

Homework Strategies for Success

When your tween has a game plan for homework, it will go more smoothly and he'll produce better work. Share this guide to help him learn time management and organization skills—and make homework time more pleasant for everyone!



Establish a routine

Your middle grader can make homework a priority by scheduling it into his daily routine. Here are suggestions:

- Start by discussing the best time to do homework. Does your child need downtime before settling into homework, or does he prefer getting his work done right after school? Let him experiment to see when he works best.



- Have him try different homework conditions. Some students work better in silence, others with background music. If your middle grader has trouble concentrating at the kitchen table, he might stretch out on his bed.
- Your tween should keep school supplies handy in one place. He can include basics like pencils and paper, as well as a dictionary, a calculator, and a thesaurus.
- Be sure your child has a plan for bringing home books and papers. He should jot down each assignment in his agenda as it's given. Then, at the end of the school day, he can see at a glance what he needs.
- Decide if and when TV, video games, and computer play fit into his schedule. Consider setting a screen limit that gives

your middle grader enough time for homework, sleep, physical activity, and family and friends.

Provide support

To get the most out of homework, your child needs to complete the work herself. Resist the urge to provide answers or leap in and solve problems for her. Use these ideas for supporting her efforts:

- Discuss a plan for tackling her work. She might do harder assignments first and save easier ones for later. Or she could save her favorite subject for last so she has that to look forward to.
- Help your child break large projects into smaller chunks and assign due dates to herself for each. *Example:* For a geography report, she might do research first, then make an outline, write the report, and finally revise and proofread it.
- Before she begins, have your middle grader explain the directions to you to make sure she understands them. Encourage her to reread them when she finishes. Did she follow the instructions exactly?



continued

Middle Years



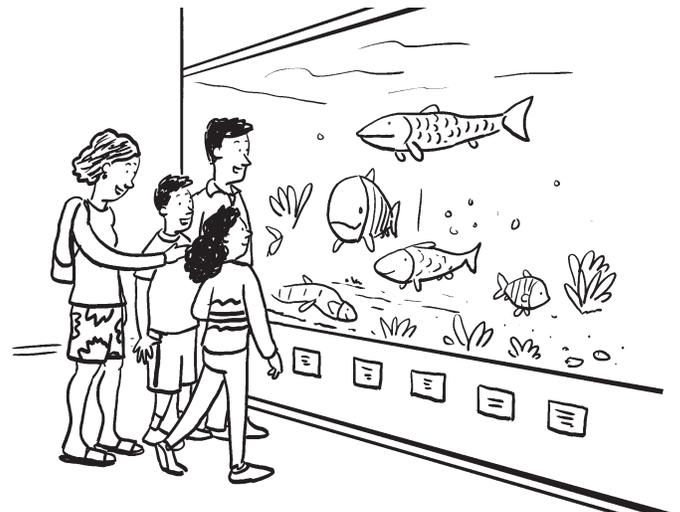
- Offer to help her answer her own questions when she gets stuck. If she asks, “What’s the difference between a physical change and a chemical change?” you can say, “Let’s read the chapter together and see if you can spot it.”
- Review homework together to make sure it’s complete. Let your youngster find mistakes herself. For instance, if she notices a math error, have her show you how she did the problem.
- Give her time on the family computer when she needs it for homework, or take her to the library to use a computer there.
- When your youngster chooses extracurricular activities, have her consider her homework load. Remind her to allow extra hours for projects and tests as she weighs her options.

Note: If your middle grader is struggling with homework, call or email her teacher. He will have ideas to help.

Keep it interesting

Encourage your tween to vary the way he does homework by adding a dose of fun. Try these tips:

- Your middle grader could start a homework group. Having friends around will make homework more enjoyable, and he’ll learn more, too. Quizzing each other and explaining material to each other helps children remember facts.
- Suggest that your youngster view assignments from a different angle. He might present an oral history report like a newscaster doing the evening news. Or he could turn a book report into an email exchange between two characters. *Note:* Make sure he checks with his teacher before taking a new approach.



- Plan a family activity to celebrate the end of a big assignment. For example, visit an aquarium when your child finishes a science project on sea life.
- Involve the whole family with games like “Social Studies Jeopardy.” Have your tween write answers and questions on index cards and act as the host. Making the cards and checking answers are great ways to study.
- Have your middle schooler take breaks, especially when tackling long or tough assignments. He might work for 30 minutes and then stop for 10 minutes to move around or eat a healthy snack.
- Find different places to do homework. Try the library, a coffee shop, the bookstore, or outside by a stream. Or see if your school, community center, library, or YMCA offers homework clubs.

Middle Years

Partner with Your Child's School

Middle schoolers may be more independent than they were in elementary school, but that doesn't mean they don't need their parents. Being a part of your youngster's schooling will show her you care and help her succeed. Use these tips to stay involved in her learning—and in the loop with her school.



