

Middle Years

Working Together for School Success



Short Stops

Snow day plans

Plan ahead for school closings and delays because of bad weather. Sign up to receive email, phone, or text alerts from the school, or check the school website. If needed, make arrangements with friends or family who can watch your child during a delay or closing.

Go-get-'em goals

Your middle schooler can make the most of the new semester by setting specific goals for each class. *Examples:* "I will improve my math grade." "I will fill out my reading log every night." Encourage him to write his goals inside the cover of his planner or binders.

Curse words: Not cool

Today's "plugged-in" tweens may get used to hearing and reading foul language and decide it's no big deal. Explain to your middle grader that cursing can make a bad impression on teachers, coaches, and even friends. Suggest that she substitute words like "ugh" or "darn" instead.

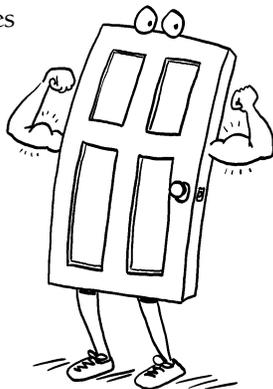
Worth quoting

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." *Booker T. Washington*

Just for fun

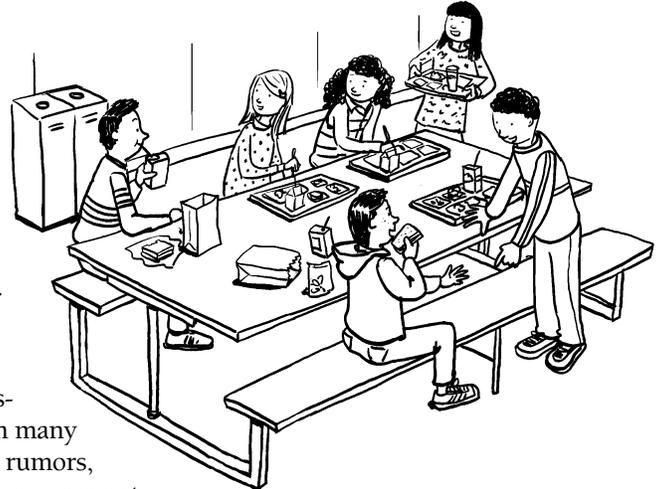
Q: What gives you the strength to walk through walls?

A: A door.



The power to stop bullying

Bullying typically peaks in the middle grades, as tweens try to figure out where they fit in with their peers. These ideas will help your middle schooler know what bullying can look like—and learn how to be a part of the solution.



Recognize

Ask your child if he has seen bullying at school. Discuss how bullying comes in many forms, including spreading rumors, making threats, or leaving someone out on purpose. Even if your tween hasn't seen anyone trip or punch a fellow student, he might realize that the kid who is frequently called names or whispered about is being bullied.

Stand up

Children who are bullied need to know they have someone on their side. If your middle grader witnesses bullying, he can calmly step in by saying something like "That's not funny" or "You're being mean." Or he might ignore the bully and address

the target: "Let's sit at another table" or "I think your shoes are cool."

Report

Tweens may be afraid that bullying will get worse if they tell an adult. But explain that school staff can often resolve an issue without revealing who reported it. For example, if your child sees a kid knock papers out of someone's hands on the bus, he could alert the driver. At school, he can privately tell a teacher or the principal about bullying—and encourage other students to do so. 👍

Better public speaking

Public speaking is part of school life, from giving class presentations to leading team meetings. Here are ways your tween can boost her skills and confidence.

Find an audience. Practicing will calm her nerves. She might give her speech in front of a mirror, present it to family members, or even use a pet as her audience.



Get rid of "extras." Pesky filler words such as *like* and *um* can slip into your tween's sentences without her realizing it. Suggest that she record her speech and play it back, making a tally mark each time she hears an unnecessary word. Then, she could focus on reducing the number of marks each time she practices. 👍

No problem!

