

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Imaginary language

Using a pretend language can sharpen your tween's listening and critical thinking skills. Have her make up nonsense words for actions (like *blergle* for *point* and *troni* for *sit*). Then, you do the same. Take turns using your languages—and motions—to communicate. Can you figure out what each other's words mean?

Attending concerts

If your middle grader asks to go to a concert, consider his request carefully. Ticket prices may be high, and the atmosphere might not be kid-friendly. Check into the act online or talk to other parents. If you allow him to go, avoid school nights, and have an adult attend, too.

DID YOU KNOW?

Your child's body clock shifts during puberty, making her naturally want to stay up later. Yet she needs 9–11 hours of sleep daily to support her memory, regulate hormones, and guard against stress. Discourage late-day naps, and avoid caffeine. Also, doing a quiet activity before bed, such as drawing, can signal to her body that it's time to sleep.

Worth quoting

"I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book!"
Jane Austen

Just for fun

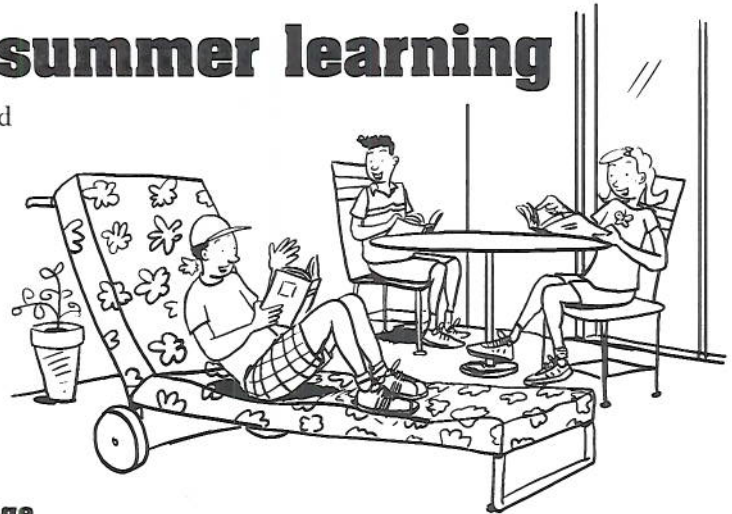
Q: Why aren't zebras good dancers?

A: Because they have two left feet.



Social summer learning

Summer alert! Did you know that students can lose up to two months of skills during the break from school? Keep that from happening to your child with these suggestions for learning the tween way—with friends.



Reading exchange

Let your middle grader create a shared document online where he and classmates list books they have read and share recommendations. They could summarize the books, rate them from 1 to 5 stars, and explain their opinions. They might even read together at a park or at each other's homes.

Baseball math

Play ball—with a math twist. During weekly get-togethers, friends can pitch to each other (three pitches per turn) and tally swings, hits, and misses. Have them calculate stats. What percentage of the

time did players hit the ball (total hits ÷ swings x 100)? Who had the best "batting average" (hits ÷ at-bats)? Let them graph their progress over the summer.

Map making

Encourage your child to turn a trip to the park into a geography expedition. Suggest that he and his friends each make a map, using a compass to label it north, south, east, and west. They could add landmarks like a basketball hoop, a slide, or a trail. Then, they take turns secretly choosing a landmark and using their maps to guide others to it. ("Walk north to the pond, then turn east.")

1-2-3 Kindness

Being a kind person helps children form strong relationships and enjoy a greater sense of belonging at school and at home. Try these steps to encourage kindness.

- 1. Develop ideas.** Together, brainstorm ways to show kindness. *Examples:* Ask an older relative to tell a story from his past. Send an inspirational quote to someone who's struggling.
- 2. Track actions.** Divide a sheet of paper into boxes, and write an idea in each square. Now look for opportunities to perform these acts of kindness. For each one completed, "x" it out.
- 3. Repeat.** When the sheet is filled, make a new one. There are always more ways to be kind—and discovering them will help your youngster make kindness a regular part of her life.



Home safe

You may not always be home while your child is out of school. Consider these ideas for handling summer supervision.

Stay alone? Decide whether your tween is ready to be home alone. Think about how responsible and resourceful she is—and whether she would be comfortable by herself. You'll want to get her input, too. *Note:* Check your state's age guidelines for leaving kids alone.



Buddy up. Talk to other parents about swapping supervision times, whether that means checking in on kids home alone or watching ones who aren't ready yet. Another idea is to look for another tween who would also be home alone and let them spend time together at one of your houses.

Set clear rules. Be firm about expectations. For instance, you might not allow your child to open the door, answer the phone unless she recognizes the name or number, or leave home without your approval. Explain that she shouldn't let callers know she's alone, and give her written instructions on who to contact and where to go in an emergency. 👍

If an elephant brushed its teeth...

This science activity creates foam that looks like toothpaste the size an elephant would need! It also demonstrates an *exothermic* reaction, or a chemical reaction that releases energy. Share these directions with your middle schooler.

Mix

Place an empty 20-oz. plastic water bottle in the sink. Pour in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hydrogen peroxide and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dishwashing soap. (*Tip:* For colorful "toothpaste," he can add food coloring.) Gently swish the mixture around, being careful not to create too many bubbles.



Combine

In a separate cup, mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup warm water with 1 packet (about $2\frac{1}{2}$ tsp.) dry yeast. Stir until the yeast dissolves. Pour the solution into the bottle. What happens?

React!

The yeast acts as a *catalyst*, causing the hydrogen peroxide to break down faster than normal. Oxygen is released and combines with the dish soap, resulting in overflowing foam. 👍



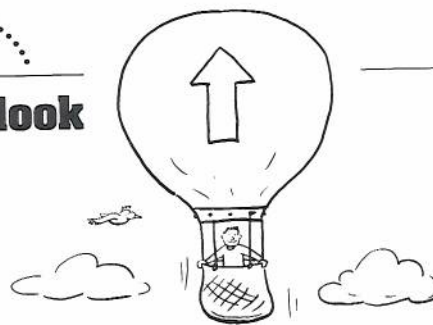
Parent to Parent

A positive outlook

My employer recently brought in a motivational speaker who said a positive attitude could help us perform better. As I was listening, it dawned on me that trying her tips with my son might help him, too.

I shared what I learned with Ben—when your attitude is "up," your brain is more creative and productive. We tried two exercises the speaker had suggested: First, we stared into each other's eyes. Then, I broke into a big smile while Ben had to try to keep a neutral expression. It's almost impossible! We both ended up laughing. Next, we each wrote about a positive experience from the last 24 hours. Reliving it brought back the good feelings.

Now, we're going to try another activity—choosing three things we're grateful for each day. I'm hoping it will help to keep both of our outlooks bright. 👍



Q & A

On track toward a goal

Q My daughter has set goals in the past and then forgotten about them in a few weeks. How can she stay focused and see them through?

A When your daughter sets goals, it's important to make them specific and measurable so she'll be able to tell if she has reached them. Giving herself deadlines for each one will help her keep moving toward them, too.

For instance, instead of saying, "I want to get in shape," she could say, "I want

to be able to run 5 miles by September." Then, she needs to name specific steps to take each week, such as, "First week: Alternate walking 1 minute and running 1 minute for 1 mile."

At the end of each week, suggest she look over the steps to see how she did. If she didn't follow through, encourage her to make revisions if needed, recommit to her goal, and keep going. 👍



OUR PURPOSE

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

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