Laughing together
Telling jokes with your youngster is a fun way to build family bonds. And jokes that involve wordplay can boost his vocabulary. Look for joke books at the library, and take turns reading aloud from them. If he doesn’t “get” a joke, explain the different meanings of the words—he’ll see that a bigger vocabulary means bigger laughs!

Motivated ’til the last day
It might be a challenge for your child to stay focused as the school year winds down. Inspire her to continue doing her best by having her compare a journal entry or math test from the beginning of the year with a recent one. Seeing how far she has come may motivate her to keep going.

Wear your seat belt
Before you drive away, remind everyone in your car to buckle up—and check riders in the backseat. Don’t allow youngsters to place shoulder belts behind their backs, and set an example by always wearing yours correctly. Also, tell your child to buckle up in other people’s cars, even if the driver doesn’t insist.

Worth quoting
“The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

Summer learning: Anytime, anywhere

School may be out, but learning is not! Encourage your child to keep learning all summer long with these ideas for at home or on the go.

Whiteboard in a bag
Here’s a tool your youngster can use everywhere. Let her make a “whiteboard” by sliding white paper into a gallon-sized zipper bag. Drop in washable markers and a small package of wipes. You might give her words to spell or math problems to solve. Or have her draw and write about what she sees out the car window. She can write on the sealed bag, use the wipes to erase, and start again.

Show-and-tell table
Set aside a small table where family members can share discoveries. For instance, your child could bring back an interesting rock from a walk or take a photo of an unusual insect on the back porch. Or you might add a news article about a cool invention. Keep the table going all summer—talk about the items, rotate them, and learn together.

Reading staycations
Together, dream up imaginary vacations to take at home, and read fiction and nonfiction books to go with your choices. For example, make a tent with chairs and a sheet, and read about camping. Or wear leis and flowered shirts while enjoying a story set on a tropical island. Your youngster may even like to “time travel” to ancient Egypt with books on hieroglyphics. Note: Ask your child’s teacher or a librarian for book suggestions.

For the teacher...

These teacher-appreciation projects are a fun way to wrap up the year, and they will teach your youngster to think of others:

- Get a plastic craft or tackle box with different-sized compartments. Let your child fill it with dollar-store treats his teacher would like, such as travel-size lotion, sticky notes, or lip balm. Then, he can decorate the lid with “Thank you,” his name, and the date.

- Have him pick out a packet of flower or vegetable seeds. Suggest that he use permanent marker to personalize a flowerpot and place the seed packet inside along with a thank-you note.

Q: What invention lets you look right through a wall?
A: A window.
Raise resilient kids

Coping with changes, bouncing back from disappointment...youngsters who are resilient are able to do these things more easily. Here are everyday ways to help your child build resilience.

**Form strong connections.** Kids who have close relationships with loving adults tend to be more resilient. Regularly show affection for your youngster, and point out what’s special about him. (“You’re always so kind to animals.”) Also, show interest in activities he enjoys, whether it’s playing trumpet or collecting trading cards.

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**ACTIVITY CORNER**

**Let the story unfold**

Keep your child’s creative writing skills sharp with these activities that will hold her interest until the last line.

1. Have your youngster cut out a dozen random words or phrases from newspaper and magazine headlines. **Examples: ice age, mystery.** Let her shake them in a bag, pull out one at a time, and use them to write the lines of a story. (“Not another ice age!” Simon told his friend, “We need to solve the mystery of why it’s so cold.”) When she has used all her words, listen while she reads her tale to you.

2. Ask your child to make up a story title (say, “The Big Thunderstorm” or “The Day the Zoo Animals Escaped”). Then, she could write one part beginning, middle, or end—and have family members write the other parts. When everyone finishes, she can put the pieces together, adding transitions to connect them logically.

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**Q & A**

Q: Last year, my girls’ behavior really deteriorated over the summer. I think they were tired of being together. How can I make this summer more pleasant for everyone?

A: This is a common problem during school breaks. Even siblings who get along need space from each other.

Try to figure out “triggers”—maybe one child makes noise when her sister is on the phone or takes the last pigtails holder. Together, discuss ways to head off these situations (use the phone in another room, keep hair supplies separate).

Also, plan times for your girls to be apart. If your older child has a friend over, play a board game with your younger daughter so the big girls have time to themselves. Or if your girls start to argue, suggest that one move to the kitchen for a craft project while the other reads in the living room.

At the same time, if they find activities to enjoy together, that will make the summer more pleasant, too. They might make music videos, for instance, or take up a sport like volleyball.

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**PARENT TO PARENT**

**Community classes**

My son Eli was excited to learn about the solar system in school this year, and I want to build on his enthusiasm this summer.

We got a summer catalog in the mail from our parks and recreation department. Eli looked through it and found a few free programs about outer space. So far we’ve decided to attend a stargazing session with a local astronomer and a crafts class where kids make a mobile of the planets.

I also found a discount coupon for a planetarium, so we’re planning a day trip there the first weekend of summer break. And of course we’ll visit the library so Eli can check out books on the planets, space missions, and astronauts.

I had no idea our community had so much to offer for Eli’s new interest—looking around really paid off!
Prepare for exams
Your tween will remember more information if he studies for finals over a longer period of time rather than cramming. Suggest that he create a study schedule and stick to it. He could also join a study group to stay on track.

