Being respectful will make your middle schooler’s relationships better at school and at home. Here are ways he can show respect for himself, other people, and the world around him.

Respecting himself

Tweens with self-respect are more likely to stick to their values and say no to risky behaviors. Teach your child to check in with himself before he makes decisions. Say a friend invites him to a party where parents won’t be home. He could think about what might go on there and say, “Thanks, but that’s not for me.”

Respecting others

Explain that showing respect will make it easier for your tween to get along with adults and peers—and help him earn their respect, too. He can do that by treating people as he wishes to be treated. For instance, he should eat snacks in the kitchen at a friend’s house if that’s the family’s policy (even if he eats in the living room at your house). Also, he’ll respect classmates by doing what he says he will, such as completing his part of a project he’s doing with a partner.

Respecting the environment

Encourage your middle grader to adopt the motto, “Leave a place better than you found it.” To put that into practice, he might throw away trash that he sees in your neighborhood or at a park. Conserving resources is another way to respect nature. He can turn lights off when he leaves a room and shut water off while brushing his teeth.

Hygiene habits

Middle school is a good time for you and your children to evaluate their hygiene routines. At this age, they’ll start to sweat more, so they’ll need to work harder to keep their skin clean. Introduce habits like washing their faces morning and night and using deodorant daily.

Worth quoting

“A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination.”

Nelson Mandela

Just for fun

Q: How do you know when the moon has had enough to eat?
A: When it’s full.

Help wanted

When your child is stumped about a concept or a homework problem, teachers want to help. Plus, asking for assistance shows that your tween cares about her work. Encourage her to seek help confidently with these tips.

■ When to get help: Her question may have an easy-to-find answer. Suggest that she check her textbook and notes or call a classmate. If that doesn’t work, she should approach her teacher.

■ How to ask: Your child might wait until the teacher is free and say, “I’m having trouble with my essay thesis. Can you help me?” Or if the question pops up after school, she could email, “I don’t understand why I got this algebra problem wrong. When is a good time to stop by?”
**STEM at home**

You don’t have to be a scientist to foster a love of STEM in your middle grader. Share these quick-hit ideas for exploring STEM at home.

**Science.** Play with sound by turning a straw into a musical instrument. Let your child experiment with ways to create vibrations—and thus produce noise. For instance, she can make a “flute” by poking holes in a straw, or an “oboe” by flattening one end of a straw and cutting it into a point.

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**Conversation games**

Being able to carry on a conversation will help your tween in everything from participating in class to hanging out with friends. Have fun practicing together with these games.

**Link by link**

Show your middle grader how conversation connects people. Choose a topic (movies, holidays), and set out one paper clip. Go in a circle, and let each player speak. For each related comment, follow-up question, or answer, add a paper clip to the chain. When the chain reaches 20 links, switch topics and play again.

**Freeze chat**

Teach your child to speak on his feet. Have two people stand, set a timer for two minutes, and call out a random question ("What’s better, snow or sun?"). The players go back and forth discussing the answer. When the timer rings, whoever is talking freezes, and another player takes his place. Ask a new question, and the game continues.

**Q & A**

**Q** Now that my oldest child is in middle school, do I really need to go to her parent-teacher conference?

**A** It’s a good idea to attend parent-teacher conferences regardless of your student’s age. Going to them sends her a clear signal that you’re interested in her education.

Knowing that you’re paying attention can inspire her to give her best effort. Plus, teachers will share helpful insights about your child, from her work habits to her social life.

Before you go, see if your tween wants you to bring up specific topics. Also, look over her graded papers. That way, you’ll pinpoint anything you want to discuss, such as the math she’s working on or her progress in English.

Finally, consider any changes at home that her teachers should know about (a military deployment or a change in marital status, for example).