November 2016

Londonderry Middle School

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

## Short Stops

### A+ feedback

When your middle grader gives a classmate feedback (say, on a presentation or a rough draft of a report), encourage him to be positive *and* honest. First, he could tell what he liked ("Your opening really grabbed my attention"). Then, he should offer suggestions for improvement ("Try adding transition words"). Giving constructive criticism may help your child accept feedback on his work, too.

### Just you and me

Carve out one-on-one time with your tween while you tackle your to-do list this holiday season. Write down everything that needs to be done, and let her choose some tasks to work on with you. You might, for example, make table centerpieces and napkin rings or address greeting cards together.

### Spatial reasoning

The ability to visualize shapes, sizes, and positions of objects is an important thinking skill. Give your middle schooler practice by having him load the dishwasher, bag groceries at the self-checkout, or pack items in boxes. He'll have to picture what could go where and how everything will fit.

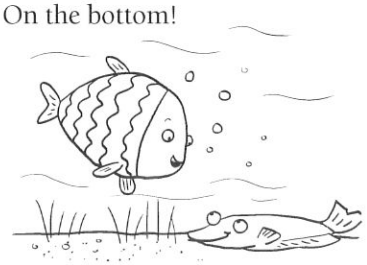
### Worth quoting

"Don't count the days, make the days count." *Muhammad Ali*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Where is the ocean the deepest?

**A:** On the bottom!



## Study smart

Good study skills let your tween accomplish more each time she studies—and they prepare her for high school and college. Suggest that she try these different ways to study and stick with the ones that work best.

### Rewrite material

After your child reviews notes or completes assigned reading, writing the information in a different format will help her learn and remember it. She might be creative and make up a song about the parts of the nervous system or write a poem using vocabulary terms. Or she could teach the information to a peer by writing key information on a small whiteboard or chalkboard.

### Picture it

Suggest that your middle grader think of a way to turn information into something visual. That can help her make sense of it. She may draw a picture with arrows to show steps in the water cycle, a bar graph to display income statistics for an economics project, or a chart to compare two novels by the same author.

### Make your own tests

Testing herself on what she learns will show your student what she knows and what she needs to review. Encourage her to create a test using old worksheets or quizzes and her textbook. She can check her answers and grade herself. Or she could think of and answer essay questions. *Idea:* Suggest that she team up with a friend and make up tests for each other to do.

## Conferences are worth attending

Now that your child is in middle school, parent-teacher conferences may be different from what you're used to. Here's what to expect:

- You'll get an overview of how your tween is doing in each subject. If you meet with one teacher who shares notes from a team, ask about scheduling a follow-up conference with a particular teacher if you'd like more information or have concerns.
- You may discover interests or talents you didn't know your youngster has, and the teacher might recommend electives for next year that let him use and develop these strengths.
- Find out how your child interacts with teachers and peers. For example, you could ask about how he works with classmates.

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# How math adds up

Math isn't just for math class. Knowing how to use numbers will benefit your middle grader in his other courses, too. Share these ideas.

### Social studies

When your child makes a time line of historical events or uses coordinates to locate a city on a map, he's doing math. Here's a fun way to combine math and social studies at home: Encourage him to watch this month's election-night coverage and figure out which combinations of states would lead to the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency. Or have him hold a mock election among friends and family members, and calculate the percentage of votes each state or local candidate receives.

### Science

In science class, your middle grader will measure liquids for experiments, figure out speed and velocity, and graph results. In fact, most science experiments involve math in some way. Remind him to double-check formulas and calculations on lab reports—just as he would check his work in math class. He will see the connection between what he's learning in algebra, geometry, or regular math class and what he's doing in science.

## Parent to Parent: A jarful of gratitude

Sometimes I feel like my 12-year-old son, Brock, takes things for granted, like the rides I give him or the Internet I pay for. For example, he won't be ready when it's time to leave or he'll complain that a friend has faster Internet. A neighbor shared an idea her family uses to remember what they're thankful for, and I decided to try it.

I had Brock cut colored construction paper into squares and stack them near an empty glass jar. In the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, I asked everyone to pay attention to small things they appreciated. Each time they noticed something, they could write it on a square and drop it into the jar.

Before our holiday meal, we are going to pass the jar around and have everyone read a square. Then, we're going to start a new jar for each month so Brock learns that being thankful isn't just for Thanksgiving.

## Q&A: Tween blues—or depression?

**Q** *My daughter seems down lately, but I don't know if it's normal mood swings or something more serious. How can I tell?*

**A** Mood swings are a normal part of adolescence. But if your child is sad or irritable for more than a couple of weeks—and if it interferes with her regular activities—she may be depressed. Other clues include withdrawing from friends and family, frequent headaches or stomachaches, or sleeping too much or not enough.

Point out what you've noticed by saying something like, "You seem kind of quiet lately." If she says she feels "angry at the world" or "hopeless," don't try to downplay her feelings by saying "You shouldn't feel that way" or "That's no big deal." Instead, listen and tell her you want to help. Then, contact her pediatrician or the school counselor for guidance. *Note:* If she insists nothing is wrong but symptoms continue, seek help anyway.

## Talking without screens

Face-to-face communication can fall by the wayside if your tween sticks to texting or chatting on screens. By actually talking to people, she will build interpersonal skills and pay attention to the world around her. Consider this advice:

- Make screens off-limits for everyone—parents included—during meals or while riding in the car. This will get your child talking to the people she's with, rather than those "inside her phone."
- If your middle grader participates in activities after school, she'll naturally spend more time talking to friends than in texting them. For instance, if she works for the school newspaper, she will interview classmates or toss around article ideas with fellow staff members.

**OUR PURPOSE**

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

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www.rfeonline.com
ISSN 1540-5540

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