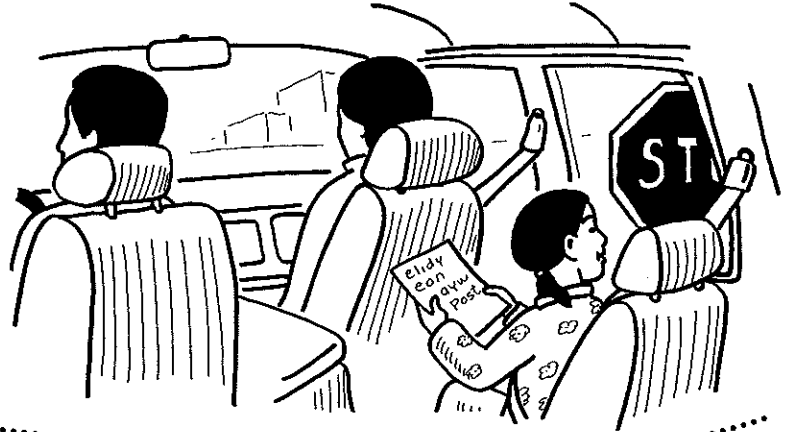


# Let's Break for Learning

Learning can happen every day, whether your child is reading at the breakfast table, looking up at the moon, or playing on a jungle gym. Here are some fun activities that can help your youngster with reading, writing, math, science, and social studies.



## Breakfast read-a-thon



Add a taste of reading to your child's breakfast. Have him draw a circular "track" on a piece of paper and divide it into 26 sections—one

for each "mile" of his book marathon. (Note: A real marathon is 26.2 miles.) Depending on your youngster's age and reading level, each of his "miles" could be a page or a chapter of a book. Then, he can read at breakfast each morning and color in a section for each page or chapter he reads. How many reading marathons can he complete?

## Money minute

Let your child use spare change to practice addition and money skills. Name an amount that's less than \$1 (say, 16 cents). She tries to use the fewest number of coins to make that amount (1 dime, 1 nickel, 1 penny). Then, she can make the amount using the most coins (16 pennies) or using different combinations (3 nickels and 1 penny, 2 nickels and 6 pennies).

## Where is my team?

Give your youngster an excuse to learn a little geography while he's watching his favorite team play. Help him look up the city where they are playing on a map or in an atlas. What can he tell about the *topography* (geographic features) of the area? (Perhaps it is mountainous or flat.) For an extra challenge, have him use the mileage scale to find out how far away the game is from your hometown. *Variation:* Help a younger child locate the state where the team is playing.

## Road-sign scramble

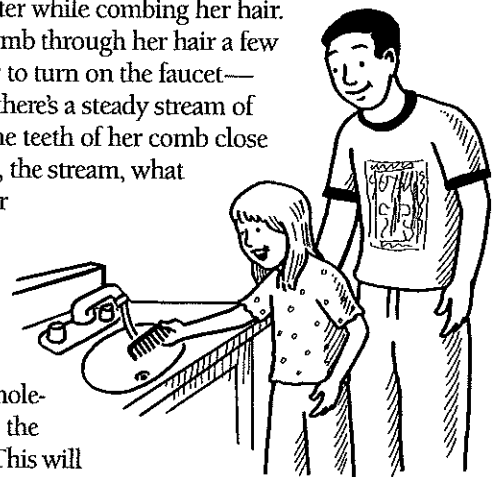
Make a quick word scramble for your child before you go someplace in the car. Think of a few signs you might see (*yield, one way, stop*), and scramble each word or phrase on a piece of paper (*elidy eon ayw post*). Have your youngster take the paper along and try to spot the signs to help her unscramble the words. As she plays, she'll practice word recognition and spelling skills.

