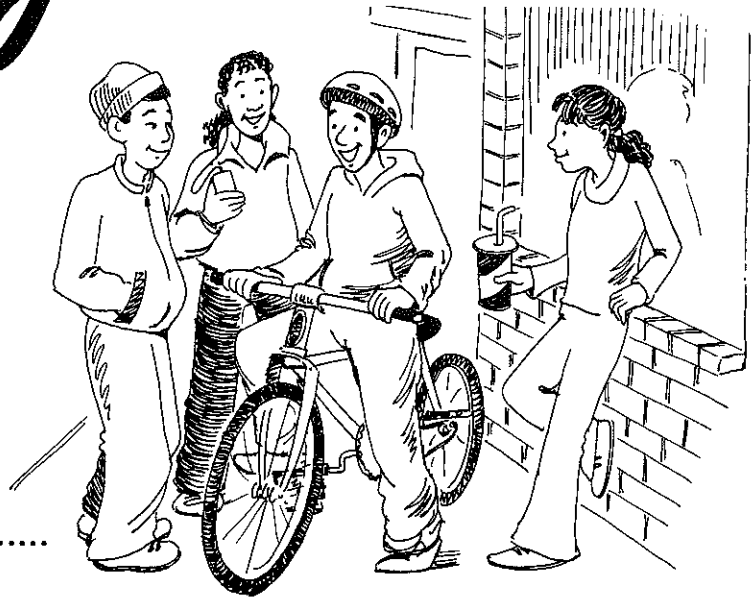
or at dinnertime, ask specific questions that invite discussion. *Examples:* "What did you do in science lab?" "What are you working on in math this week?" You'll hear what your child is doing and let him know that you're interested.

3. Track progress. Look over your youngster's graded tests and marked papers. If your school reports grades electronically, check them regularly. Also, watch for interim grade reports in the mail or in your child's backpack. If you monitor his progress, you'll be able to encourage him to get extra help—or to praise him for a job well done.

Middle Years

Building Social Skills

Shifting friendships, more time spent with peers, and roller-coaster emotions make the middle years exciting and challenging. But life is easier when children know how to be a good friend, resolve conflicts, and deal with feelings. Try these suggestions for helping your youngster develop strong social skills.



FRIENDSHIP

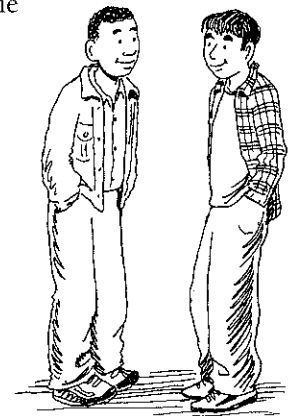
Having friends to spend time with and confide in is an important part of the middle years. Help your child be a good friend with these ideas:

- Friends show they care about each other. Encourage your youngster to take the time to listen to a friend and to ask questions about her—instead of just talking about herself. If a friend has a problem, she should be sympathetic and try to help.
- Three's a crowd—but it doesn't have to be. Talk to your child about how to make everyone feel included when she's hanging out with a group. For instance, she can ask a quieter person her opinion or suggest a game that everyone can play (charades, capture the flag).
- Although rumors and gossip are common at this age, your middle grader can do her part to reduce them. Remind her that talking behind people's backs hurts her, too. A friend may think, "If she talks this way about other people, what does she say about me when I'm not around?" Role-play standing up to a person who is spreading gossip ("I have a hard time believing that... have you talked to her about it?") and then changing the subject ("Are you going to the basketball game this weekend?").

