Maple Hill Junior High School

November 2019

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Asking about school

It may take a little creativity to get your tween talking about school. Instead of asking "How was school?" try "What made you laugh today?" or "What was the most interesting thing a teacher said?" *Idea:* Share something about your day first. Your child may be more likely to open up.

Eat your fruits and veggies

Encourage your middle grader to get more fruits and vegetables with her cafeteria lunch. She might add salad bar veggies like lettuce and tomato to her burger or chicken sandwich. And for a healthy dessert, she could dip fresh fruit like apple slices or pineapple chunks into yogurt.

DID YOU KNOW? Checking your tween's grades online helps you know how he's doing. However, it's important to keep in mind that grades aren't always updated every day. If you notice a low grade or a missing assignment, ask your child about it. He might have a reasonable explanation, or it's possible his teacher hasn't entered everything yet.

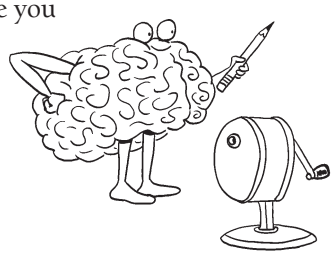
Worth quoting

"Remember that happiness is a way of travel, not a destination."
Roy M. Goodman

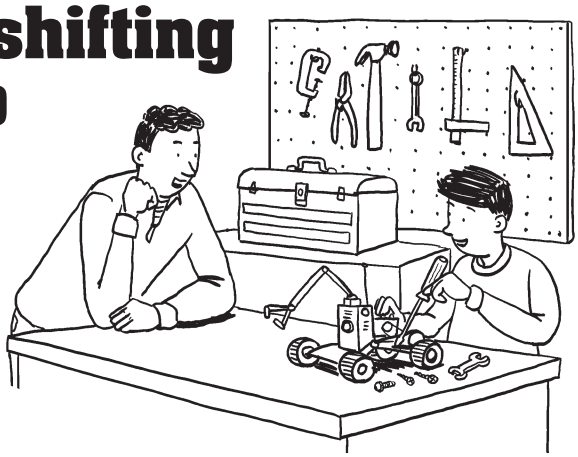
Just for fun

Q: What gets sharper the more you use it?

A: Your brain.



Tweens: A shifting relationship



Watching your child grow into an adolescent can be fun. You get a peek at his future adult self as his interests, opinions, and sense of humor develop. It may also be confusing, though, as he becomes more independent. Try these strategies for maintaining a strong relationship.

Allow some space

Does your tween prefer to hang out with friends rather than with you? Does he often hole up in his room? Those behaviors are normal. Stay connected by making some family activities, such as weekend outings or dinners, nonnegotiable. Also, be sure to spend time chatting with him each day. He'll find it comforting to know you're there.

Find the positives

When your middle grader is moody, think about what you enjoy about him, such as his sense of humor or his compassion for animals. Try framing his negative behaviors as positives. For instance, his ability to argue could be seen as a knack for debate. Or his insistence on doing things his way shows he's thinking for himself.

Avoid comparisons

Focus on who your child is instead of comparing him to yourself at his age or to other tweens. Perhaps you played sports in middle school but he wants to build robots and join the environment club. Show interest in his activities, and ask questions to learn more about them. ("What can your robot do?" "How was the watershed cleanup?")

Effort = results

The better your middle grader understands that hard work contributes to success, the more likely she is to put in effort. Help her see the connection with these suggestions.

- **Focus on her actions.** Rather than saying what a great writer your child is, you might point out that all the time she spent editing her essay made it better. She'll learn that she has control over the results she gets.
- **Encourage persistence.** When your tween faces a setback, recommend that she make adjustments rather than give up. Say she receives a lower-than-expected score on a civics quiz. She could set aside more time to study for the next quiz.

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Hooked on a book

Reading for pleasure will build your tween's background knowledge and vocabulary. Inspire her to read more with these ideas.

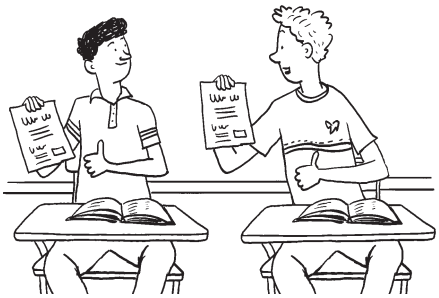
Make reading a priority. When your family sits around in the evening, have each person read silently instead of watching TV. Visit the library regularly so you always have books in your home. Talk to your child about what you're reading, and ask about her book.

Read about authors. If your middle grader likes particular books, she could visit authors' websites to learn more about them. She might search the internet to find interviews with the authors and reviews of their other books—and discover something new to read.

Take material along. Reading a few minutes here and there adds up. Your teen could plan ahead by packing a book everywhere she goes! That way, she can read on the subway, in the dentist's office, or while waiting for her ride home. Suggest that she grab a magazine for her purse, keep a novel in her backpack, or download an e-book so she always has something to read.

Q&A Think first

Q *My son sometimes makes decisions without thinking them through. How can I teach him not to make impulsive decisions?*

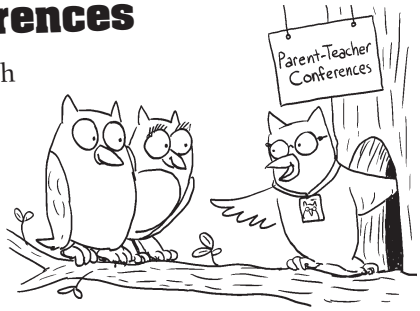


A Your tween's brain is still developing—especially the part of it that controls decision making.

Let him know that to make good choices, he needs to consider the facts. For example, maybe he needs to pick partners for a group project. His first instinct may be to work with his best friend. But encourage him to think about who has good work habits and won't leave him doing all the work.

Also, give him experience making everyday decisions like picking out gifts for relatives or choosing the film for family movie night. For instance, rather than picking the first gift that looks cool, he should consider your family's budget and each relative's interest.

Make the most of conferences



Use fall parent-teacher conferences to touch base with teachers early in the year and share information to support your middle grader's learning. Consider these tips:

- Get your child's input. Ask if there's anything specific he'd like you to bring up. He may want a teacher to know he feels hesitant about raising his hand in class, for instance.
- Ask about your tween's strengths as well as areas where he could improve. Maybe you'll find out that he loves helping other students but needs to manage his time better in class. Also, get advice on how you can support him at home.
- Point out what you notice at home. Perhaps he's enjoying a math game the teacher recommended, or maybe he's struggling with a science project. This gives teachers useful information for challenging and assisting your child.

Parent to Parent: Empathy can prevent bullying

My sister's son was being bullied in school. Thankfully, she worked with the counselor and the situation was resolved—and my sister learned something interesting that she shared with me.

The counselor told my sister that empathy is an antidote to bullying. He said when kids really understand and care about how others feel, they're far less likely to bully. That got me thinking about ways I could approach the subject with my daughter Dara.

When she mentioned that a classmate's parent was sick, I encouraged her to call the girl regularly and perhaps even send a card or cookies.

I also try to show empathy for Dara if she's upset about something, rather than saying, "You'll be fine." When a boy she liked didn't feel the same way about her, I related a similar experience I had in middle school.

I'm hopeful that our focus on empathy will help Dara be kind toward others and never participate in bullying.

OUR PURPOSE

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

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