Where’s the best place for your child to show respect? Everywhere! Share these pointers to encourage respect no matter where he is.

School
Together, talk about ways kids are respectful—or not respectful—in his classes or after-school activities. He could compare a classmate who waited his turn patiently during a group discussion vs. the one who kept interrupting everyone else. Then, ask about times your middle grader finds it hard to show respect. For instance, maybe he thinks a teacher doesn’t grade his papers fairly. Explain that he still needs to approach him with respect—and that the teacher is more likely to listen to him that way.

Social events
Prep your child for how to behave at family gatherings. For starters, you might let him know that relatives won’t appreciate playing second fiddle to his phone or video game. Remind him to look people in the eye when they’re talking and to answer questions politely. It’s also a nice show of respect to be interested in their lives and to ask questions back. (“How’s everything in Cleveland, Aunt Martha?”)

Home
There’s no question that life goes more smoothly when family members treat each other with respect. Consider writing up a few “Family Rules of Respect.” Each person could contribute an idea or two, and then work together to follow them. Some ideas: “Speak in a nice tone of voice.” “Ask before borrowing something.” “If you break or tear it, fix or replace it.”

Do your work carefully
Your middle grader might know how to solve 831 x 427 or how to spell chromosome—but if she isn’t careful, she could still get the answer wrong. Here are ways for making sure her work shows what she knows:
■ Encourage her to take care with the little things so they don’t turn into mistakes. For example, did she line up the numbers properly in her math problems? Did she include all the steps in her lab report?
■ Have your child reread papers and essays before turning them in. A tried-and-true system is to lay a sheet of paper on top of her work and slide it down slowly, reading one line at a time. Or she could try this trick: Look for one type of error (spelling, punctuation, grammar) on each reading.
Reading: The right connections

When your tween reads, making meaningful connections can help her understand the text and enjoy reading more. Suggest these strategies.

Connect with characters. Ask your middle grader to think of ways in which she is similar to a book character. Maybe the character just started middle school. Your child could think back to how she felt on the first day of school (nervous, excited) to help her understand the character’s behavior.

Activity Corner

Start your engines!

Can your middle grader use his noodle to build a race car out of pasta? Encourage him to explore engineering with this activity.

1. Let him look at pasta in the grocery store and think about which shapes would fit together to make a car. Examples: lasagna for the base, spaghetti threaded through penne for axles, wagon wheels for tires.

2. Suggest that he sketch a model of his race car on paper.

3. Using his sketch, he can arrange the uncooked noodles and attach the parts with craft glue.

4. To test his vehicle, he could make a ramp by leaning a piece of cardboard against a stack of books. Then, he’s ready to send it down the ramp and measure the distance it travels.

5. Based on his results, have him redesign and retest until he comes up with the ultimate race car. Idea: A friend or sibling could make one, too, and they can race.

Togetherness time

Parent-child relationships are a lot like gardening—tend them with care, and watch them grow! Use these tips to stay close to your middle grader.

Catch up

Try to spend 15–20 minutes a day in one-on-one time. Let him show you something he’s working on, like a song on his guitar or his math homework. Or you might chat about school or friends before he goes to sleep.

Tune in

When your child wants to talk, stay focused on what he’s saying. You could close your laptop if he comes to you for help or put down your magazine if he starts to talk about his day.

Make plans

Ask your youngster what special things he’d like to do together, and write them on your calendar. Maybe he’d like to play racquetball on the weekend or go to an art fair next month.

Parent to Parent

Alcohol...already?

I recently heard a startling statistic: About a third of eighth graders say they’ve had alcohol in the past year. My daughter Sabrina is in eighth grade, and it really concerned me to think of children her age drinking.

I asked Sabrina how she feels about underage drinking. She said it can be dangerous and assured me she wouldn’t break the law. I was happy to hear that, but I know it’s hard to say no to peer pressure.

Instead, I brought the subject up regularly. I plan to bring up the subject regularly to help her think twice about drinking.