When your tween has a problem, how she handles it can determine whether she overcomes it or remains stuck. Help her see problems as opportunities in disguise with these steps.

1. Put it in perspective. Knowing that problems are a normal part of life may keep your middle grader from feeling stressed out by them. Share a similar problem you had at her age (forgetting about a big test) or recently (a disagreement with a friend). Then, explain how you resolved it.



2. Consider options. Encourage your tween to investigate solutions instead of ignoring a problem. Say she loses a library book. She might call the library rather than letting fines pile up. She may be surprised to find they will give her an extension to look for the book—or that the cost of replacing it is less than she thought.

3. Reframe the situation. Putting a positive spin on a problem will help her solve it. Instead of thinking, “I hate it when Crystal cancels our plans,” she could tell herself, “Now I’ve got time to finish that book I’m in the middle of.” 👍



Q & A Keep a learning journal

Q My older daughter recently mentioned she’s keeping a “learning diary” for her college classes. Is that something that could help my middle schooler?

A A learning diary is simply a place for students to reflect on their studies. Keeping one is a great way for your tween to think more about what she learns.



Suggest that your middle grader get a notebook she likes and label each entry with the class and date. She might write about topics that interest her, like how a novel she read in English helped her understand an important period in history. She could also record questions and ideas to investigate, such as a science experiment to try.

Encourage your girls to share their journals from time to time—your younger daughter will get a glimpse of what goes on in college! 👍

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ISSN 1540-5540

Parent to Parent Connect without electronics

My son Eli got in the habit of playing video games the minute he got home from school. When I tried to talk to him, his eyes stayed glued to the screen, and he barely responded.

So I made a new rule: no screens for the first hour after we all get home from school and work. That way, we can reconnect and talk about our day. Sometimes we play a quick card game or tell jokes before I start dinner and Eli does homework.

Next, we’re going to try something “radical”—an entire device-free evening. If we need the tablet or computer for homework or our jobs, that’s okay. But “recreational use” is off-limits for that night. I hope Eli will see that family comes first—and that it’s possible to survive for a few hours without electronics. 👍



Community service for tweens

Being involved in the community can teach your middle grader compassion for others and give him a sense of belonging. Consider these tips:

■ Start by volunteering together. Community centers, places of worship, and your local United Way can suggest family-friendly opportunities. You and your child might sort donated clothing for a homeless shelter or bake cookies for a charity bake sale.

■ When your middle grader is ready to volunteer on his own, he could ask his

school counselor about options. Perhaps he’ll be paired with a student who has special needs so they can read together in the school library. Or he may join in a park or stream cleanup day.

Tip: Encourage your tween to keep a record of his volunteer experience that includes supervisors’ contact information and his dates of service. This will come in handy when he applies for jobs or programs in high school. 👍



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Short Stops

No skipping allowed

Middle graders may think it's cool to roam the halls or hang out in the bathroom instead of going to class. Make sure your child knows you expect him to be in all of his classes every day—and explain ahead of time what consequences he would face from school, and from you, if he skips.

Shifting moods

Tweens often go through ups and downs because of changing hormones. When your child seems out of sorts, that's when she most needs you to remain calm. Showing you have control will comfort her and make her feel secure, even if she doesn't realize it at the time.

Where's my glove?

Are family members constantly looking for missing gloves? Make it easier to get out the door to school and to work by giving each person his own bin for winter gear (mittens, hats, scarves). Stack them by the door, or place in a closet. *Tip:* Designate a spot for gloves without matches in case the mates show up.

Worth quoting

"We cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand."
Randy Pausch

Just for fun

Q: Why do dogs wag their tails?

A: Because nobody else will do it for them.



Happy to collaborate

You may have heard your middle schooler talk about group assignments—perhaps a paper she's writing with a partner or a slide presentation she's creating with classmates. Learning to collaborate will help her succeed in these projects *and* teach her an important skill for the future. Share these strategies.



