

Home & School CONNECTION[®]

Working Together for School Success

November



Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic School
Jenny Hetzler, School Counselor

SHORT NOTES

Take good notes

Help your youngster practice note taking with this idea. During a family discussion, appoint him as secretary. Explain that he doesn't have to write every word that's said, and he can use abbreviations and symbols. Instead of "We are going to Katie's chorus concert on Friday at 7 p.m.," he could write, "Katie's chorus Fri @ 7."

Dress for the weather

Your child will enjoy winter recess more—and get more exercise—if she's warm enough. Plan ahead by making sure she has a winter coat, mittens or gloves, a hat, and boots. *Note:* If your family needs assistance getting these items, let the school counselor know, and she may be able to help.

Make your own audio books

Would your youngster like a collection of audio books? Encourage him to record himself reading favorite stories aloud. He can practice using expression by trying a different voice for the narrator and for each character. Then, he'll be able to play back the recordings whenever he wants to listen.

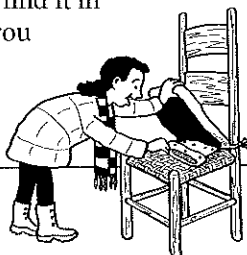
Worth quoting

"The beautiful thing about learning is that no one can take it away from you." *B.B. King*

JUST FOR FUN

Q: When you lose something, why do you always find it in the last place you looked?

A: Because once you find it, you stop looking!



Parent-teacher conference FAQ

Whether this will be your first parent-teacher conference or you've already been to several, these answers to common questions will help you get the most out of your meeting.

Q: What should we expect at a typical conference?

A: The teacher will tell you what your child does well, show you work samples, and go over any problems. She may also explain how she's helping your child and suggest things to try at home. Plus, you can share information about your youngster.

Q: How can I prepare for our meeting?

A: It's helpful to write down questions ahead of time. You could ask about schoolwork, your child's behavior, and how she gets along with others. Also, include anything your youngster wants you to discuss.

Q: My child isn't having problems in school. Do I still need to attend the conference?

A: Yes! A conference lets you talk one-on-one with your youngster's teacher and hear how your child is doing. And



it strengthens your relationship with the teacher so it will be easier to reach out to her in the future.

Q: I'm nervous about going into the school and talking to the teacher. How can I feel more comfortable?

A: Keep in mind that the teacher wants you to be her partner in your child's education. Knowing that you are welcome—and needed—may help you feel confident. Arrive early so you're not rushed, and arrange child care (perhaps swap with another parent) so you can talk without distractions.♥

Explain your math thinking

"I know that $3 \times 26 = 78$ because 3 quarters = 75 cents, plus 3 more pennies = 78 cents!" When your youngster explains how he solved a math problem, it helps the process become more automatic for him. Encourage him with these ideas.

Talk. Let your child hear you do math out loud when you calculate a tip or estimate how long a car trip will take. He'll discover different ways of solving problems and learn that math thinking is an important part of everyday life.

Listen. When your youngster finishes his math homework, pick a random problem, and ask him to explain how he figured it out. Talking it through will deepen his understanding of math concepts—and it may help him correct any errors or find a more efficient method.♥



Steps to project success

School is full of projects, from science experiments to social studies reports and more. No matter what kind of project your youngster has, these steps can help him do his best.

1. Pick a topic. Your child will enjoy his project and learn more if his topic interests him. If the teacher assigns a project about the Middle Ages, a Lego fanatic could build a castle to use in his presentation, for instance.

2. Do research. Encourage your youngster to become an expert on his topic, whether he's experimenting with simple machines or researching state history. He should do this by

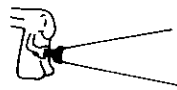


reading various sources, such as nonfiction books, textbook chapters, magazine articles, and websites.

3. Make visuals “pop.” A bright background in his rain forest diorama or a colorful bar graph on his science project poster will catch his teacher's eye. But visuals must also be neat and accurate—for example, he wouldn't include an elephant in his rain forest.

4. Review and rehearse. Have your child look over his project carefully to make sure he addressed all the requirements. If he has to present it to the class, let him practice in front of you so he'll work out the kinks and feel confident.♥

ACTIVITY CORNER



My name, your name

Your child's name is a big part of her identity. Encourage her to explore it with these activities that help her learn about culture, history, and geography:

- Tell your youngster the story of her name—why and how you chose it. Perhaps she is named after a relative or the name is important in your religion. Then, let her look it up in a baby-name book or online.



