

January 2014

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Get to know teachers

For many middle schoolers, a new year means some different classes and new teachers. Stay in the loop from the beginning by asking your child about her classes, attending parent nights or a second-semester back-to-school night, and emailing teachers to introduce yourself.

### Prevent shoplifting

Unfortunately, some children start to shoplift in the tween years when they begin shopping with friends rather than their parents. Discuss this serious issue with your middle grader. Make sure he understands that shoplifting is a crime and that stores may call police and press charges—even for a youngster.

### Great debate

Does your child tend to argue with your opinions? Here's the good news: You can use the opportunity to improve her critical thinking. Say she disagrees with you about whether a movie should be rated PG-13. Ask her to back up her opinion with three facts, and tell her you'll do the same. Then, pick a time for your "debate."

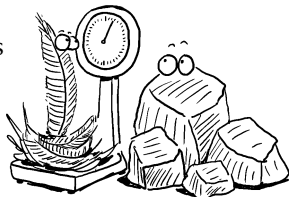
### Worth quoting

"Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness."  
*Seneca*

### Just for fun

**Q:** Which weighs more—a pound of feathers or a pound of rocks?

**A:** Neither. Each weighs a pound!



## Make the most of class time

How your child spends his time in class can make a big difference in how much he learns and what grades he gets. Share these practical ways for getting the most out of each class.

### Be ready

Your tween should walk into class prepared. If his English class will be discussing a novel, he'll be able to join in only if he has done the assigned reading. And if he has a rehearsal in band, he will need to practice the night before and bring his instrument to school.

### Stay alert

Share strategies your middle grader can use to keep his mind from wandering. For instance, as the teacher talks, he could follow along in his book by putting his finger under each step of a math problem or each line of a poem. He can also use different techniques to stay focused as he takes notes. If his teacher says she will list



"three factors," your middle grader could write "1, 2, 3" in a column and fill in the items as she talks. That way, it will be clear if he missed one.

### Learn with classmates

Students can serve as great teachers for each other. Encourage your tween to listen carefully to peers' questions during discussions—there may be some he hasn't thought of. Or if his lab partner doesn't understand a science experiment, your child could explain it. They'll both learn more by discussing the experiment and dividing up the work. 👍

## On target in 2014

Having goals can keep your middle schooler motivated. Encourage her to pick resolutions that she'll keep with these suggestions.

■ **Choose carefully.** Your tween could set a goal for each area of her life, such as academic (start long-term projects early), social (avoid gossip), and personal (save allowance). Or she might name a resolution for each class, such as memorizing formulas in math or spending more time studying Spanish verbs.

■ **Get advice.** Encourage your middle grader to talk to people she respects about how they keep their resolutions. She might ask relatives, neighbors, teachers, or coaches about goals that they set now or when they were her age. 👍



# Better ways to talk to tweens

“You don’t understand me!” When you talk with your middle grader, do you ever feel like you say one thing and she hears another? Help prevent miscommunication with these tips.

**You say:** “Here’s what you should do.”

**Your child may hear:** “You can’t handle this by yourself.”

Your tween may be more open to your advice if you present it as a suggestion. When she’s dealing with a problem (a disagreement with a friend, a grade she feels is unfair), start by listening and trying to understand her feelings. Then, you



could offer a solution by saying, “One idea might be...” or “Sometimes it works to...”

**You say:** “I can’t believe you did that.”

**Your child may hear:** “You’re so dumb.”

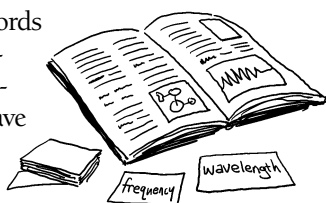
If your middle schooler makes a mistake or gets into trouble, she is probably feeling

bad about herself already. Try to hold back criticism, or she may shut down. Instead, you might start by asking, “Can you explain what happened?” Together, talk about ways she can learn from the mistake or make a better decision next time. 👍

## Building a vocabulary

Hearing and using new words frequently can make them a permanent part of your child’s vocabulary. Try these ideas for helping him learn new words.

**Play.** Use words from his textbooks in family games. Have your tween write each word on a separate index card. For example, if he’s studying sound and light in science, you could play Pictionary with words like *wavelength* and *prism* or act out *frequency* and *reflection* in a game of charades. Or players could earn an extra point per letter for using one of the words in Scrabble.



**Search.** When your middle grader comes across a new word in a novel, suggest that he jot it down. Then, he can be on the lookout for the word in magazines and newspapers. He can also listen for it in conversations, on TV, and on the radio—he’ll learn to understand the word in a variety of contexts. 👍

### OUR PURPOSE

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

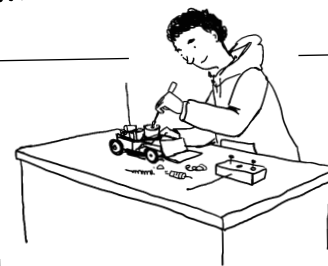
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### Q & A

## Think for yourself

**Q** My son wants to join the robotics club, but his friends are telling him it’s not cool. How should he handle this?



**A** Friends’ opinions matter a lot to middle graders. It’s not always easy to go against the crowd, but this is a good opportunity for your child to practice thinking for himself.

Encourage him to keep an upbeat attitude, since his friends may tease him if he gets upset. He could respond by smiling, shrugging, and changing the subject. Or he might simply tell them, “Robotics is a lot of fun. You should try it.”

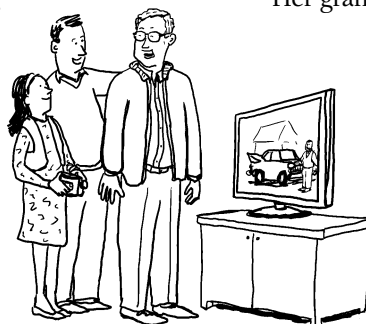
If his friends see they can’t bother him, they’ll probably back off. You can also point out that if he joins the club, he’ll meet new friends who enjoy robotics as much as he does. 👍

### Parent to Parent

## Year in review

For my dad’s 70th birthday last month, our daughter Lisa had a great idea. She suggested making a video about the year he was born to surprise him with at the party.

She started by getting old almanacs from a used bookstore and searching websites for facts about that year. For instance, she found that in 1943, a postage stamp cost 3 cents, construction on the Pentagon was



completed, the New York Yankees won the World Series, and the musical *Oklahoma!* opened. When she finished her research, we videotaped her pretending to be a newscaster from that year.

Her grandfather loved the video, and afterward, he talked to Lisa more about life in the 1940s and 1950s. Now she seems more interested in studying history since she knows someone who remembers the events she’s learning about! 👍