Look for themes

Collaborating is about using everyone's thoughts and opinions to find a solution.

First, group members need to brainstorm and keep track of suggestions. Then, they can look for ways to combine their ideas. For example, they might realize most of their concepts fit into three main categories and work together to divide their paper into three parts.

Learn to compromise

Help your tween use language that encourages others to participate and shows she is considering their recommendations. For instance, she could ask, "What's your reaction to this?" Or she can paraphrase someone's comments with "It sounds like

you're saying..." To disagree politely, she might reply, "I see what you're saying. I also see it another way."

Figure out roles

Another key to collaboration is using everyone's strengths. Say your middle grader's group is making a slide show. One person might use her organizational skills to schedule meetings and decide how to arrange the slides. Another can use technology know-how to create the slides and add special effects. 👍

"I care about you"

Caring about others can make your child feel good about himself and even help him make new friends. Inspire compassion with these ideas.

Trade places. Suggest that he put himself in someone else's shoes. Say his friend is disappointed because he didn't make a sports team. Your tween could think about how he would feel if he worked hard for something and didn't get it. Seeing things from his friend's perspective will help him understand his friend's feelings—and empathize.

Take action. Encourage him to find a way to support others who are going through a rough time. If a classmate loses his grandfather, he might visit the friend and invite him to tell stories about his grandpa. Or he can make a sympathy card and have other students sign it. 👍



Grow by the rules

Setting rules during the tween years can be puzzling, since middle graders aren't little kids anymore, but they aren't teenagers either. Try these tips.

Consider new freedoms

Think of ways to adapt rules for your child's age and maturity level. Ask for his input, and decide which suggestions make sense. Say he wants you to start dropping him off at the mall with his friends. You might agree to read in the mall's coffee shop while they walk around. Once you see how he handles it, you can choose whether to drop him off in the future.



Encourage problem solving

Parents want to protect their children—but your tween will often be better off experiencing the natural consequences of his actions. Perhaps your rule is that he needs to remember his own items for school. If he forgets a book for class, let him work out a solution instead of dropping it off for him. He'll learn to problem solve, and chances are he'll try harder to remember next time. 👍

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Chores without complaints

Does your child pitch in around the house? Having her do chores helps her develop a good work ethic that will benefit her at home and in school. Here are ways to foster this quality.



■ **Think “we.”** Have her regularly help with chores that benefit the whole household, such as doing dishes or cleaning out closets. That way, she'll learn to work hard even if it won't benefit her directly.

■ **Make it snappy.** Set a timer for 2 or 3 minutes, and challenge everyone to do a specific chore before time is up. Your tween might straighten up the family room while you wipe down kitchen counters. Keeping it short and fun makes it more likely she'll pitch in willingly—and be more open to helping out next time. 👍

Parent to Parent

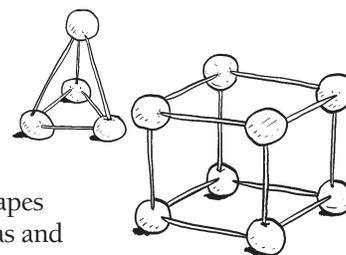
Math night at school...and at home

My daughter and I recently attended family math night at her school. Marissa found the activities fun, so when her teacher sent home more ideas to try, we decided to hold a math night at home.

First, we rolled play dough into little balls and connected them with toothpicks to create 3-D shapes like cubes and cones. Marissa measured their areas and showed me how to do it.

Next, we played “secret function.” I wrote numbers on slips of paper. Marissa picked one at a time, performed a “function,” like adding 8 or dividing by 3, and wrote the answer on the flip side. I had to figure out the function she used. For “4,” she had written 16, and I said she had squared the number. She said that was right, but added, “It could have been $\times 4$ or $+ 12$.” That led to a great discussion about how many different functions may have been right!

