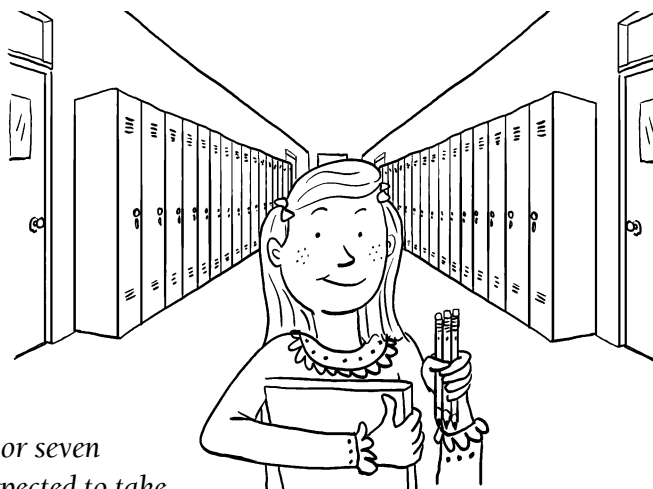


Organized for School Success



Now that your child is in middle school, she may have six or seven desks, classrooms, and teachers—plus a locker! And she's expected to take increasing responsibility for her own learning and success, laying the groundwork for even more responsibility in high school and beyond.

All of that change means organization is more important than ever. Here are ways to help your tween organize her time, study efficiently, and make sure assignments are finished and turned in.

Manage time wisely

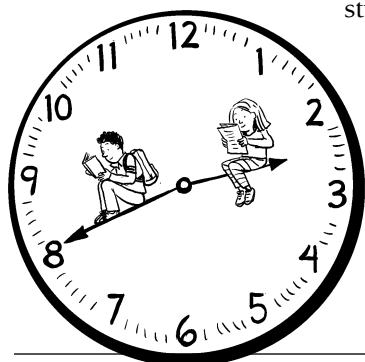
Being a good time manager includes knowing what you *have* to do and what you *want* to do, as well as accurately judging how long each activity will take. Consider these ideas for helping your child learn to manage time well so she can maximize her learning.

Write it down

Encourage your tween to think of her student planner as her sidekick on her journey through middle school. Suggest that she use one color to write required tasks (homework, band practice) and another color for those she'd like to make time for (riding bikes with friends, organizing her photos). Let her know in advance about appointments or family events so she can include those, too. Having all of her commitments written down in one spot will let her see them at a glance so she always knows what's ahead.

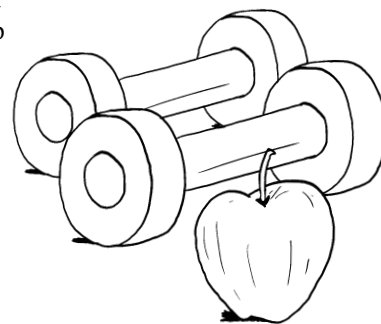
Learn to estimate time

Have your middle grader time himself doing activities like studying or researching. For instance, he may plan to spend 30 minutes on Saturday doing library research for a social studies report, but find out that it actually takes him an hour. By paying attention to his start and stop times, he can estimate more accurately in the future and set aside the time he will need.



Stick to routines

Regular daily routines often lead to better organization and greater school success. Suggest that your tween develop the ones that work best for him. They should include 9–11 hours of sleep, healthy meals and snacks, at least an hour of exercise, and time for family and friends. Help him make adjustments if a routine isn't working. If it's hard for him to get started on homework right after school, perhaps he'll decide to relax for 15 minutes rather than jumping in immediately.



Set mini-deadlines

Your tween can manage time better by breaking tasks into chunks. She could write down deadlines for specific parts of her work. If she starts studying for a history test at 5 p.m., she might plan to read and take notes on one chapter by 5:30 p.m., then quiz herself until 6 p.m. If she has a science project due in two weeks, she could give herself one week to complete the experiment, two days to write up her findings, two days to make a poster, and three days to practice presenting her project.

continued

Arrange homework space

Your child is in charge of doing his own homework, but you can help by making sure he has what he needs. Try these tips for creating a well-stocked homework spot where he can focus on his assignments and do his best work.