Keep in touch

The key to creating a good partnership with your child's school is communicating with the principal, teachers, counselors, and other staff. Try these ideas:



- Meet teachers at open house or orientation. Then, stay connected by saying hello at school events, volunteering when possible, and responding promptly to notes and emails.
- Contact staff members before small issues grow into large ones. If your middle grader is struggling with a subject or seems overly frustrated, call the teacher. Ask what you can do to help, and look for solutions together.
- Treat school staff with the same respect you give coworkers and friends. A friendly smile and a calm tone get conversations off on the right foot.
- Let teachers know when your tween is excited about school. *Example:* Send an email saying, "Maddie really enjoyed the speaker on the United Nations. She told us all about him at dinner!" Also, thank teachers for ways they help your child.

Attend conferences

Parent-teacher conferences change in middle school. You may meet with several teachers or with a lead teacher who represents your child's teaching team. What hasn't changed, though, is the importance of attending. These suggestions will help you make the most of your conferences.

Before the conference...

List questions to take along. For instance, you might ask: "What should my child know or be able to do by the end of the year?" "How does he get along with peers and staff members?" "Do you have any concerns about him?" "Where is he doing well?"

Also, share your middle grader's strengths, weaknesses, hobbies, and interests. If the teacher knows he loves baseball, she might suggest a math project using baseball statistics. Consider telling teachers about personal news that affects your child (divorce, a parent who is deployed in the military).



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At the conference...

Listen carefully. Take notes to share with your tween or follow up on later. When it's your turn to talk, mention your most important concerns first, in case time runs out. If you need more time, ask the teacher to schedule another meeting or a phone call. Also, find out the best way to reach her (email, phone, note).

After the conference...

Talk to your middle schooler about what his teacher said. Be sure to include compliments as well as areas to improve. If your tween was at the conference, you can review the points covered. Then, let him know what you and the teacher expect of him (keep track of assignments, arrive at class on time).

Tips for supporting learning

Give your middle grader's learning a boost with these strategies to support him at home.



Ask about classes

Have your tween walk you through steps in a science experiment, notes from a geography lecture, or a summary of a book he's reading in

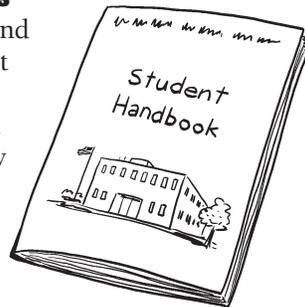
English class. Your interest will show him that his schooling matters to you, and going over the information will reinforce what he is learning.

Stay in the know

Take advantage of ways your school keeps parents informed. With your child, look at her school calendar and write important dates on your own calendar (standardized tests, school pictures). Read school newsletters and websites, and sign up for email lists. If your school offers an online grade service, check your youngster's grades often.

Read your school's policies

Your child needs to respect and follow school rules. The student handbook includes everything you need to know about school policies and procedures. Review the handbook with your middle schooler at the start of the year, and keep it on hand for reference.



Find help

Ask the school counselor about resources like learning labs or peer-to-peer tutoring. Also, teachers may be available before or after school to answer students' questions. And counselors can screen or refer students for depression or

anxiety and direct your family to contacts for housing or food assistance if needed.

Think through classes

Talk to your tween about what courses she would like to take. At this age, she'll have a choice of several electives. Classes like computers and graphic design teach important skills for the workplace. Middle-school foreign-language courses and more advanced math and science classes can lead to college-prep courses in high school.



Make use of special services

If your child has a learning disability or is an English-language learner, stay in touch with the resource teacher. Attend annual meetings if he has an IEP (Individual Education Program). Make sure your tween understands and uses the services available to him like extended time for tests, preferential seating, or extra copies of textbooks.

Stick with it

When you start and finish challenging tasks (cleaning out the attic, finishing a big report at work), you demonstrate hard work and dedication. Point out to your middle grader how good it feels to complete a job that seemed tough at the start. Your example can influence your child's attitude toward her own projects.

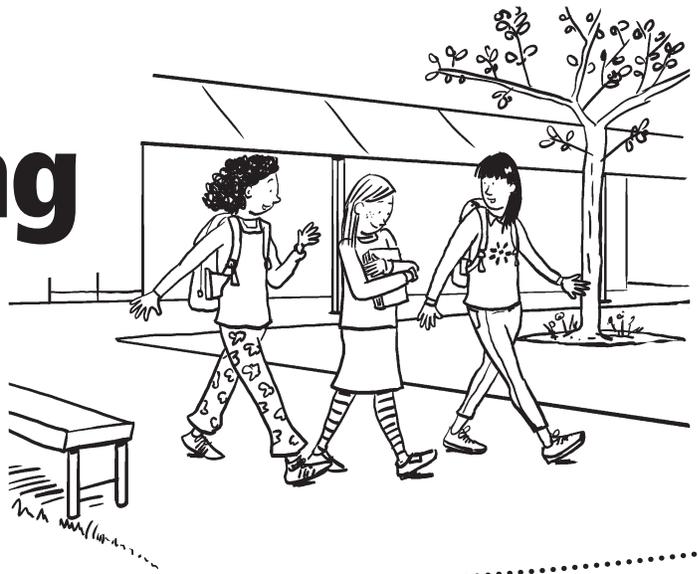
Emphasize sleep

Almost two-thirds of school-age children in the United States say they feel tired during the school day. Lack of sleep can cause them to function as much as two grade levels lower. Your tween should wake up refreshed and alert. If that's not happening, try moving his bedtime back 15 minutes at a time until you find one that works.

