

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### Writing fun

Make creative-writing practice fun for your child. Challenge her with interesting writing prompts (“If I were principal for a day, I would...” or “Ten things that make me laugh are...”). *Idea:* Take turns suggesting a first sentence. Then, you can each write a paragraph and read it to each other.

### Make time for others

Your middle grader doesn’t have to spend money to be generous. He can be generous with his time instead. For example, he could spend one afternoon a month visiting residents at a nursing home, or he might surprise his sister by doing a chore in her place. He’ll feel good about himself and learn to think about others.

### Healthy snacks

Growing bodies need a variety of healthy foods. Suggest that your child mix food groups when making snacks. She might create a “wrap” by putting lean protein (turkey) and vegetables (lettuce, cucumbers) in a whole-wheat tortilla with tomato salsa. Or she can combine fruit (peaches) and dairy (low-fat yogurt).

### Worth quoting

“Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.”  
*Robert Collier*

### Just for fun

**Q:** What is light as a feather but can’t be held very long?

**A:** Your breath.



## Playing by the rules

Your middle grader is old enough to know he should watch for cars when crossing the street and brush his teeth before bed. But as he gets older, he still needs rules to help him stay safe and learn to be responsible.

Children this age may not say it, but they like knowing that their parents care enough to give them limits. When you establish guidelines, make sure they are:

### Important

Narrow your set of rules to the things you think matter the most. Having too many guidelines makes it hard for children to remember and follow them. For example, you might give rules about your youngster’s schoolwork and activities (“Homework must be completed daily”), but let him decide how to decorate his room or spend his allowance.

### Clear

Be specific when you tell your youngster what you expect. If you want him home by 7 p.m. on school nights, say so.



Instead of “Don’t get home too late,” tell him, “Your weekday curfew is 7 p.m.” Post rules where everyone can see them (refrigerator, bulletin board), and update the list as needed.

### Positive

Let your middle grader know what you want him to do, rather than what you don’t want him to do. *Example:* “Clear the table after meals” rather than, “Don’t leave a mess after you eat.” Putting rules this way will set a friendly tone and help your child focus on the right behavior. 👍

## Everyday math

Your child may see math only as a subject in school. With these two activities, you can show her that math is a part of everyday life—and help her sharpen her math skills.

- Have her figure out how many pizzas to order for her cheerleading team party. She’ll need to consider how many people will be there, how many slices each person will eat, and how many slices are in each pizza.

- Ask her to review three months of cell phone bills to see whether you’re using the best plan for your family. She should calculate the average minutes used and texts sent per month. Together, go over the options for limited and unlimited calling plans. 👍



# It's raining ideas!

Every great project starts with a creative idea. Your child can get inspired and find those ideas by starting a storm—a *brainstorm*.

To begin, she should identify her purpose (“Choose a science fair project”) and jot down ideas on paper or the computer. Encourage her to write down every idea that comes into her head—no matter how zany it may seem. Keeping an open mind will allow her imagination to flow. Even “crazy” ideas can lead to some that will work.

Once she has her ideas down, she can review them. First, she might put them into categories (plant projects,



astronomy projects). Then, she can evaluate each one by asking questions (“Am I interested in this?” “What kind of supplies would I need?”). She should choose a project that seems both exciting and practical.

For group projects, suggest that she brainstorm with her partners. For example, if they’re deciding which skit to do on the American

Revolution, everyone can call out ideas (“Act out the Boston Tea Party,” “Pretend we’re members of the British Parliament”). One person can write the ideas down. Finally, they can talk each one over and take a vote. 👍



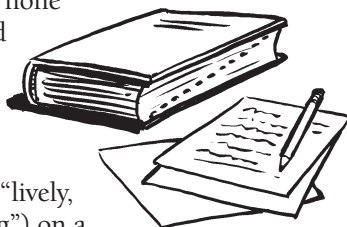
## Parent to Parent

### Silly definitions

Our son Brandon came home from his friend’s house recently talking about a word game they had played. It sounded like fun, so we gave it a try.

He said all we needed were a dictionary, slips of paper, and pencils. Brandon began by opening the dictionary to a random page and picking out a word he thought none of us would know—*zappy*. He secretly copied the definition (“lively, entertaining”) on a piece of paper and told each of us to make up a meaning and write it on our own slip. Then, he collected the papers and read them aloud. Everyone voted on which definition was the real one. We laughed when the definition I made up “won” that round!

Now the dictionary game has become a nightly ritual in our house. The kids like stumping me, and I’m happy because we’re all learning new words. 👍



## Q & A Blended families

**Q** I recently remarried, and my daughter is having trouble adjusting to having a stepfather. How can we help her?

**A** Creating a new family means developing new relationships, and that takes time. You can smooth the transition by being patient and easing into the new arrangement.

Let your child know that your husband is there to help, not to be a replacement for her dad. It’s best if you continue to be your child’s primary disciplinarian until your daughter and her new stepfather bond.

Meanwhile, your spouse can begin making a connection in gentle ways. He might notice your daughter’s efforts around the house (“Thank you for setting the table”) or offer praise (“Nice report card! I can see that you worked hard”). And he can show support by going to her events (softball games, school play). 👍



## Respecting teachers

One key trait can help your youngster enjoy better relationships with teachers—respect. Suggest that your middle grader:

- Speak to teachers and staff politely. Your child probably appreciates being asked nicely when you need help. By the same token, he should approach teachers with a friendly attitude when he has a question. Speaking in a nice tone of voice and using good manners (saying “please” and “thank you”) will make it easier to get along.
- Pay attention in class. Chances are your youngster feels valued when others

listen (looking at him while he speaks, for example). To show teachers the same respect, he should keep his eyes on the front of the room and avoid talking with classmates during class.

■ Be respectful even if he doesn’t “hit it off” with a teacher. This will help him work better with the teacher throughout the year. *Idea:* You might relate an example of when you were respectful of a boss or a neighbor you found difficult. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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