Pick a place

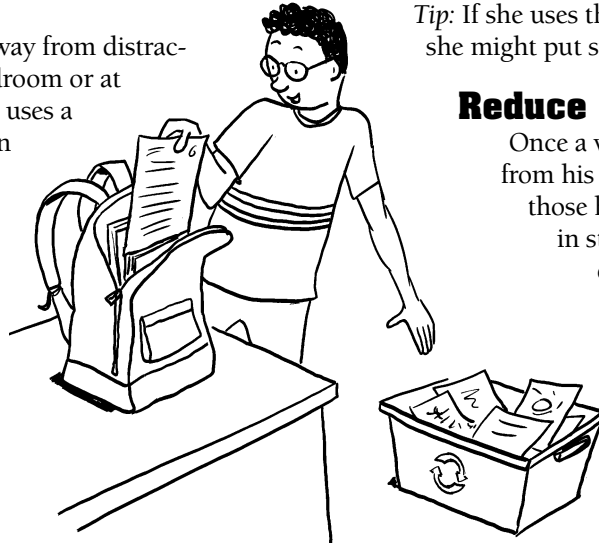
Have him choose a well-lit location away from distractions. He could work at a desk in his bedroom or at the dining room table, for example. If he uses a shared spot like the kitchen, cut down on noise by making homework time “quiet time” for everyone. Younger siblings might read or color, and perhaps you’ll also read or do paperwork.

Stock supplies

Let your middle grader decide how to organize her supplies. She could decorate glass jars for storing scissors, pens, and pencils. Zipper bags might hold paper clips, erasers, and sticky notes. And shoeboxes are ideal for items like

a tape dispenser, a pencil sharpener, a hole punch, a ruler, a stapler, and index cards. Suggest that she keep a dictionary handy and notebook paper and graph paper in a magazine file or a drawer. For work on a laptop or tablet, she should keep her charger close by and monitor the battery level.

Tip: If she uses the kitchen table for homework, she might put supplies on a shelf in a cabinet.



Reduce clutter

Once a week, he could clear old papers from his backpack. He should throw out those he doesn’t need and store the rest in stacked plastic trays for future reference. For example, he might save old quizzes and tests to study for final exams. This will help him find what he needs quickly and make sure important papers don’t get lost.

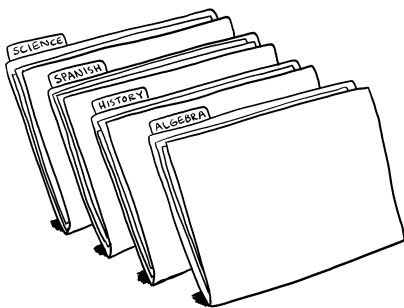
Stay on top of schoolwork

Middle school courses require your tween to juggle a range of assignments, papers, and projects. She’ll need to take materials back and forth—from home to her locker to the right class—and be sure everything gets turned in on time. Here are suggestions for organizing assignments.

Pack wisely

At the end of each school day, she can glance at her assignments in her student planner to see which textbooks and other supplies she has to take home. For example, she may need her trumpet to practice a new song or her English study guide to prepare for a test on a novel.

File assignments immediately



Have your middle grader label a separate folder or binder for each subject and keep his backpack nearby when he does homework. As he finishes each assignment, he can put it in the

correct folder or binder and into his backpack right away. That way, he’ll be sure to take completed work with him rather than leaving assignments on his desk or on the kitchen table in the morning.

Turn it in

Remind your tween that taking homework to school is just part of her job—she won’t get credit if it’s left in her backpack or locker! She should make a habit of taking out her homework as soon as she arrives in class and putting it in the designated spot to be graded. Then, she can check it off in her planner so she knows she turned it in. *Tip:* If your child is absent, point out that she is responsible for asking her teachers what she missed so she can make it up.



Middle Years

Navigating the Middle Years



The tween years can have their challenges, but they also have their joys! These tips will help you steer your way through the middle grades with success—and enjoyment—for both you and your middle grader.