Words inspire confidence
The way your middle grader talks about herself can affect her self-esteem. If you hear her make a negative statement like “I can’t do this” or “I’m just not good at this,” have her turn it into a positive one. Examples: “I’ll try” or “I’m working on it.” Then, set an example by doing the same for yourself!

A first aid kit
Ask your child to make a home first aid kit. He can fill a container with bandages, gauze, adhesive tape, and antiseptic wipes. Show him how to use the supplies so he learns what to do if he or someone else is injured. Encourage him to put the kit where family members can find it easily, perhaps in the hall closet.

Worth quoting
“The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.”
Dorothy Parker

Just for fun
Teacher: How fast does light travel?
Student: I don’t know, but it sure gets here early in the morning!

Keep your brain in gear

When the school year ends, the learning doesn’t have to. Keep your tween’s mind active all summer long with ideas like these.

Take up a hobby
A hobby gives your child a meaningful way to spend time while she practices various skills. For example, knitting requires math and attention to detail. And chess promotes strategic thinking and patience. She could take a community center class or watch how-to videos. Then, suggest that she set a goal like knitting a scarf or beating you at chess before summer ends!

Explore the community
Visiting new places will build your tween’s general knowledge. You might tour a museum or hike in a state park, for instance. During your adventures, encourage her to ask a docent or ranger questions or to read signs to learn about the exhibits or wildlife.

Look ahead to fall
Your child can get a head start on a subject she’ll study in school next year. For example, if she’ll take Spanish, she could download a free app to begin learning greetings and other phrases. Or if she signed up for engineering, she might look online for projects to try like designing a water bottle rocket or a solar panel.

Summer routines
Setting up a routine can add structure to your child’s summer on days when he’s home. Try these tips.

- Eating. Plan regular family meals to stay connected with your middle grader. Also, have him help you stock healthy snacks and lunches he can prepare on his own if you’re not home.

- Sleeping. Getting enough sleep is important for good health year-round. Set a reasonable bedtime, and have your tween get up by a set time. This is especially important toward the end of summer so he’ll be ready to return to his school schedule.

- Chores. Keep your child in the routine of having regular responsibilities. You might give him a list of jobs for the week (laundry, vacuuming) and let him decide which day he’ll do each task.
Ways to handle peer pressure

Peer pressure can be positive when friends motivate your middle grader to read a good book or work out. But when he's pressured to do things that aren't good for him, he needs to be able to resist. Share these strategies.

Listen to instincts. If your tween is pressured to do something he knows isn't right (shoplifting, bullying), suggest that he ask himself, "Would I want my parents to know?" or "Is this safe (legal, kind)?" If the answer is no, he should listen to his instincts.

Practice responses. Together, brainstorm ways to say no, such as, "No thanks, I'm not into that" or "I don't want to get kicked off the swim team." Also, help your child think of ways to get out of uncomfortable or unsafe situations like being pressured to try alcohol. Agree on a phrase he will use in a call or text to you if he needs a way out. Example: "Can you put my clothes in the dryer?" That's your cue to pick him up right away.

Break into coding

Learning to code will make your child a better logical thinker and problem solver. It could even lead to a career one day. Spark her interest with these suggestions:

- Can your tween and a friend draw identical pictures without seeing each other's papers? First, each person draws a 10-by-10 grid on her own paper. One person secretly chooses a crayon and draws a shape in any box on her grid. Then, she writes code telling the other person how to copy her drawing (starting in the bottom left-hand corner of her paper). Example: R3 U2 BT = move right three boxes, move up two, draw a blue triangle. Now it's the other person's turn to draw a shape and write code. After a few rounds, they can see if their drawings match.

- Help your middle grader find a computer class or club at school or the public library. Maybe she'll create a mobile app or build a Lego robot. Or she might use coding to make online games at a site like code.org.

Building sibling bonds

Q: My daughters are busy with their own friends and don't spend a lot of time together. How can I help them be closer?

A: Suggest that your girls set aside "sister time" on a regular basis. They could take turns deciding what to do. Maybe your older daughter will teach her little sister to bake. Or perhaps your younger one will show her big sister a science project she did in school. They might even find ways to combine their talents or interests—say, by doing food-related science experiments.

Encouraging your daughters to support each other will also strengthen their relationship. Say your younger one is disappointed about not getting invited to a sleepover. Quietly suggest to your older daughter that it would mean a lot if she comforted her little sister. She might show her funny videos or write a note about why she's a great sister, for instance.

'Zines by tweens

My son Brian recently submitted a short story about pet adoption to a teen magazine. That gave him the idea to publish his own 'zine, which he explained is a mini print magazine. He decided to focus on animal welfare and call his 'zine Paws and Claws.

In each issue, he highlights an animal in need of adoption. He prints a photo and description from our local shelter's website and pastes them into his 'zine. The 'zine also features the adventures of his rescue hedgehog. He takes pictures of Hedge curled into a ball or snuggled up in a blanket and writes funny captions.

Now each month, Brian makes photocopies of his 'zine and mails them to friends and relatives. Sometimes he even gets "fan mail," which motivates him to keep writing.