- Have your child research relatives' and classmates' names. She will discover what the names mean and what countries they're from. Together, find the countries on a map.

- Visit ssa.gov/oact/babynames to see the most popular baby names by year. For example, John and Mary were number one a century ago, while last year it was Noah and Emma. Build thinking skills by asking “Why do certain names become popular?” or “Why do you think Noah and Emma are most common now?”♥

Q & A

In control of fears

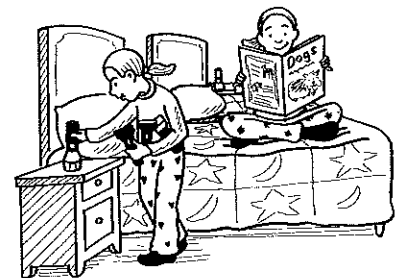
Q: I have twin girls. Suddenly, one is scared of storms, and the other is afraid of dogs. What should I do?

A: Fears are normal for kids—typical ones include bugs, the dark, and doctors, as well as storms and dogs. The good news is that most childhood fears go away over time. Try talking to your girls about their fears and coming up with strategies so they feel more in control.

With your daughter who fears storms, discuss ways your family prepares for weather emergencies. Then, let her do a specific task like gathering flashlights and placing one in each room.

You could have your other twin check out library books about dogs. Often, being more knowledgeable about something can make it less frightening.

Note: If either girl's anxiety interferes with sleep or schoolwork, talk to her doctor.♥



PARENT TO PARENT

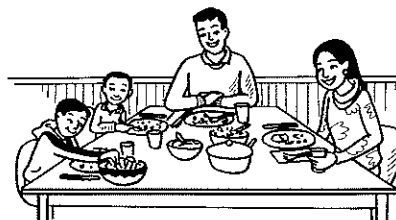
A bowl full of thanks

As we were discussing our Thanksgiving plans, my son Bradley remembered our tradition of going around the table and saying what we're thankful for. Then he asked a good question: Why do we only talk about being thankful one day a year?

His question led to what we hope will become a new year-round tradition. Once a week before dinner, we each get a slip of paper and write one thing that made us feel thankful

that week, such as a delicious lunch or seeing an old friend. We put the slips in a bowl. Then, we take turns pulling out a slip and reading it aloud—and everyone tries to guess who wrote it.

We have only done this twice so far, but Bradley said that now he regularly thinks about what he's thankful for so he has something to share at dinner. And it's fun to guess why others are thankful!♥



OUR PURPOSE

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

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Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

A+ feedback

When your middle grader gives a classmate feedback (say, on a presentation or a rough draft of a report), encourage him to be positive *and* honest. First, he could tell what he liked (“Your opening really grabbed my attention”). Then, he should offer suggestions for improvement (“Try adding transition words”). Giving constructive criticism may help your child accept feedback on his work, too.

Just you and me

Carve out one-on-one time with your tween while you tackle your to-do list this holiday season. Write down everything that needs to be done, and let her choose some tasks to work on with you. You might, for example, make table centerpieces and napkin rings or address greeting cards together.

Spatial reasoning

The ability to visualize shapes, sizes, and positions of objects is an important thinking skill. Give your middle schooler practice by having him load the dishwasher, bag groceries at the self-checkout, or pack items in boxes. He'll have to picture what could go where and how everything will fit.

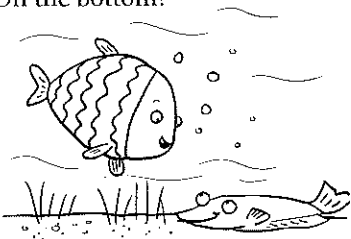
Worth quoting

“Don't count the days, make the days count.” *Muhammad Ali*

Just for fun

Q: Where is the ocean the deepest?

A: On the bottom!



Study smart

Good study skills let your tween accomplish more each time she studies—and they prepare her for high school and college. Suggest that she try these different ways to study and stick with the ones that work best.

Rewrite material

After your child reviews notes or completes assigned reading, writing the information in a different format will help her learn and remember it. She might be creative and make up a song about the parts of the nervous system or write a poem using vocabulary terms. Or she could teach the information to a peer by writing key information on a small whiteboard or chalkboard.

Picture it

Suggest that your middle grader think of a way to turn information into something visual. That can help her make sense of it. She may draw a picture with arrows to show steps in the water cycle, a bar graph to display income statistics



for an economics project, or a chart to compare two novels by the same author.