Connect with your tween

Getting your child to communicate with you may just be a matter of finding the right time and place. Try a different setting, such as in the car on the way to soccer practice or while taking a walk around the block. He may open up more than he would if you were just staring at each other. Also, listen for openings that he gives you. If he mentions a topic he's interested in or brings up something funny that happened in school, be ready to listen and follow his lead.



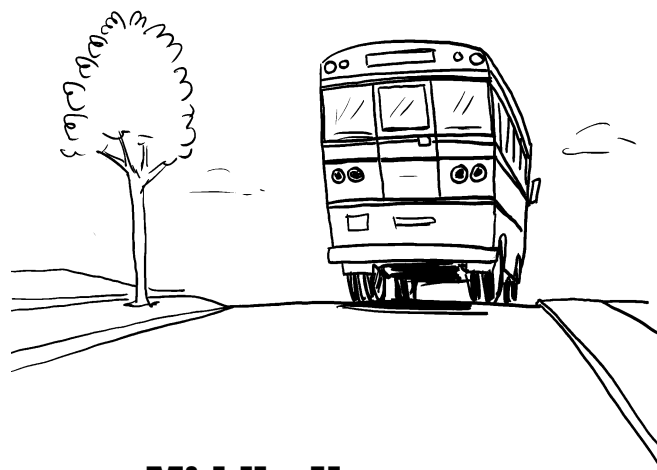
casm or negative language, and she'll be more likely to respond in kind. A good rule of thumb: Don't say anything you wouldn't want someone else to say to her.

Think before you speak

Your middle grader missed the bus for the second time this week, and you have to drive him to school again! Before bringing up a topic that makes you angry, use strategies to calm down, such as breathing deeply or simply waiting

Model respect

Set the stage for better interactions—and a better relationship—by treating your tween with respect. When you chat, put away distractions like your phone, and look her in the eye. Speak nicely, avoiding sar-



a few minutes. Then, start the conversation on a positive note by saying something like, "You know I love you no matter what. Here's what we need to work on..." Your discussion will be more peaceful and productive if he feels loved and understood from the beginning.

Agree on guidelines

Make a plan to ensure civil discussions with your tween. For instance, you might say that each person should be able to speak without being interrupted. Or set ground rules about no put-downs or yelling. Also, try to use *I* messages so no one feels attacked. You could say to her, "I feel worried when you don't come straight home from school," instead of "You never follow my rules!" Then, to avoid recycling old fights, only bring up past issues if they relate to the matter at hand.

Listen to problems

When your child is faced with a challenge, such as an argument with a friend, try to avoid jumping right in with your opinion. Instead, ask how he thinks he should handle the situation. If he needs help, share how you dealt with a similar issue (perhaps you asked a mutual friend for help in making up). You'll give your middle grader valuable problem-solving practice, and you'll reduce the chances that he'll get defensive.

continued



Compromise wisely

If you find yourselves at odds, remember this: It might be possible for you both to get what you want. In fact, you'll help your tween develop conflict-resolution skills by negotiating solutions. Say she wants to sleep at a friend's house, but you want her to get a good night's rest for her game the next day. You might suggest that she go to her friend's for a while but come home to sleep. Or she may ask if her friend can sleep over at your house instead, and you could make sure they get to bed on time. Encourage her to listen to your suggestions with an open mind, and you do the same for her.

Notice good behavior

Middle graders still aim to please you—especially if they feel appreciated. Recognize good deeds with a high five, a “Way to go!” or a sincere thank-you. Consider giving an extra privilege from time to time. For instance, if your child volunteers to help a younger sibling with homework or cleans the family room without being asked, you might let him choose your weekend family activity or pick the film for movie night.



Put it in writing

Making your expectations clear will put you and your middle grader on the same page. Together, make a list of household rules covering safety (drugs, Internet use), school (attendance, homework), and family life (chores, meals). Then lay out consequences for breaking rules (grounding, loss of phone privileges). *Tip:* Having fewer rules makes them easier for your child to remember—and for you to enforce—so try sticking to the ones that matter most (“Finish homework before playing video games”). If she argues, simply point to the rule and walk away. She'll get the message, and you won't invite a fight.



