December 2015

Turpin School

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Social media?

If your tween wants a social media account, check age guidelines first. Children usually need to be 13 or older to join, and they may not yet understand the potential pitfalls. If you do allow it, have him "friend" you so you can keep an eye on things. Also, set rules about keeping personal information private.

Be a community helper

'Tis the season of giving back, and teaching your child to help her community is a great lesson. As a family, watch for needs to meet, such as gift shopping for a sick neighbor or donating hats and gloves to a collection drive. Your middle grader could call local charities for opportunities.

Shifting friendships

During middle school, it's normal for friendships to change. If your tween grows apart from old friends, let him know that it's common and it's okay to feel sad. Encourage him to focus on getting to know new people through classes and activities. And since he may reconnect with his old friends down the road, he should remain friendly when he sees them.

Worth quoting

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader." *John Quincy Adams*

Just for fun

Q: What can you catch but not throw?

A: A cold.

Reading: On the case

When it comes to assigned reading, a little detective work can go a long way. Digging into a text and looking for clues will help your middle schooler understand and analyze what she's reading. Suggest strategies like these.

Go beyond what's written

Authors may hint at something without saying it directly. Encourage your child to consider the context and use details to *infer*, or figure out what's behind the words. For instance, if one character is building a time machine and another character says, "Yeah, good luck with that," your youngster might infer that the second character believes the time machine won't work. As she continues reading, she can look for stronger evidence that her inference was correct.

Find the purpose

After reading a section in a textbook or nonfiction book, she could ask herself, "What was the author's reason for writing that?" If your tween gets in this habit, she will automatically start to think about the author's purpose (to entertain, to persuade, to inform), which will give her a specific reason for reading. That can also help her connect on a deeper level to what she reads and cause her to think more critically about it.

Pull out what's confusing

Good readers think about their own thinking! As your middle schooler reads, have her highlight or mark with sticky notes any words or statements she doesn't understand. Then, suggest that she reread them after she finishes the chapter, look up words, or ask classmates or her teacher for help. Rather than glossing over things she doesn't "get," she'll figure out what the selection really means.

Winter pastimes

Need ideas for family fun as the weather turns chilly? Here are two good ones.

1. Make a hot chocolate station. Your child could put out a variety of ingredients for mixing into cocoa, such as vanilla extract, cinnamon, nutmeg, maple syrup, orange zest, or crushed peppermint candy. Taste each other's concoctions, and sip your drinks while watching a movie.

2. Schedule a weekly puzzle night. Choose a jigsaw puzzle to work on together until it's finished. Or make your own puzzles, and swap with each other. You might glue magazine pictures onto cardboard and cut them into pieces or search online for free jigsaw puzzle templates.

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Expect respect

Your relationship with your tween will be more pleasant if respect is a regular part of it. Try these ways to encourage respectful behavior in daily life.

Draw a line. Let your child know that he's allowed to be mad at you, but he's not allowed to be disrespectful. For instance, while he can disagree with having to pick up his room, he can't raise his voice or stomp off sighing loudly. Explain the consequences of behaving that way, such as losing phone privileges or being grounded.

Try again. If he doesn't handle a situation with respect (say he yells, "That's so unfair!"), ask him to think of a better way to approach you. He could rephrase it by saying, "I'm sorry, but I don't agree" in a normal tone of voice. If he doesn't cooperate, don't get drawn into an argument. Tell him you'll talk when he's ready to be respectful. Then, walk away.

Note: Sometimes tweens and parents get caught in a negative cycle. If that happens, tell your youngster you'd like to start fresh. Discuss ways to be more respectful toward one another, including specific things each of you can do. Finally, set a positive tone by doing something together that you both enjoy.

Consider the source

Reliable sources will help your child get the facts right when she writes research papers. Share these tips for finding good information:

- Be aware of who created a source and whether that person or group is trustworthy. In general, she should be able to get solid information from educational institutions, reputable nonprofit organizations, government sources, and professional or academic journals.
- Have her be sure the information is up to date. A book copyrighted in 1989 might say Pluto is a planet, when it's now labeled a dwarf planet. If she uses older sources, she should double-check information against current references.
- Many local libraries subscribe to databases that offer prescreened, quality sources. Instead of plowing through Google results, she can use those databases to reach reliable information quickly. Have a librarian show her what's available and how to use it.

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 Stay involved at school

Q *My seventh-grade daughter isn't thrilled with the idea of my volunteering at school, but I'd like to be involved somehow. Help!*

A Your middle schooler may not want you showing up in her classroom, but you could still participate in her school. And in fact, she'll be better off if you do. Students whose parents are involved during middle school tend to have higher grades—and even are more likely to enroll in college.

Teachers may need help outside of class, so ask them to keep you in mind. Perhaps you can make copies or rearrange the room before a special activity. To find out about other volunteer opportunities, check notices from the school and from clubs your child participates in. You might opt in for text alerts from the drama club advisor, for example. Also, sign up for the PTO email list, and try to attend PTO meetings.

Parent to Parent Learning to advocate

My son Eric was diagnosed with dyslexia in third grade. I got used to speaking to teachers when he needed something or had a problem. But when he reached middle school, his counselor said letting him advocate for himself would prepare him to handle challenges down the road.

So before Eric's IEP meeting this fall, I had him write down what he wanted to discuss with the team. Then, we role-played to help him get comfortable. He practiced explaining his goals, such as increasing his spelling accuracy, and what he thinks might make learning easier, like using a text reader. We also reviewed ways to respond if he doesn't understand something. ("Can you clarify that, please?")

Eric was a little nervous, but he got through it. Now we're working on having him approach teachers when he needs help.