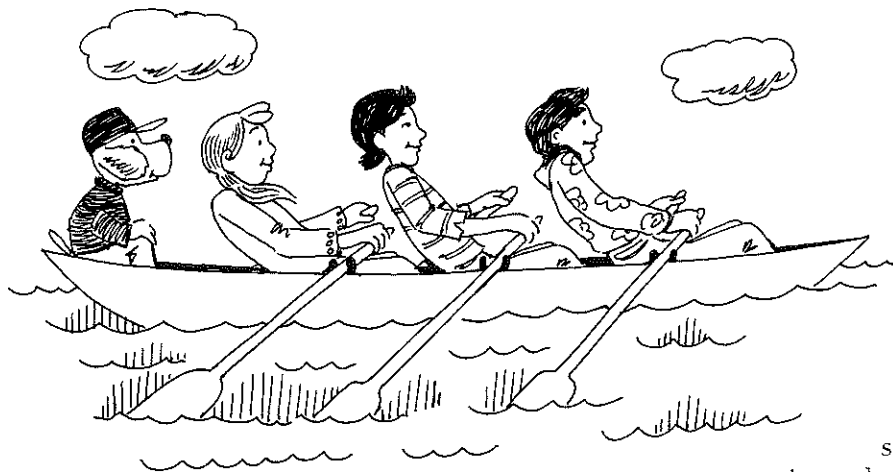
SOCIAL CUES

Does your child know what to say and how to understand body language? Share these tips to help him master the art of conversation:

- If your youngster approaches kids who are in the middle of a conversation, he should wait for a pause before jumping in. Remind him to stay on topic when possible or to use what one person says as a springboard to a new subject ("We go to that beach, too. What do you think of...?").
- Nodding, smiling, and looking you in the eye all show that someone is interested in what you're saying. On the other hand, moving or looking away may signal that a person is ready to stop talking. If your child senses these cues, he might excuse himself politely ("Well, I've got to go. Nice talking to you!").
- Remind your middle grader to be aware of a person's face, posture, and tone of voice when he's talking. If a classmate says, "That's great," but he's rolling his eyes or shrugging his shoulders, he may not mean it the way it sounds.



continued



FEELINGS

Learning to manage emotions helps youngsters maintain relationships. Show your child how with these ideas:

- Your middle schooler may feel left out if a friend stops spending time with him or starts hanging out with a different crowd. Before he assumes the friendship is over, suggest that he try to make plans (“Hey, want to come over after school tomorrow?”). If his friend makes excuses or seems disinterested after a couple of invitations,

it may be time to accept that they’ve grown apart. To help your child talk about his feelings, you might tell him about a friendship of yours that ended. As time goes by, gently encourage him to make new friends.

- Teach your youngster to handle his anger. First, talk about warning signs that you’re about to lose your temper (flushed face, rapid heartbeat).

If your middle grader feels this way during an argument, he should take a deep breath and walk away. Explain that taking a break like this is a

sign of strength, not weakness. He can come back later and work things out when he has a clear head.

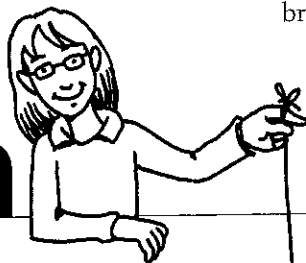


PROBLEM SOLVING

A true test of your middle grader’s social skills comes when a conflict arises. Prepare her for tough spots with these strategies:

- Teach your child to use “I” messages (telling someone how she feels instead of placing blame or name-calling). For example, rather than telling a friend, “You didn’t return my game. You can never borrow anything from me again!” your middle schooler could say, “When you borrow something of mine and don’t return it, I get upset.” Then, they can discuss the problem calmly and find a solution.

- Compromising can end a disagreement. Explain that compromising means that each person gives up something and gains something. Say your child and a friend can’t agree on a movie to watch. They might compromise by choosing another one. Or they could flip a coin to see who gets to decide and agree that the other person gets to choose the next two times.



IT’S A BIG WORLD!

Getting along with people of different backgrounds will help your middle grader in school now and in the workplace later. Try these three strategies:

1. Suggest that your youngster concentrate on what she has in common with others rather than on ways they’re different. She can make an effort to get to know someone by thinking of several things they can talk about. She might mention a popular reality show she enjoys or a book she’s reading.

2. Your middle grader doesn’t need to speak the same language as another child to become friends. They’ll just have to be creative! For instance, she can invite someone to join

a kickball game by miming a kick and nodding her head toward the field. Tell your child to speak in her normal tone while using gestures. A student who is learning English probably understands more words than she speaks.

3. Set an example by showing respect and appreciation for all kinds of people. If you hear your middle schooler or someone else put down a person because of her culture or a disability, make it clear that it’s wrong. Remind your child that being a good friend means accepting people with different traits and abilities and not criticizing them.

Middle Years