Find opportunity in mistakes

Every mistake can be an important learning opportunity. If your middle grader is upset because he didn't spend enough time studying for a big math test and got a poor grade, encourage him to come up with a plan for next time. He might set up a calendar and organize study guides. Let him know there will be more chances to do well—and that you're proud of him for thinking ahead.

Choose your battles

Along with your child's desire for more independence comes a need to control her own environment. Try to decide what's most important to you. Maybe you can overlook a messy room or loud music, but you probably want to put your foot down about school attendance or dating. Letting the “little stuff” go will give her small victories that will mean a lot to her.

Take care of yourself

Calm, happy parents tend to have calmer, happier kids. Think of ways to relax when parenting your middle grader becomes stressful. For example, you might read a book or take a bath. It's also helpful to chat with friends who are parents of tweens and share tips on handling parenting situations. You will feel better knowing you're not alone—and you may even find solutions you hadn't thought of!

Middle Years

Build Interpersonal Skills

Through the middle years and beyond, your child will need to get along with all kinds of people—from adults like teachers and administrators to classmates and coworkers. Strong social and communication skills will help her make connections, build relationships, and interact well with others. Use these suggestions.



Start conversations

Have your tween practice introducing herself. Pretend to be a teacher or student she hasn't met before. Suggest that she smile, say "Hello," and tell a little about herself. ("I'm Nicole, and I'm in seventh grade.") Then, she could ask questions about the other person. ("What subjects do you teach?" or "Where did you go to school before you moved here?") She can finish the conversation on a friendly note by saying something like "I'm looking forward to your class."

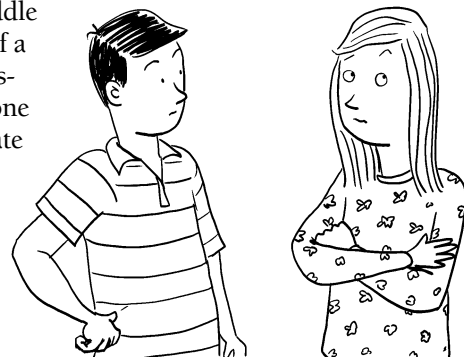
With people your tween already knows, she might create conversation by bringing up shared interests ("Did you see the latest comic book?") or relevant topics ("What are you doing your history project on? Mine's on the Reconstruction Era").

Read body language

Nodding, smiling, and looking people in the eye all show that someone is interested in what you're saying and probably wants to keep talking. On the other hand, moving or looking away may signal that a person is ready to end the conversa-

tion. Talk about polite ways for your child to excuse himself if he senses those cues. ("Thank you for the help, Mrs. Smith" or "I have to go. See you later!")

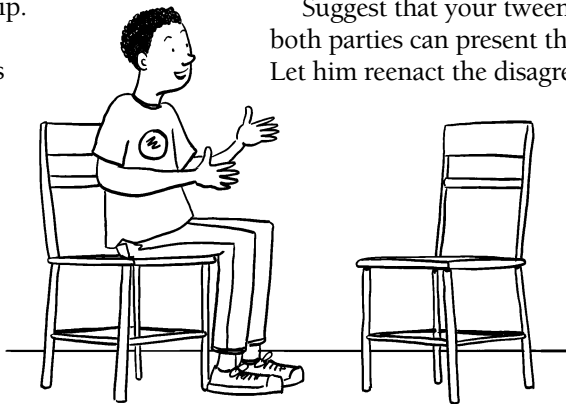
Remind your middle grader to be aware of a person's facial expression, posture, and tone of voice. If a classmate says, "That's great," but she's rolling her eyes, she may not mean it the way she said.



Resolve conflict

Conflict can crop up in any relationship. Learning how to handle it will give your child a valuable tool for solving problems while maintaining good relationships.

Encourage your middle schooler to look for ways to settle issues peacefully. For example, if he and a friend can't agree on an activity, they might do what each person wants for part of the time. Or if he and a project partner both want to choose the images for a presentation, they could each pick half or decide together.



