April 2016

Bennet Academy
Joseph Chella, Principal

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success

Short Stops

Creative projects

Encourage your tween to think outside the box for school projects. Approaching them in interesting ways can motivate him to work hard and create a finished product he's proud of. Perhaps he'll include a "Wanted" ad with a paper on an endangered species or a model to accompany a report on an archaeological site.

Spotlight on effort

When your middle grader brings home a graded test or assignment, first ask what she learned rather than what grade she got. You'll send the message that it's not just her grades that count—it's also the effort she puts into her education and what she gets out of it. Plus, her answer may lead to an interesting discussion.

Dressed for success

Warmer weather means your child will start wearing lighter clothing. Together, go over the dress code in his student handbook so he knows what's allowed. For instance, maybe he can't wear "muscle shirts," flip-flops, or baseball caps in the building.

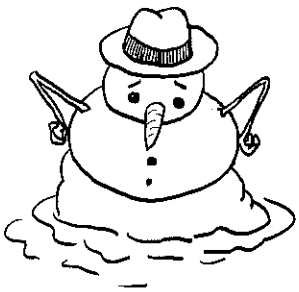
Worth quoting

"Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known." *Carl Sagan*

Just for fun

Q: What do you call an old snowman?

A: Water!



Updating the rules

As your child gets older, does it seem like the rules you have don't fit anymore? Adjusting them can give her room to gain independence while still keeping her safe. Try these ideas.

Pick priorities

As kids get older, they tend to push boundaries. Some rules will be nonnegotiable, such as no drinking or smoking, and showing respect for others. Beyond those, decide what really matters to you at this age—and stick to the rules you set. For example, you might expect your tween to keep her bedroom neat and be okay with her wearing light makeup. On the other hand, another family may not consider a tidy room a priority but feel strongly about a no-makeup rule.

Get her input

Middle graders want to feel like they have some control over their lives. Involve your youngster in rule revisions. Perhaps she wants to decide when to do her chores as long as they're finished by a certain time. Make it clear you'll think over her ideas but that you have the final say. She'll be more likely to cooperate if you listen, even if she doesn't like your decision.

Let her earn privileges

Try granting more freedom when your child proves she can handle it. Say she wants her own smartphone or tablet. If you're open to the idea, have her show that she can follow your Internet rules on the family computer or your phone. When you see that she chats only with people she knows, asks permission before downloading apps, and sticks to time limits, you could consider letting her have her own device.

Dinnertime learning

Put learning on the dinner table with these fun suggestions:

- Hang a map in the kitchen. Talk about where your food is from, and point to the countries or states. Discuss why you think the food is grown or produced there (climate, altitude).
- Play show-and-tell. Family members can take turns bringing interesting or unusual objects to the table. Set the item in the center, and say what you think it is, where it came from, or what it could be used for.
- Discuss your day at work. Your child may hear how you managed multiple priorities or handled computer glitches, for example. He'll learn from your experiences—and learn about your world, too.

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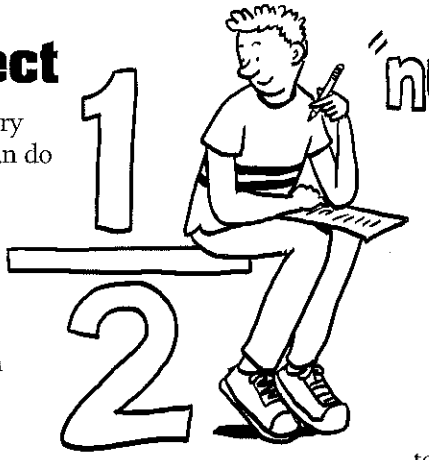
The "write" subject



Strong writing skills are essential in every class. Here are ways your middle grader can do well when writing in all classes.

Use specific vocabulary. Every subject has its own "language," and your child should include the proper terms in his writing. Encourage him to incorporate the vocabulary, and even the verbs, in his notes and textbooks. In a science lab report, for instance, he might say, "I *observed*..." instead of "I *saw*..." Or he should write "numerator" to refer to the top number of a fraction when explaining his math answer.

Cite evidence. Suggest that your middle schooler use information from course materials (textbooks, teacher handouts, recommended websites) to make sure his writing is accurate and credible. In a persuasive paragraph for social studies, for instance, he can weave in facts to back up his opinion. Or in an essay about an author, he could cite lines from her books.

Tip: Good grammar and proofreading are key to polished writing. Remind your youngster to double-check punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.

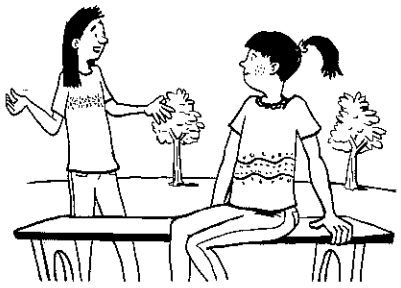
Parent to Parent: Build a family team

When I remarried, my wife and I each brought a son and a daughter into our new family. The kids are different ages and go to different schools, and they didn't seem to have anything in common. But in fact they share something very special—our new family traditions!

We have created our own rituals for birthdays, holidays, and other special days. For example, on New Year's Eve, our family picks one thing we all want to add to our lives in the coming year. This year we decided to be more active, so we took up Rollerblading. And on each person's birthday, we set up a treasure hunt that leads to a gift, and everyone writes a nice comment about that family member on a balloon.

We have a lot of fun, and I love that we're creating special memories to share with our new family.

Q&A: A rocky friendship



Q *My daughter has a friend who doesn't always treat her well. She likes hanging out with the girl but says she's bossy and makes hurtful jokes. How can I help my child handle this?*

A The next time your daughter complains about her friend, ask what she gets out of the friendship. Explain that there's no such thing as a perfect friend—but in a friendship worth keeping, the good should outweigh the bad. Suggest that she list pros and cons to help sort out her feelings.

If she wants to save the friendship, encourage her to talk to the girl. You could help her think of conversation starters such as, "Lately you've been deciding what we do. Let's take turns," or "It hurts my feelings when you joke like that."

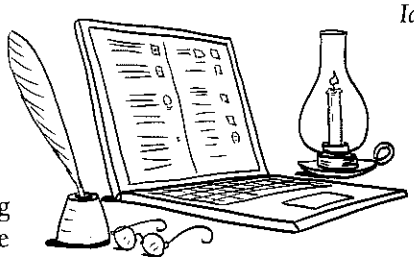
A good friend should be willing to listen and work on the relationship. If things don't change, your child will need to decide if she wants this person in her life or if she's better off concentrating on other friends.

Reporting—from the past

If your youngster could travel back in time and report on the Boston Tea Party or the Industrial Revolution, what would she say or "tweet"? She can dig deeper into history class topics by pretending she's a news reporter. Try these ideas.

Breaking news!

Suggest that your middle grader write a headline in her notes for each event she studies. ("Colonists dump tea to protest taxes.") She could add headlines for follow-up stories as she learns more. ("Protestors declare tea-drinking unpatriotic.") When she finishes the unit, let her deliver a newscast for you.



Tweets and hashtags

Encourage your child to write tweets about people, places, and events. She'll need to decide what's most important as she tries to fit her tweet into 140 characters. ("Mass production & faster travel = big changes coming to America!")

Idea: For more fun, she might incorporate clever hashtags into her tweets, perhaps "#railroadsrock" and "#seatoshiningsea" for the Transcontinental Railroad.

OUR PURPOSE

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

Resources for Educators, a division of CCH Incorporated
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfecustomer@wolterskluwer.com
www.rfeonline.com
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