I enjoyed seeing math in a new light. And I'm glad Marissa is enjoying playing with math. 👍



Q & A Work that's mine

Q My son recently received a zero on a paper because it was too similar to an online article he used as a source. He had simply rearranged the information, and he didn't understand this was plagiarism! What should I do?

A In today's online world, students may pass off someone else's work as their own without realizing it. They might believe that just rewording or rearranging material makes it theirs. Or they may

even forget which part is a direct quote from a source and fail to give credit.

Your son can avoid unintentional plagiarism by taking careful notes as he researches. Encourage him to put quotation marks around direct quotes and to keep a running list of sources.

Also, suggest that he jot down his own thoughts and reactions while researching. That will give him a good place to start when he writes so he is sure to use his own words. 👍



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Savvy shopper

Show your tween that she can use math to be a smart consumer and save money. In a store, have her compare sale items. Say two brands of shirts cost the same, but one brand is “buy one, get one half off,” and another is 40 percent off. Which is the better deal if she buys two shirts?

How-to for parents

If you have parenting questions, you may get answers at free workshops in your community. Speakers might focus on topics like how to ease your child’s transition to high school or help him cope with anxiety. To find out about upcoming events, read emails from the school and look for flyers at the library or recreation center.

Lights, camera, action

Many tweens love to make videos—and that can be a great study method. Encourage your middle grader and her friends to record each other reading class notes, demonstrating science experiments, or acting out historical events. They could use props, add music, or think of other creative ways to review the material.

Worth quoting

“If you want children to keep their feet on the ground, put some responsibility on their shoulders.” *Abigail Van Buren*

Just for fun

Q: How do you talk to a giant?

A: Use big words!



Planning for standardized tests

When your middle grader takes a standardized test, having a plan will boost his confidence and help him do his best. Here are strategies to use every step of the way.

The week before...

Encourage your child to try his hardest on practice tests. Even if they’re not graded, the results can reveal what he needs to brush up on. Suggest that he try to figure out where he went wrong on incorrect answers and ask his teacher if he’s not sure. This may prevent him from making similar mistakes on the actual test.

The day before...

Being well rested and well fed can keep your tween focused and alert. Before bedtime, help him plan a breakfast with protein and whole grains. You might hard-boil eggs while he sets out a cereal box, bowl, and spoon. Then, he’ll need a good night’s sleep (at least 9–11 hours). *Tip:* Have him pack a healthy



snack like an apple, whole-grain crackers, and water, if allowed.

The day of...

Your middle grader should think carefully about how to approach different types of questions. If he’s given a passage to read, he might skim the questions first so he knows what information to focus on. For multiple-choice math problems, he could solve first, then look to see if his solution is among the choices—if so, it’s likely correct. 👍

Bonding with your tween

Spending time with your child opens the door to conversation and keeps you involved in her life. Plus, it can be fun! Consider these ideas:

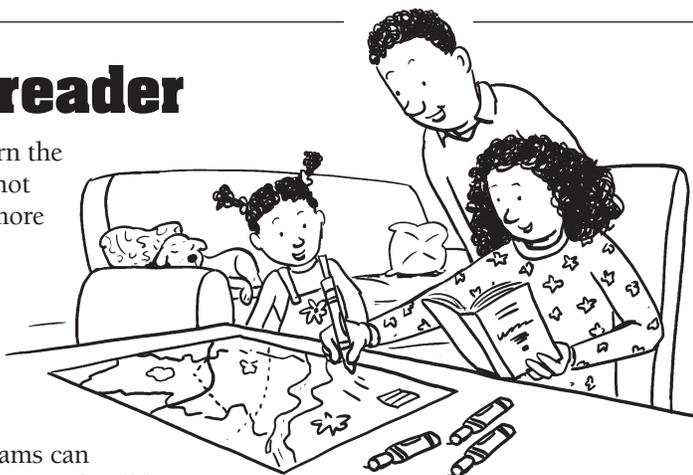
- Create a family photo album. While you work, talk about memories the pictures bring to mind. *Tip:* When your middle grader has a rough day, flipping through the album together may encourage her to smile and perhaps talk.
- Have monthly living room campouts. Put out sleeping bags and popcorn. Then, take turns reading aloud or telling stories by flashlight. *Tip:* Your tween may be more likely to chat in the dark. When you turn out the lights, share something about your day, and she might follow suit. 👍