Suggest that your tween listen as much as he talks so both parties can present their sides in an argument. *Idea:* Let him reenact the disagreement at home like this. Have

him set up two chairs facing each other and alternate sitting in one, then the other, to role-play each side of the dispute. When he has to make points for the "other" side, it will open up his mind to another way of seeing things.

continued

Think before you post

You can't overstate the fact that what we do online never goes away—and can end up being shared all over the world. Before your middle grader posts pictures or comments or sends texts, suggest that he ask himself if he would want them seen by a roomful of classmates or by adults like his grandparents, teachers, or even future college admissions officers or employers. If not, they're better left offline. *Tip:* Follow your child on social media. You'll keep track of what he's doing, and knowing you're seeing it may help him think carefully about what he posts.

He should also consider whether something is more of a personal discussion—and therefore meant to be shared only with one or two close friends. If so, he could talk about it in person or send a direct message or text. Point out that broadcasting comments on social media pages is like walking into a store and announcing it over the loudspeaker.

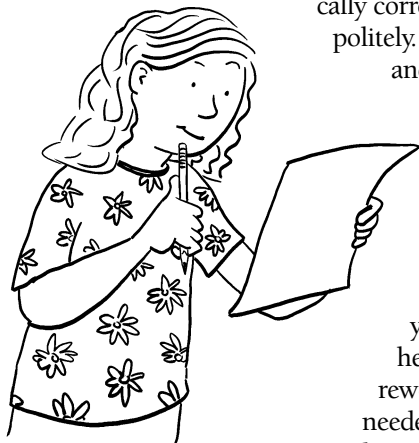


Be clear and respectful

Your tween may need to communicate with teachers, coaches, or activity advisers via written note, email, or text. Encourage her to read over what she's written before hitting "send." That way, she can be sure it makes sense, is grammatically correct, and comes across politely.

Saying things clearly and respectfully in writing is another way to get along with people while getting the job done.

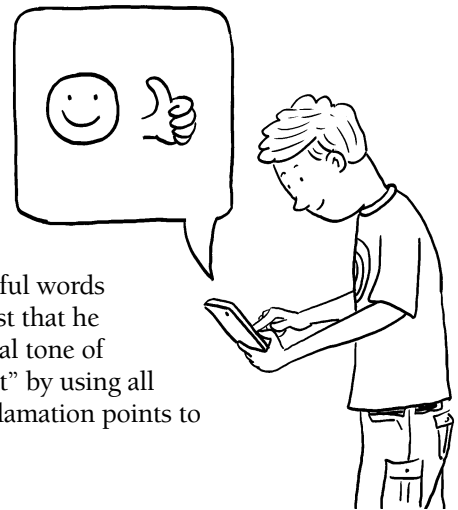
Note: Offer to look over messages if she has time and you're available. Help her think of ways to reword something if needed. She'll improve her editing skills in the process.



Keep it positive

Encourage your middle grader to stay upbeat, supportive, or helpful in his online comments and responses ("Way to go!" or "I like your sweater"). This old advice is still good advice: "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

Also, let your tween know that disagreements that start online can carry over into real life. To avoid stirring the pot, he shouldn't post angry or hurtful words or pictures. Suggest that he "speak" in a normal tone of voice—not "shout" by using all caps or lots of exclamation points to make a point.



Work as a team

Teamwork is an important interpersonal skill—and one that will come into play in school, after school, and on the job.

Suggest that your middle grader get used to working with others by starting or joining study groups. Even a casual weekly meeting with classmates to go over science notes can give her experience with give-and-take. They might ask each other questions or take turns teaching each other different parts of the material. Attending study groups

may give her the chance to work with students she doesn't know well, which is another way to prepare her for collaborating in the workforce.

Another great way to practice is to literally join a team, whether it's a debate team, math team, or field hockey team. From team meetings and practices to games or meets, your tween will get experience with brainstorming ideas, giving and listening to opinions, and sharing credit for results.

Middle Years