

# SKILLS FOR NOW AND LATER

Did you know that the skills your child needs to succeed in school now are the same ones that will help him thrive in the workplace as an adult?

Employers are looking for people who can communicate well, work with others, analyze information, and come up with creative ideas. You can help your middle grader develop these important abilities. Here's how.



## COMMUNICATION

Knowing how to communicate clearly and accurately can help your child make connections, find work, and build rapport on the job. Try these ideas to give your middle grader practice:

- Suggest that he make a list of people who have jobs he finds interesting (a neighbor who's an event planner, a relative who's a mechanic). He can write down questions. ("How did you get started in your line of work?" "What are your daily duties?" "What do you enjoy about your occupation?") Have him set up an interview where he can explain a little about himself (why he's interested in what they do, what careers he's considering) and take notes on their answers.
- Take turns pretending to be an employee striking up a conversation with a new coworker. You can play the employee first to show your middle schooler how to make an introduction. For example, give a firm handshake, make eye contact, and say something like, "Hi, I'm Monica Wells. I work here as an account manager." Show your child how to continue a conversation by asking the person about his job, family, or hobbies. ("What did you do before

you started here?" "How do you spend your spare time?") Then, switch roles.



- Sharpen writing skills with your middle grader's "wants." If he's begging for a pet iguana, you could ask him to email you about the kind of care it would need and how he would handle the responsibility. If he'd like to have a party, suggest that he put together a proposal including how many friends he wants to invite, what activities they might like, and how much it would cost.

## COLLABORATION

In today's workplace, the saying "Two heads are better than one" definitely applies. Companies want employees who can successfully work with others to solve problems and achieve goals.

Help your child become more comfortable collaborating with suggestions like these:

- Discuss routine issues during family meetings or daily life. You might talk about where to go on vacation or negotiate a schedule conflict. Using a notepad or computer, keep track of everyone's ideas and feedback (similar to how a white board might be used in a company meeting). Your middle schooler will get used to offering solutions, responding to others' viewpoints, and compromising. Once a decision has been made, she can help with further planning as part of a "team" (say, arranging details of a trip once you've chosen a destination).
- Use at-home activities to practice working together. If you're cleaning out



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the garage or throwing a dinner party, ask your middle grader to help you think of a plan. Then, assign roles for different parts of the project (he helps Dad remove items from the garage, Mom and Christine sweep), and complete it together. Encourage your child to offer ideas for getting the job done (“Let’s take large items out first”).

■ Suggest that your middle schooler have study partners. Even a casual weekly meeting with a classmate to go over history notes can give your child experience with give-and-take. They might ask each other questions or take turns “teaching” different parts of the material. If study groups form to review for big tests, suggest that she attend. She may get the chance to work with students she doesn’t know—another way to prepare her for collaborating with new employees in the workforce.



■ Challenge your child to answer her own questions. She might ask, “Why does it matter if the temperature is high in the house?” You can respond, “Why do you think it matters?” She might run through a list of possible answers (the gas bill will go up, other family members will feel too warm). Also, point out that she can uncover information when she wants to know something by asking herself, “How can I find out?” or “Where can I learn about this?”

video, and digital images to make a multimedia presentation about her favorite activity or hobby. Or she could create her own Mad Libs and let friends or family fill in the blanks.

## CRITICAL THINKING

We live in a society bombarded with information—and the business world is no different. Companies are looking for employees who can sort, analyze, and evaluate information to filter out what’s reliable and important. Sharpen your middle grader’s critical-thinking skills with the following activities:

■ Encourage her to analyze and evaluate what she reads. If she’s reading a book, ask her to think about what viewpoint each character has and to find evidence that supports her conclusion. When browsing online news or a magazine, she should try to verify the information in more than one place.

■ When you’re trying to sift through information or make a decision, think out loud so your youngster hears you. He will learn to imitate your thinking process. *Example:* “If I spend money on a gym membership, I’ll have less money for going out on the weekends. But I’ll exercise more. I need to look at my calendar and see when I could fit in trips to the gym so I know whether I’ll use it or not.”

## CREATIVITY

Creativity isn’t just for artists and poets. Organizations need people who can discover fresh ideas, tackle challenges, and pioneer new ways of doing things. Try these tips to cultivate your youngster’s creativity:

■ Suggest that she take on creative projects. She might enjoy digital storytelling—she can piece together audio,



■ Play fun thinking games. Name a few random words (clouds, clowns, cotton), and ask your youngster to use them to tell a story. He might say, “Clowns took over the town last night. They wanted to find cotton so they could make clouds.” You can also pose silly questions that encourage zany responses. (“If you were a toad, where would you hop?”)

■ Help your middle grader think outside the box. For example, next time she complains that she doesn’t have anything to wear, suggest that she give an old blouse or dress a new look (change the buttons, wear a scarf as a belt). Or suppose a friend who loves movies has a birthday coming up. Your child might plan a film festival night for her, complete with several of her best friends, her favorite snacks, and a double feature starring her favorite actor.



## Middle Years