## Draw the moon

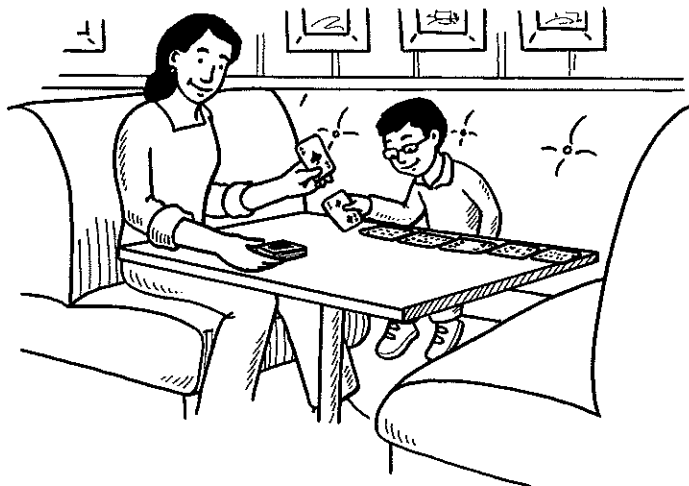
This project will show your youngster how the moon changes from night to night. Just before bed, have him look out a window at the moon. Let him draw what he sees on a sheet of paper. After doing this every clear night for a week or two, what does he notice? (The moon's shape is slightly different each night.)

## Bending water

This science experiment lets your child bend a stream of water while combing her hair. Have her pull the comb through her hair a few times. Then, ask her to turn on the faucet—just enough so that there's a steady stream of water. If she holds the teeth of her comb close to, but not touching, the stream, what happens? (The water bends toward the comb.) That's because the comb is charged with static electricity from her hair, and the water molecules are attracted to the charged comb. *Tip:* This will work better on a dry day.



continued

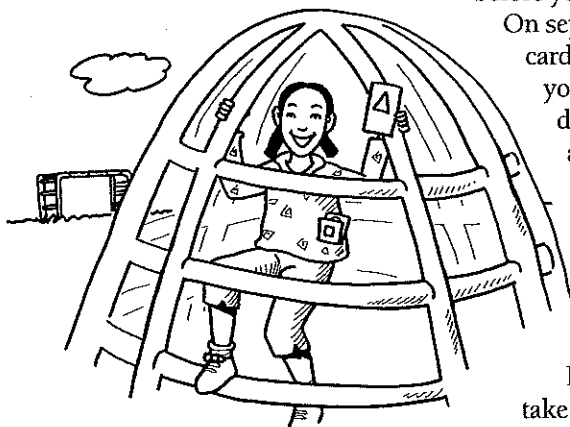


**Measure it**

Going to a restaurant? Take along a deck of cards (or pad of sticky notes). Your youngster can work on measurement and estimation while you're waiting for your food. Ask him to measure the table, menu, chair, and other items—with the cards. Before he starts, have him estimate the length. ("How many cards long do you think this table is?") Then, he can line up cards end to end to check his guess and tell you how many he used. ("This table is 24 cards long.")

**Outdoor geometry**

Shapes, angles, lines ... the playground is full of opportunities to discover geometry. Make a geometry scavenger hunt before your next visit.



On separate index cards, you and your child can draw shapes and geometric figures (circle, square, rectangle, triangle, right angle, parallel lines). Then,

take the cards with you to the playground—can she find each one? For example, the legs of the swing set form a triangle, and the ladder on the slide has parallel lines.

**Rubber-band race**

Try this contest to see which family member can make a rubber band fly the farthest. Your youngster will get a lesson in motion and energy. Making sure to stay a safe distance apart, have each person slip a rubber band over his finger, pull it back, and let go to launch it across the yard. Ask your child

what happens if he barely stretches it (it doesn't go very far) or if he stretches it as far as possible (it flies farther). Explain that the more he stretches the band, the more energy he gives it, and the farther it will go.

**Memory cards**

While sorting through outgrown clothing or toys, give your child a reason to write. Suggest that she fill an index card with a memory about the item she has outgrown. ("I remember wearing these jeans to go fishing with Daddy. I caught my first catfish on that trip.") If the outfit will be handed down to a younger sibling or cousin, she can share the memory card—maybe the recipient will be able to add her own memory, and a family heirloom will be created!

**Video history**

Family movie night can encourage your youngster to explore history. Look for family movies set in other time periods (for example, *Mary Poppins* takes place in 1910). Together, compare how things are in the movie with how they are now. You could also encourage your child to learn about historical events that happened in the same time period by reading library books or searching online at a website like *brainy history.com*.

**Idea notebook**

When you're on the go, use everyday opportunities to help your child discover new interests—and boost his motivation to read about them. For instance, he might be fascinated by a snake he spots at the pet store or curious about black-and-white photography he sees at an art fair. Suggest that he keep track of these new interests in a notebook. Then, he could use the notes to help him select books at the library.