Middle Years

What to Do About Bullying

When a child is bullied, it affects everyone involved: the student who is targeted, the person doing the bullying, and those who witness it. Here are ways parents can help tweens stay safer by preventing or responding to bullying.



Understand bullying

Having a clear picture of what bullying is can help you recognize it and discuss it with your middle grader.

Bullying happens when a person with more power repeatedly mistreats someone physically or emotionally. The tween doing the bullying might be seen as more powerful because she's stronger or more popular, or she possesses information (including photos or videos) that could hurt someone's reputation.

The bullying itself can take many forms. These include making fun of people, name-calling, spreading rumors, sharing photos to humiliate someone, shoving and tripping, and intentionally leaving peers out to be cruel. And it may happen in person or online (cyberbullying).

Respond effectively

Whether your middle grader is a witness or is directly involved in bullying, these suggestions can make a difference.

Has your child witnessed bullying?

■ **What to do:** Your tween can offer support to the child who is being bullied. He could give the target a way out of the situation ("Want to shoot hoops with me?"), ask if he's okay, and let him know that he doesn't deserve to be bullied. Your child might offer to go with the student to tell an adult, then check up on him later to see how he's doing.



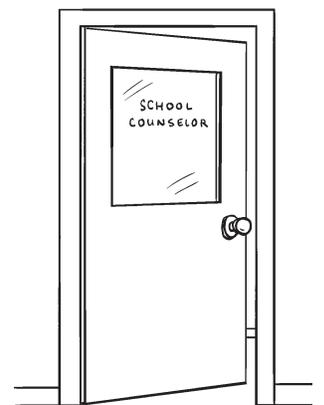
■ **What to avoid:** Your middle grader shouldn't confront a bully if she feels unsafe. Also, make sure she knows never to join in or laugh when someone is being bullied. Finally, standing by and doing nothing gives the person who is bullying an audience and sends the message that the behavior is okay.

Is your child bullying others?

■ **What to look for:** Signs your child may be participating in bullying include becoming more aggressive, hanging out with peers who bully, or getting into fights. He might come home with unexplained belongings or money, and express excessive worry about being popular.

■ **What to do:** If you find out that your tween has bullied someone, let her know you won't tolerate it. Talk about why she may be bullying, whether it's because she's jealous of someone or wants to fit in with a certain group. Then, set consequences that help her learn why bullying is wrong. Perhaps she could read books or articles about bullying, then write about what she learned and share it with you. Have her write a sincere apology to the target or replace damaged belongings.

■ **What to avoid:** It's important not to dismiss bullying as a normal part of growing up. Also, don't excuse his behavior because he's dealing with stress or going through a difficult time. The school counselor could help him with issues or emotions that are fueling the bullying.





■ **What to do:** If your tween is being targeted, let her know it's not her fault and that she's not alone. Explain that she has the right to be safe and that you will support her. Write down specific details, including when and where incidents took place and who was involved. Then, share the information with the school counselor, and find out what he will do and what steps you should take. As time goes by, check in with your child and the counselor to make sure the bullying has stopped.

■ **What to avoid:** Don't encourage your middle schooler to stand up to the bully, since doing so could put him in danger or, if he fights back, lead to his being disciplined at school. Also, don't simply ignore the bullying and assume it will stop on its own. Finally, resist the urge to contact the bully or his parents directly. Instead, let the school communicate with them.

Is your middle grader being bullied?

■ **What to look for:** Stay in touch with your tween by having regular conversations with him, and keep an eye out for warning signs. A child who is bullied might want to avoid school or friends. He may have falling grades, lost or damaged belongings, unexplained injuries, stomachaches or headaches, or trouble sleeping. Bullying can also lead to anxiety, depression, or self-injury like cutting.



A bullying "antidote"

Tweens who understand others' feelings and show kindness to people are less likely to bully—and more likely to stand up for those who are bullied. Try these tips to raise a child who is empathetic and kind.

Encourage empathy

Have your middle grader pay attention to her own emotions and those of others. Being aware of feelings may make her less likely to participate in bullying. Say she mentions that a friend didn't get chosen for a team at school. You might say, "Your friend must feel disappointed." Then, suggest that she show empathy by taking action. For example, she could plan to do a special activity with her friend to make her feel better.



Foster kindness

Teaching your middle grader to care about people can help prevent bullying. As part of everyday life, look for small acts of kindness to do together. You might run an errand for a sick neighbor. Or get a card for a relative you don't see often, just to let her know you're thinking of her. Consider finding ways to volunteer, like sorting donations at a food bank or babysitting during English-language classes at the library. Also, encourage your tween to show kindness in school by reaching out to students who are often alone or who struggle in class. Perhaps he'll invite someone to run laps with him during PE or to study together after school.

Middle Years