Make your own tests

Testing herself on what she learns will show your student what she knows and what she needs to review. Encourage her to create a test using old worksheets or quizzes and her textbook. She can check her answers and grade herself. Or she could think of and answer essay questions. *Idea:* Suggest that she team up with a friend and make up tests for each other to do. 👍

Conferences are worth attending

Now that your child is in middle school, parent-teacher conferences may be different from what you're used to. Here's what to expect:

- You'll get an overview of how your tween is doing in each subject. If you meet with one teacher who shares notes from a team, ask about scheduling a follow-up conference with a particular teacher if you'd like more information or have concerns.

- You may discover interests or talents you didn't know your youngster has, and the teacher might recommend electives for next year that let him use and develop these strengths.

- Find out how your child interacts with teachers and peers. For example, you could ask about how he works with classmates. 👍



How math adds up

Math isn't just for math class. Knowing how to use numbers will benefit your middle grader in his other courses, too. Share these ideas.

Social studies

When your child makes a time line of historical events or uses coordinates to locate a city on a map, he's doing math. Here's a fun way to combine math and social studies at home: Encourage him to watch this month's election-night coverage and figure out which combinations of states would lead to the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency. Or have him hold a mock election among friends



and family members, and calculate the percentage of votes each state or local candidate receives.

Science

In science class, your middle grader will measure liquids for experiments, figure out speed and velocity, and graph results.

In fact, most science experiments involve math in some way. Remind him to double-check formulas and calculations on lab reports—just as he would check his work in math class. He will see the connection between what he's learning in algebra, geometry, or regular math class and what he's doing in science. ☺

Parent to Parent

A jarful of gratitude

Sometimes I feel like my 12-year-old son, Brock, takes things for granted, like the rides I give him or the Internet I pay for. For example, he won't be ready when it's time to leave or he'll complain that a friend has faster Internet. A neighbor shared an idea her family uses to remember what they're thankful for, and I decided to try it.

I had Brock cut colored construction paper into squares and stack them near an empty glass jar. In the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving, I asked everyone to pay attention to small things they appreciated. Each time they noticed something, they could write it on a square and drop it into the jar.



Before our holiday meal, we are going to pass the jar around and have everyone read a square. Then, we're going to start a new jar for each month so Brock learns that being thankful isn't just for Thanksgiving. ☺



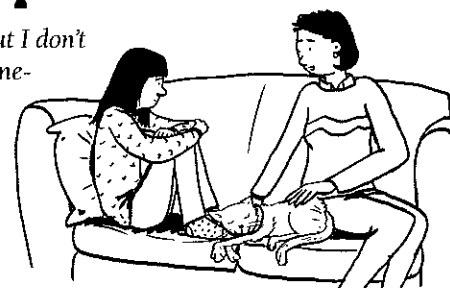
Q & A

Tween blues—or depression?

Q My daughter seems down lately, but I don't know if it's normal mood swings or something more serious. How can I tell?

A Mood swings are a normal part of adolescence. But if your child is sad or irritable for more than a couple of weeks—and if it interferes with her regular activities—she may be depressed. Other clues include withdrawing from friends and family, frequent headaches or stomachaches, or sleeping too much or not enough.

Point out what you've noticed by saying something like, "You seem kind of quiet lately." If she says she feels "angry at the world" or "hopeless," don't try to downplay her feelings by saying "You shouldn't feel that way" or "That's no big deal." Instead, listen and tell her you want to help. Then, contact her pediatrician or the school counselor for guidance. *Note:* If she insists nothing is wrong but symptoms continue, seek help anyway. ☺



Talking without screens

Face-to-face communication can fall by the wayside if your tween sticks to texting or chatting on screens. By actually talking to people, she will build interpersonal skills and pay attention to the world around her. Consider this advice:

■ Make screens off-limits for everyone—parents included—during meals or while riding in the car. This will get your child talking to the people she's with, rather than those "inside her phone."

■ If your middle grader participates in activities after school, she'll naturally spend more time talking to friends than in texting them. For instance, if she

works for the school newspaper, she will interview classmates or toss around article ideas with fellow staff members. ☺



