

# Middle Years

Working together for school success

## Short Stops



### ► Make-up work

If your middle grader misses school because she's sick, have her arrange to get her work. She might see if a friend in your neighborhood can bring assignments home or ask the office if you can pick them up. That way, she can complete it when she feels better.

### ► Prevent shoplifting

Tweens shoplift for different reasons—to see if they can get away with it, to impress friends, or to get what they can't afford to buy. Explain to your child that shoplifting is a crime that can have serious consequences. Shoplifters (even youngsters) may be handcuffed publicly and prosecuted and end up with a criminal record.

### ► Holiday visitor log

Many families have company during the holiday season. Suggest that your middle schooler create a family visitor log by decorating an inexpensive journal or binder. Then, she can write a "welcome" paragraph and ask guests to record their visits.

### ► Worth quoting

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."  
Winston Churchill

### ► Just for fun

**Q:** Can you name three consecutive days without saying Wednesday, Friday, or Sunday?

**A:** Yesterday, today, and tomorrow!



## It's all in the family!

The end of the year brings a break from school, holiday gatherings, and the chance for families to spend time together. Here are fun and inexpensive ways to use this time to build family bonds.

### Tell family stories

Have family members share funny or touching stories about their lives. You might talk about the days your children were born, how your parents met, or childhood memories. Your middle grader could share a funny moment, greatest achievement, or favorite holiday tradition.

If family members need help thinking of stories, come up with phrases to choose from ("I laughed so hard when...", "The best day I ever had was...").

### Make a time capsule

Celebrate the year you've had together by storing mementos in a container (cookie tin, plastic bin, or shoe box).

Have everyone choose items to put in the time capsule. *Examples:* photos, newspaper articles, programs from school activities. Or write descriptions of events (concert, summer camp) or



predictions for the coming year. Next December, family members can open the capsule and enjoy the memories.

### Take a day trip

If you're traveling out of town for the holidays, ask your child to help you find out what's in the area—or close enough to take a detour to visit. Maybe there's a railroad museum near Aunt May's house or a snow-tubing run near Grandpa Smith's.

If you're staying home, take advantage of nearby activities (miniature golf, indoor swimming). Building family time into your schedule will make the season that much more special. 👍

## Cozy up to reading

Nothing beats snuggling up with a blanket on a cold winter day and treating yourself to a good read. Encourage your child to include reading in her school-break plans. Suggest that she:

- Read what she hasn't had time for during the school year. She might browse a stack of magazines that have been piling up. Or she could start a book she borrowed from a friend but hasn't opened.
- Pick up the next book in a series. If your middle grader has read *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief*, for example, she could try the second book in the series, *Sammy Keyes and the Skeleton Man*.
- Put bookstore gift certificates on holiday wish lists. Your child can use them before school is back in session. 👍



# Chilly science

When you think of science experiments, you may picture beakers and test tubes. But your middle grader can explore science with simple supplies and a little help from the cold! Encourage her to try these wintry experiments.

**Balloon freeze.** Water balloons aren't just for summer. Make them in winter to learn about properties of water.

Choose three colors of balloons. Fill each balloon with a different amount of water, and tie them closed. Measure the circumference of each one using a tape measure, and record the colors and measurements. Then, put the balloons outside (if the temperature is below freezing) or in the freezer. Check them every half hour, and note when each one freezes solid.



Remeasure the circumference of each, and compare the results.

**Blubber mitten.** Ever wonder how animals stay warm in cold temperatures? Learn how their body fat helps them survive.

Fill a large bowl with ice water, and put 10 pennies in the bottom. Next, fill one plastic bag halfway with shortening (this will act like animal fat), and place another bag inside. Put one hand in the dry bag, and fasten both bags around your wrist with a rubber band. Try picking up pennies with both hands.

Count how many pennies you can pick up with the insulated hand compared with the other hand. Which hand feels warmer? Invite other family members to try, and discuss your findings. 👍

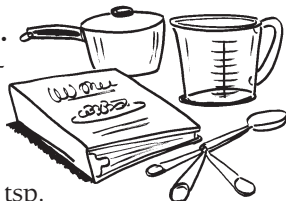
## Relying on me



Making a meal... shopping for the best prices... checking car fluids. These are all skills your child can use to stand on his own one day. Show your middle grader how to:

**Use a cookbook.**

Leaf through recipes together. Go over abbreviations like *tblsp.* (tablespoon) and *tsp.* (teaspoon). Explain basic cooking terms such as *dice*, *whisk*, and *broil*.



**Shop on a budget.**

Show your teen how to compare prices using labels on store shelves. When he goes shopping for shoes or T-shirts, give him an amount he can spend. Ask him to find what he needs without going over budget.

**Maintain a vehicle.**

Get under the hood and check fluids (oil, brake, steering). Talk about what the normal levels should be and how to replace fluids when they're low. Check tire pressure and tread, too. *Hint:* If you don't know how, find a friend or neighbor who can teach you *and* your child. 👍

## Parent to Parent

### "Bored" with school

When my son reached middle school, he raced through assignments and missed simple questions. When I asked why he didn't take his time, he said the work was "boring." I called the guidance office for advice.

Mrs. Bartlett, the counselor, suggested that I ask Sean's teachers for feedback. They said he did sloppy work but scored high on tests. The counselor said this might mean Sean is gifted, and she gave me forms to request that he be tested.

The result showed Sean is gifted in math and language arts. His general math course wasn't challenging enough, so the counselor suggested enrolling him in Algebra I. Since the school doesn't offer advanced language arts, we asked his teacher for help. She started giving Sean special assignments so he can extend his learning.

These changes are making a difference. Sean seems more interested in what he's studying, and his teachers say his work is improving. 👍



## Q & A Going through puberty

**Q** *Some of my daughter's friends are developing more quickly than she is. She seems upset. How can I help her be comfortable with her body?*

**A** It's not uncommon for girls to feel insecure about puberty. When friends develop sooner than they do, they may worry that their bodies aren't keeping up.

Reassure your daughter that every girl's body develops

at its own pace. Her time will come.

When she asks you questions, do your best to answer them or look for information that can help.

You can also guide her to books and Web sites written specifically for girls this age. Try the American Girl book *The Care & Keeping of You: The Body Book for Girls* or the Pink Locker Society Web site ([www.pinklockersociety.org](http://www.pinklockersociety.org)). *Idea:* Check out a book from the library, and leave it in her room. 👍



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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