**What's cooking?**

Your youngster can practice descriptive writing by making a dinner menu for your family. Show her a few take-out menus or online menus so she can see how foods are described ("A thick slice of creamy cheesecake topped with plump, juicy strawberries"). Then, let her know what's for dinner and have her draw pictures and write descriptions of each course ("Fresh green salad with ripe cherry tomatoes and sweet, tangy raspberry dressing"). She can post her menu on the refrigerator or write it on a chalkboard.

# Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



## Short Stops

### Check your mail

What's in the bulk mail that arrives in your mailbox?

Opportunities for your child to discover writing strategies! What was the writer's purpose? (To persuade you to buy something, to inform you about an issue.) How did he achieve that purpose? (With facts, statistics, or words appealing to emotions.) Ask your tween if the strategies worked: Does he want the product or agree with the position?

### Sun smart

Encourage your child to be smart about outdoor safety habits this summer. Have her drink lots of water to stay hydrated—when she's thirsty, with meals, and while she's active outside. Also, make sure she knows to wear sunscreen even on cool, overcast days, since harmful UV rays still come through.

### Well-earned thanks

A simple thank you from students and parents means a lot to teachers, staff members, and coaches. Your middle grader could hand-deliver a card saying what he has learned from them. And you might send an email mentioning why you're grateful the person was in your child's life this year.

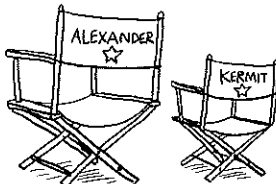
### Worth quoting

"In summer, the song sings itself."  
William Carlos Williams

### Just for fun

**Q:** What do Alexander the Great and Kermit the Frog have in common?

**A:** Their middle name!



## Keep on learning

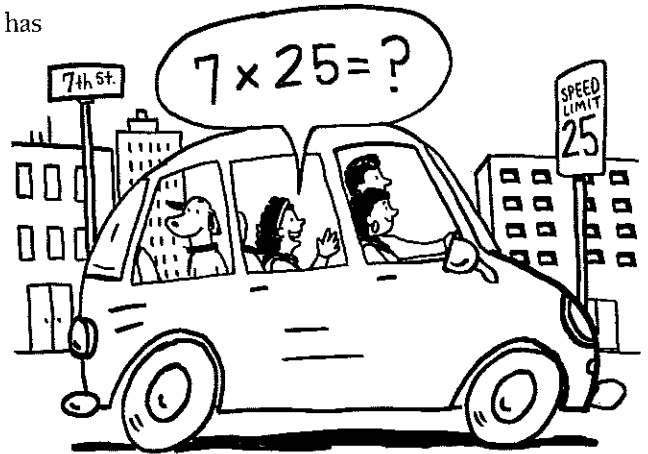
Year in review: Your child has learned a lot in many different subjects, from language arts to math to science. Flash forward: By practicing skills during summertime, she can hang onto what she learned and gain even more knowledge. Try these ideas.

### Read across the map

Print out a United States map, and hang it in a hallway. As a family, set a goal of coloring in every state by reading books or articles that take place there or mention it. If your tween reads a novel that's set in Arizona or you read a magazine article about sightseeing in Georgia, fill in those states. *Idea:* At summer's end, encourage her to pick a state and write her own tale about it.

### Take math on the road

Have your middle schooler practice doing math in her head with this car-trip activity. Suggest that she add, subtract, multiply, or divide numbers she spots along the way. If she sees a sign for 7th Street and a 25 mph speed limit, she might multiply  $7 \times 25$  or divide 25 by 7.



To turn it into a game, let her call out the problem. The first person to answer correctly gives the next equation.

### Create a science spot

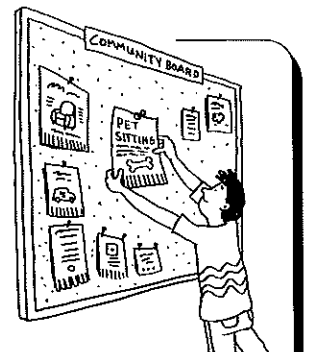
Designate a corner for storing odds and ends—say, cardboard, index cards, and aluminum foil. When your tween says, "I'm bored," see if she can figure out ways to use them in a science experiment or engineering project. Cardboard tubes could become a marble "roller coaster" to test gravity. Aluminum foil and index cards might be engineered into a shiny skyscraper. Have her research ideas online or in books. 🙌

## "I'm a CEO"

Starting a business in middle school brings job experience and the chance to earn money. Help your middle grader tap into his inner entrepreneur with these tips.