OUR PURPOSE

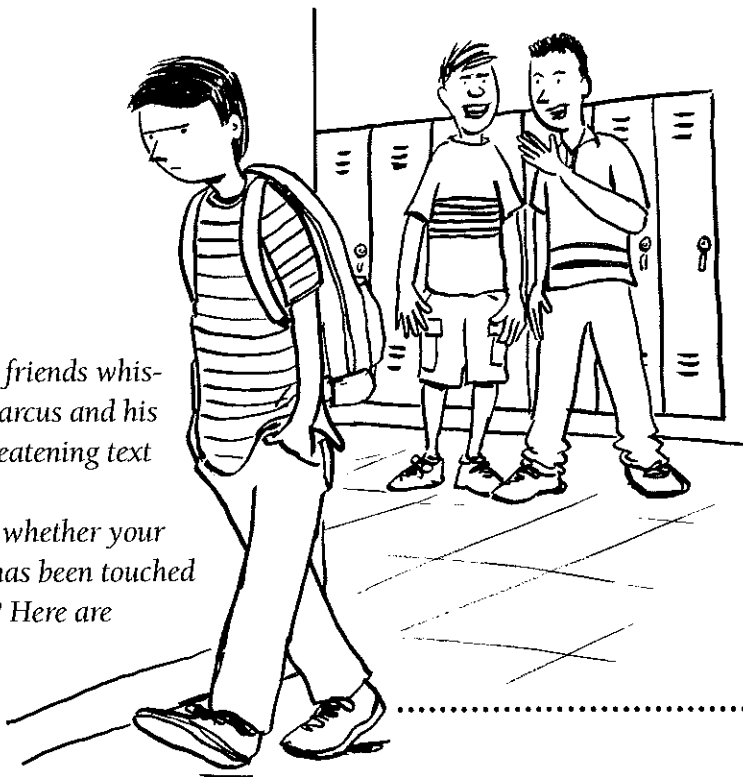
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Bullying Q&As

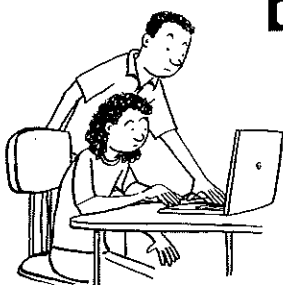
Lisa sits quietly at the “popular” lunch table while her friends whisper about an overweight classmate. On the school bus, Marcus and his buddies push a younger boy off his seat. Ellie receives threatening text messages from her ex-boyfriend.

These middle graders are all affected by bullying. And whether your child is a witness, a bully, or a victim, it's likely that she has been touched by the problem at some point, too. What can a parent do? Here are answers to common questions about bullying.



Q What is bullying?

A Bullying ranges from rejection (“This table isn’t for geeks”) to physical attacks like pushing and punching. It also includes spreading rumors, threats, name calling, and sexual harassment. When bullies use technology (say, by posting rumors on Facebook or sending hurtful text messages), it’s called *cyberbullying*. Usually, bullying is an ongoing problem rather than a one-time thing. Also, a bully typically has an advantage over his victim. For example, he might be more popular or physically stronger. Any form of bullying—verbal or physical—should be taken seriously.



Q I’ve been hearing a lot about bullying lately. Is it more common these days?

A Technology like text messaging and social networking has made it easier for tweens to continue harassing each other outside of school. Also, the problem is getting more attention as we learn about its serious consequences

for both bullies and victims. For instance, a child who bullies is more likely to get into trouble with the law as an adult. And being a victim can lead to increased school absences, falling grades, depression, low self-esteem, and dropping out. In some tragic cases, bullying has been tied to school violence and even suicide.

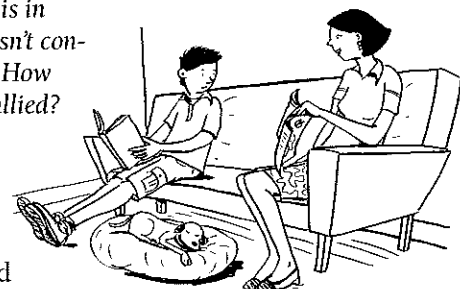
Q What motivates a bully?

A Experts used to believe that most bullies had low self-esteem and that they hurt others to feel better about themselves. While

this does happen, popular children can also be bullies. They’re motivated by social power, and they take advantage of less popular children to gain even more power. For example, a well-liked middle schooler might decide who gets invited to parties or where other kids can sit at lunch. If a classmate doesn’t do what she says, she might push or threaten the other child or call her names.

Q Now that my son is in middle school, he doesn’t confide in me very often. How will I know if he is bullied?

