Technology lets middle graders do research with the touch of a button or video-chat with relatives who live far away. Too much technology, however, might cause your tween to feel isolated and to sit still much longer than is good for her. Consider these ways to keep her usage in check.

Set the stage
Encourage face-to-face interaction by putting away devices (including yours) at established times, such as during meals, family outings, or a sibling’s lacrosse game. When you’re using a device and your child interrupts, switch your attention to her. She’ll see that the person in front of you is more important than what’s on the screen.

Wait for social media
Most social media sites require users to be 13 or older, yet some children are using fake birth dates to create accounts. Let your middle schooler know she must be old enough and get your okay to join. Consider setting up a family account, but keep the password to yourself. She can send you photos or links to post.

Harness the good
Suggest that your tween take advantage of technology to connect with family members or to do research. She might play an electronic version of a board game with a cousin in another town. Or if she’s stumped on a craft project, she could look up instructions online. Also, let her use the internet to research extracurricular activities or summer programs.

Spring clothes
Now is a good time to review the school dress code with your tween so you’re on the same page about what to wear. For instance, maybe bike shorts, tank tops, or flip-flops aren’t allowed. Suggest that your child keep school clothes and shoes separate from those for working out or wearing around the house. This will make choosing outfits easier.

Publish a book review
Have your middle schooler think more deeply about her reading with this idea. After she finishes a novel, she might enjoy writing a review that will give others a good idea of what the book is about. Let her publish her review at an online bookstore for others to read. Note: Be sure she doesn’t use her real name.

Finish strong
As your child thinks ahead to summer, he may be tempted to relax his efforts in school. Explain that staying focused in every class will help him learn and prepare him for end-of-year tests. And by keeping on top of final projects, he’ll prevent a last-minute scramble.

Worth quoting
“A good laugh is sunshine in the house.” William Makepeace Thackeray

Just for fun
Q: I’m as light as a feather, but the world’s strongest person can’t hold me for long. What am I?
A: A breath.
Funny—or not?

Joking around is a good way for tweens to let off steam and bring people together. But humor may also hurt people’s feelings—or even be considered bullying if it’s done repeatedly to make someone feel bad. Here’s how to help your child draw the line.

**Demonstrate differences.** Show your middle grader that a joke that’s funny to one person might not be funny to someone else. Let him and friends or family members list types of jokes they think are humorous (such as knock-knock jokes) on one piece of paper and those they don’t (like practical jokes) on another. Then, share lists. Your tween may be surprised if what appears in his “funny” category falls into another person’s “not funny” one.

**Think it through.** Before your child tells a joke, suggest that he consider how it will affect those around him. Is the topic one that somebody might be sensitive about, such as weight? Could the joke come across as a put-down? If so, he should avoid it. Tip: If he’ll feel the need to say “Just kidding” or “No offense” afterward, that’s a sign the joke may be hurtful.

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**Facts about opioids**

The opioid epidemic is making headlines everywhere. Take steps now to protect your tween from these highly addictive, and potentially deadly, drugs.

**Be informed**

Opioids include prescription pain relievers such as Vicodin, oxycodone, and fentanyl. Heroin is also an opioid.

**Be cautious**

Middle graders may be prescribed painkillers after a sports injury or a wisdom tooth extraction, for example. Ask the doctor or dentist about alternatives to opioids. If your child is given medicine, dispense each dose to her. Keep it locked up between doses, and discard any leftovers.

**Be observant**

If you notice that your tween has mood swings, withdraws from family and friends, or loses interest in favorite activities, talk to her pediatrician.

**A successful IEP meeting**

This meeting can be emotional for you as a parent, since you’ll hear about what your child struggles with. There will also be a lot of information to absorb. Consider taking along a spouse, friend, or relative to provide support and to help you remember what was said.

Also, remember that you’re a key part of the IEP team. If there’s an accommodation you think could boost your son’s success, such as keeping one set of textbooks in his locker and another at home, it’s important to speak up.