December 2016

Londonderry Middle School

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Year in review

As a family, take time to appreciate each other by looking back at the past year. What were your favorite moments together? Were there situations that brought you closer? Spend an evening or two discussing those experiences—and talk about what you're looking forward to as a family in 2017.

Dream team

Encourage your tween to list the people in his life he could turn to if he needed help. His list might include you, teachers, coaches, relatives, or neighbors. Then, when he needs someone to talk to about a problem with a friend or why he didn't make the honors chorus, he can pick from among his "dream team."

Study hangout

Studying with friends can be motivating for middle schoolers. Suggest that your child and her study mates hang out at your house and divide their work into pieces, then explain the parts to each other. They might have each person read a section in a textbook or review separate topics in their notes.

Worth quoting

"No one is useless in this world who lightens the burden of another."
Charles Dickens

Just for fun

Q: What's the best thing to put into a pie?

A: Your teeth!

Show grit

Twins Tanner and Taylor had a lot of the same subjects, but each handled schoolwork differently. Tanner took his time, studied, and got good grades. Taylor wasn't as driven and got only passing grades.

The difference between them? Tanner's grit and his passion about school kept him determined to do well so he could achieve his goal of attending college. Try these three tips to foster grit in your middle grader.

1. Encourage effort

Share a situation that required you to confront a challenge. If your tween knows how you overcame a struggle, it will help him build confidence to do the same. Then, acknowledge his efforts when he shows grit. Be specific: Instead of just saying "Good job!" try, "Your daily practice at the pool paid off when you nailed the dive at the swim meet."

2. Jump the bumps

Help your middle grader learn to handle setbacks by making "stretch" goals for himself. For example, if he got a poor English grade, he might work toward better grades on essays. His "stretches" could be to improve his thesis statements, to include more evidence to support his points, and to spend 15 minutes each night writing in a journal. Achieving tougher goals will give him grit to keep going further.

3. Stay excited

Perhaps your child was enthusiastic about learning Spanish when school started, but now he's lost interest. He can find ways to get excited again by looking for opportunities to use Spanish in everyday life, like talking to neighbors in their native language or translating signs on store windows for you.

Ways with words

No matter what classes your middle schooler is in, she'll need to learn new vocabulary. These ideas will help her pick up new words.

Make up crosswords. Suggest that your child use her science, math, or history vocabulary words to make up a crossword puzzle for you. She'll have to study and understand the words' meanings to give clues that make sense.

Record the meanings. Speaking definitions out loud can make them easier to remember. Your tween could record herself saying what new terms mean and using them in sentences. Playing back the recordings will give her another way to review.

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Prevent bullying

Did you know that bullying often peaks in middle school? Help your tween be part of the solution with these strategies.

Know the forms. Point out that bullying is more than physical. Your child might recognize bullying when she sees a classmate give someone a mean shove during recess. But it's also bullying when kids spread rumors, exclude people, or text hurtful comments.

Take action. Bystanders are the first line of defense in overcoming bullying. Maybe your tween overhears a bully say he's going to steal someone's backpack. Or she might see a bullying victim hurting herself in the restroom. If that happens, she should immediately tell a teacher or another adult. Encourage her to be kind to kids who don't have many friends, inviting them to sit with her on the bus, for example.

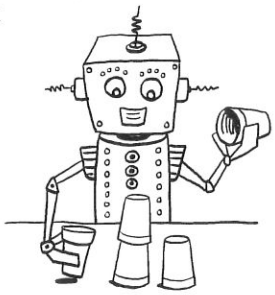
Get on the same page. If your middle schooler is bullying, discuss why her actions are harmful and wrong. Also, set consequences. If she posts mean social media messages, for instance, you might take away her cell phone.

Note: If you think your child is bullying or is a victim of bullying, take it seriously. Ask a pediatrician or mental health professional for help.

That's code for...

Computer coding is an in-demand skill that will help your child in future careers. Here's a fun offline way to introduce him to it.

Suggest your middle grader write a "code" to instruct someone on how to move paper cups around. He could first devise symbols like these:



↑ pick up cup
↓ put down cup
→ move cup forward 6 inches
← move cup backward 3 inches
Δ turn cup on its side
↕ turn cup upside down

Then, your child and a friend could use his code to write "programs" for each other, such as →←↑↕↓Δ.

Tip: Many websites offer free coding activities that teach tweens programming basics. Help your youngsters look online for ones to try.

Q&A De-stress the holidays

Q *I always try to create the perfect holidays, but I get so stressed that I can't enjoy the season—and then my family can't enjoy it either. What would make things easier?*

A If you're less stressed, then you'll have a happier holiday home that everyone enjoys.

- First, **try to have a sense of humor.** If you run out of gift wrap at the last minute, use the newspaper or leftover birthday paper. Add a note saying, "Wrapped with love *and* yesterday's news!"
- Look at your to-do list, and **think about what *has* to be done** vs. what you would *like* to get done. If you're hosting a gathering and are pressed for time, shut the door to the spare room, and your company won't see the clutter.
- **Find ways to streamline,** and involve your child. For instance, combine your errands to cut down on trips, and bring along your middle grader as a helper.

Parent to Parent Talking with my tween

When my daughter, Susie, started middle school, I got nervous about discussing "big" topics. I'd heard neighbors talk about their kids having boyfriends or even drinking alcohol. The whole thing made me want to say, "Call me when it's over!"

Luckily, I have a good friend who's been down this road. She said it's important to start conversations with Susie sooner rather than later.

If Susie mentions a friend having a crush, for example, I could open the door to a discussion by saying, "I remember having the biggest crush on a boy named Mark. Have you felt that way about anyone yet?" Or if the local news has a story about a drunk driver, I might ask her what she's learning in school about substance abuse.

Finally, my friend said tweens may shut down if they think they're being lectured. She said I should focus more on listening. That's hard for me, but I'm practicing by saying, "Would you like to hear what I think?"

OUR PURPOSE

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

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