A It’s not unusual for children to keep bullying a secret. That’s because they’re afraid the bully will punish them for telling or because they’re ashamed of themselves for being picked on. Try bringing up the subject with your son. You might show him a newspaper or magazine article about bullying. Mention that it’s a common problem, and ask if it’s going on at his school and whether he feels safe. Also, know the risk factors—children are bullied for being overweight, having a disability, or seeming different, or because of their sexual orientation. Finally, be aware of warning signs. A victim might begin to spend more time alone, ask to stay home from school, or even experiment with dangerous behaviors (drinking alcohol, using drugs, having sex). If you suspect your youngster is being picked on, talk to the school counselor for advice.



continued

Middle Years

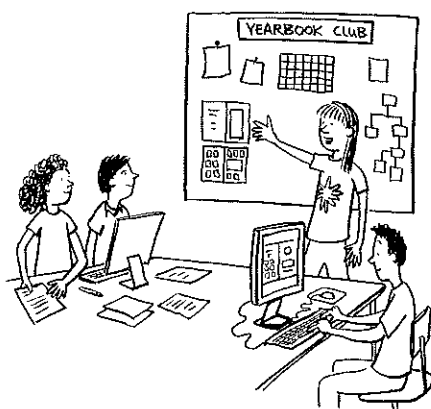
Q What should my child do if she sees someone being bullied?

A Bullies love a crowd, so the best thing your middle grader can do is to pay attention to the victim and ignore the bully. If someone is being physically attacked, your youngster should tell the nearest adult. If a classmate is being teased, she might walk up and give the victim an excuse to escape (“Hey, we gotta go” or “Mrs. Jackson needs to see you in her office”). Keep in mind that it’s normal to be afraid to step in. It’s important for your youngster to remember that a child who is being bullied is probably scared and upset and wants help.

Q My son’s school counselor called and said he’s part of a group that’s bullying a boy in the cafeteria. We have a meeting at school this week. How should we react?

A First, get your son’s side of the story. Tell him about the phone call, and ask for an explanation. If he admits to participating in bullying, let him know that his behavior is unacceptable, and tell him what the consequence will be at home (the school will likely have its own consequence). Also, help your child become more empathetic. Talk regularly about others’ feelings (“Your sister is disappointed that she didn’t make the drill team, so let’s try to cheer her up”), and consider getting involved in community service as a family.

Q My daughter has been unhappy lately. She finally told me it’s because some of her friends have become more popular, and now they say she isn’t “cool enough” for them. Is there anything I can do?



A You can explain to your daughter that friendships change as kids get older. But let her know that you understand it doesn’t make things easier now. Although she might not be able to change these girls’ behavior,

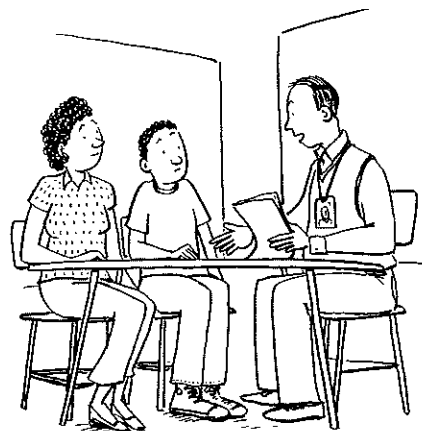
she can seek out other friends. For instance, she might join an after-school activity (yearbook, field hockey) where she can find classmates who share her interests. In the meantime, ask a librarian to help you find books about tweens who struggle



to make friends. Knowing that other middle schoolers go through the same thing can help her feel less alone, and she might learn about strategies for building friendships.

Q My son doesn’t want to go to school because kids tease him about his learning disability. And he doesn’t want me to talk to his teachers or school counselor about it. How can I help him?

A Let your son know this isn’t something he should have to handle alone. Perhaps he’ll let you write an email to his school counselor that doesn’t name the bullies but asks for help. (“What resources do you have for children who are bullied?”) The counselor’s reply might help him feel comfortable sharing. Also, since most bullying takes place when adults aren’t looking, encourage your son to stay with a friend or a group in “hot spots” like the bus, bathroom, cafeteria, or hallways. *Tip:* Have him practice assertive body language (standing up straight, looking others in the eye). This can send the message to the bullies that he isn’t an easy target.



Q A classmate has been spreading rumors about my daughter on Facebook. What can we do?

A The first step is to help your daughter block the student from her account. Although this won’t stop the bully from posting rumors on other people’s pages, knowing that your child is ignoring her might encourage her to stop. That’s because cyberbullies enjoy the drama of posting and getting reactions. If the problem continues, you might consider contacting the bully’s parents if you feel comfortable doing so. Or the school counselor might suggest peer mediation. In the meantime, keeping an eye on your daughter’s online activities can help protect her. Try putting your computer in a common area so you can see what she’s doing. Some parents insist that their child “friend” them as a condition of joining a social networking site. Finally, remind your daughter never to share her password with anyone.

Middle Years