

Motivation Methods That Work

“Have you finished your book report?” “Did you put your clean laundry away?” Does it seem like you’re constantly nagging at your middle grader to get things done?

Instead of nagging, try the suggestions and “can-do” tips in this special report. You’ll boost your middle grader’s enthusiasm for doing what he needs to do—at school and at home.



Offer praise

Never underestimate the power of a “Good job!” Children crave approval—even sometimes-alooof middle graders. A positive response, such as a hug or a smile, can be a great incentive. Whether it’s for washing a sink full of dishes or passing a math quiz, a word of encouragement will show your middle grader that you notice his hard work. His self-confidence will soar, and he will want to keep trying.

Can-do tips: Leave a thank-you note on your child’s pillow when he cleans his room without being asked. Let him overhear you bragging to a friend about a good report card.

Create excitement

When your middle grader needs help getting motivated for a task, find a way to make it enjoyable. For example, if you make reviewing for a test entertaining, you’re not only helping her study, you’re teaching her that learning doesn’t have to be boring.

Can-do tip: Next time your youngster is studying for a test, offer to quiz her outside. Tell her that for every question she answers correctly, she gets to attempt a foul shot, throw a pass, or do a handstand.



Show interest

Let your middle grader know that what he’s involved in is important to you. When you express curiosity about a new computer game he’s playing with his friends or you regularly attend

parent-teacher conferences, your middle grader will see that you’re interested.

Can-do tips: Ask your child questions about his day. *Examples:* “How was the field trip?” “What was the score of the game?” Attend extracurricular and school functions, like music recitals and parent nights, whenever possible.

Give rewards

Simple rewards, such as extra privileges, can be powerful motivators. But rewards should be used sparingly. Bargaining too much can limit your child’s natural motivation by putting the focus on getting something.

Can-do tip: Consider letting your middle grader rent a special movie or giving her extra phone privileges when she completes her homework on time or finishes all her chores without complaining.

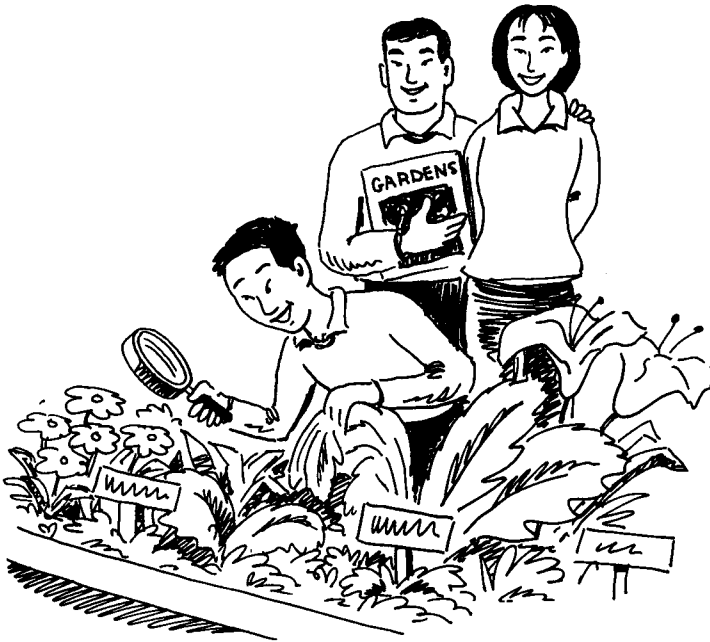


Use consequences

Experts agree that punishing kids for not doing what they’re supposed to do doesn’t always produce improved results. However, linking consequences to performance can provide a reason for your child to get the job done while giving him a greater sense of control over his life.

Can-do tip: Try to connect what your middle grader needs to do with an outcome. *Example:* “You can go over to your friend’s house after you work in the yard for a half hour.” This way, it will be an action on his part, rather than you, that lets him do something he wants.

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Encourage problem solving

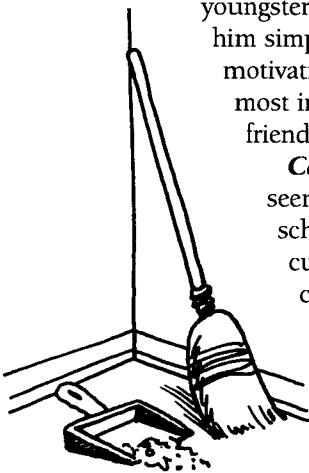
When your middle grader runs into a problem, avoid solving it for her. Instead, give hints that help her discover the answer. The more she does on her own, the more confident she will feel about her work, and the harder she will try. And she'll learn how to handle future problems.

Can-do tip: If your child comes to you for help with her homework, have her turn the problem into a question. *Example:* If she asks you how to convert fractions to decimals, suggest that she ask herself, "Where in my textbook did I learn about fractions?"

Manage stress

You may not realize it, but stress can zap your child's energy. Feeling that he can't get everything done can keep your youngster from trying to do anything. Help him simplify his schedule to regain the motivation he needs to focus on what's most important: school, family and friends, exercise, and relaxation.

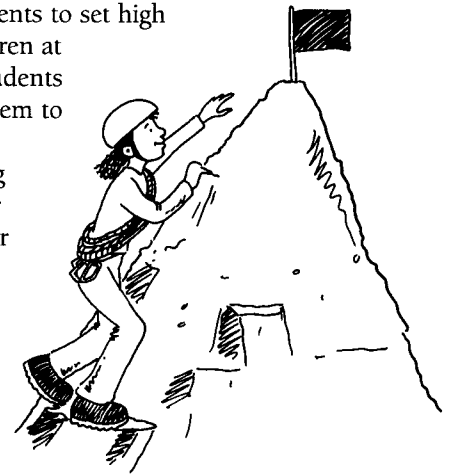
Can-do tip: If your middle grader seems overwhelmed, suggest some schedule changes. Encourage him to cut back on after-school activities like clubs and sports, and limit potential time-stealers such as watching TV and surfing the Web.



Establish expectations

It's important for parents to set high standards for their children at home and in school. Students whose parents expect them to do well in school have a better chance of learning success. Encourage your middle grader to give her best effort in everything she does. Let her know that some things may be harder for her than others, but there's no excuse for not trying.

Can-do tips: Teach your child to be responsible at home by assigning chores and setting clear guidelines for behavior. If she's struggling with schoolwork, offer tutoring or other help to improve her skills and boost her self-confidence.



Provide choices

Children, like adults, are motivated by their own interests. Allowing your middle grader to make decisions will give him a sense of control and encourage him to tackle the job at hand.

Can-do tip: Give your child plenty of opportunities to have a say in day-to-day decisions. For example, ask him where he wants to go for a weekend trip or which movie he'd like to rent for the family to watch. Let him choose whether to spend his allowance on a new CD or the next book in his favorite series.

Accept mistakes

Some kids are afraid of trying new things because they think that making a mistake means they failed. When your middle grader messes up, tell her you believe in her, and give her a chance to try again. Treating mistakes as opportunities instead of failures shows that you value effort, not just achievement.

Can-do tip: When your child makes a mistake, help her explore what went wrong. *Examples:* If she gets a poor grade, you might ask questions like, "Did you understand the teacher's instructions?" and "Did you remember to bring your review worksheet home?" If she forgets about an important meeting, try, "Did you write the date on your calendar?" By figuring out why mistakes happen, your middle grader will improve her chances for success in the future.

Middle Years