■ **Find a niche.** What does he like to do? What is he good at? Maybe he loves animals and would enjoy walking or feeding pets. Perhaps he is strong in math and could tutor younger children in multiplication and division.

■ **Advertise.** Suggest that he make flyers to place on community bulletin boards or distribute to neighbors. He should tell relatives and friends about his business and ask them to pass the word along, too. 🙌



# Foster loyalty

You want your middle schooler to be a good friend and a good student. Learning to be loyal will help him do both. Here's how.

**With friends.** Watch for opportunities to bring up what loyalty looks like in friendships. For example, if he mentions that a buddy said something mean about another friend, ask what a loyal person would do (defend his pal by



pointing out a different viewpoint). Also, share examples from your own life. Perhaps you were invited to an event and really wanted to go, but you stayed loyal to the friend you had already made plans with.

**At school.** Your child's school is his community, and being loyal to it influences his success there. Help shape his attitude by letting him hear you speak positively about his school and the teachers. To foster school pride,

encourage him to attend after-school events like pep rallies and art shows, even if his "crowd" isn't involved. He'll show loyalty not only to his school but also to the students who are participating. 👍

# A natural explorer

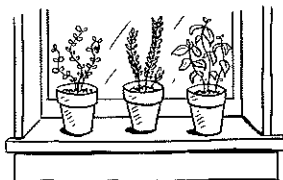
Spending time with nature helps your tween connect what she's learning in school to real life—and can even boost her critical and creative thinking. Share these strategies.

## Be a nature reporter

What kinds of plants, trees, and animals live in your area? Suggest that your middle grader start a journal to record what she sees. She could sketch and label objects and living things, describing where and when she saw crabapple trees or chipmunks, for instance. Encourage her to research anything she doesn't recognize and share what she learns.

## Plant an herb garden

Your child can dig into herbs by planting her own. In the process, she'll learn how they can be used and what conditions they grow best in. She might create a themed garden—say, a "Mexican Food" garden with cilantro and oregano. Have her ask neighbors for clippings or look for inexpensive seeds in stores. Then, she could plant them in small pots to place on a windowsill or outdoors. 👍



# Parent to Parent

## Handling the end-of-year rush

The last couple months of the school year have become one of our family's busiest times. I love being involved in my sons' activities. But between Brad's band events, Josh's tennis team commitments, and my work schedule, it's hard to keep up.

This year, I wanted us to head into the final stretch better prepared. We started going over the kids' schedules each week to plan ahead. I let them know what I would attend—and whether I could drive them or they'd need to arrange rides.

Last week I swapped my night shift with a coworker so I could go to Brad's band concert. But since I had to work the day of Josh's team car wash, I sent in snacks and checked with him afterward to see how it went. Even if I can't be at everything, my boys know I care about what they're doing. And so far, I feel more on top of things. 👍



# Q&A Ready, set, exercise!

**Q** I want our family to be more active, but my tween says exercise is boring. What are some fun ways to get moving?

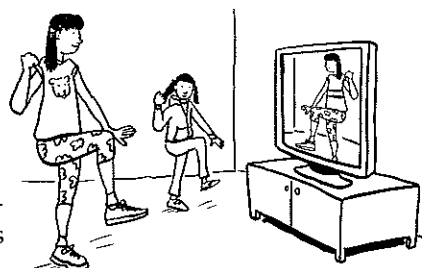
**A** Your child may like starring in a family fitness video. Tape video clips of each other leading workout moves to music.

You'll be active while you make it, and you can play it back anytime and follow along. You could even create different kinds of fitness videos—one set to

slow music for stretching or yoga poses and another to high-energy music for cardio or intervals.

Also, instead of trying to exercise 60 minutes at once, try weaving in a few minutes of activity here and there. Consider having your child assign different exercises to each room.

She might put a sticky note in the bathroom: "March in place while brushing your teeth!" Or she could place soup cans in the living room to use as weights while watching TV. 👍



## 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  
800-394-5052 • rfeustomer@wolterskluwer.com  
www.rfeonline.com  
ISSN 1540-5540