Be an active reader

Does your middle grader ever turn the page of a book only to realize she's not sure what she's just read? Reading more mindfully can help her understand and remember important information. Try these tips.

Preview. Suggest that your tween scan for “coming attractions” before she reads. Skimming subheads, captions, charts, or diagrams can tell her what to expect. That way, her mind will be better prepared to take in the material.



Apply. Doing something with the information as she reads can keep your middle grader engaged. She might draw a map showing locations of the scenes in a novel, for instance. Or she could make an outline of a textbook chapter. That will help her remember key details and see how facts are related.

Tip: When your child reads online, suggest that she turn off any notifications and close all windows except for the one she's reading so she won't get distracted. 👍

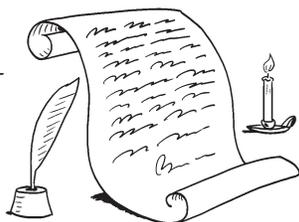


This day in history

Your tween can learn about the past—and discover that history is being made every day—with these activities.

Research the past

Encourage him to find out what happened on today's date in previous years. He could check the library or search “on this day in history” online. Then, ask him to share the “old news” with your family at dinner-time. For example, on March 1, he might report that the Peace Corps was established on this day in 1961.



Parent to Parent

Learning to lead

I had always believed the saying “Leaders are born, not made.” So at a recent work seminar, I was surprised to discover that leadership can be learned.

My son Jack had been wanting to start a neighborhood baseball team, and I realized it would be a good way for him to practice leadership skills. I suggested he call the local league and ask what to do first. They told him that he needed to find players and a coach and then get a local business to pay the league fees (in exchange for putting the company logo on the players' jerseys).

When I explained that a good leader delegates tasks, he asked three neighborhood kids to help him hang flyers and recruit players. Jack has been working hard on this project, and he has enough kids for a team now. Next, he will call a players' meeting to work on finding a coach and a sponsor. 👍



Capture the present

Suggest that your middle grader make a record of the immediate past by starting his own “Today in History” calendar. When he learns about an event (say, a record-breaking blizzard or the release of a new cell phone model), have him jot it down on the correct day. Then, he might add a brief explanation or draw a symbol to represent it. 👍

The dangers of internet challenges

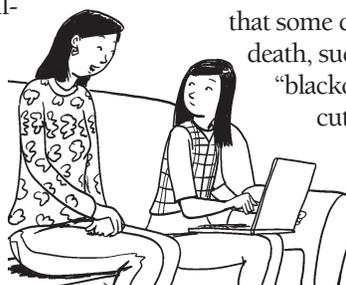
Q I've been hearing about “internet challenges” where kids dare each other to do dangerous things.

How can I keep my daughter from getting involved in these kinds of risky games?

A In today's online world, dares can spread like wildfire. Children may be encouraged to post videos of themselves eating hot peppers or being duct-taped to a pole, for example. Other kids see the videos and might be tempted to copy them.

Keep an eye on your daughter's online activities, and make sure to stick to websites' age limits. For instance, you must be 13 to post on YouTube and most other social media sites.

Also, ask your daughter to tell you when she hears about a challenge. Explain that some can cause serious injury or even death, such as the “choking game” or “blackout game,” where participants cut off their own air supply. Be sure she knows she can come to you if she ever feels pressured to do something that makes her uncomfortable. 👍



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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.

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.

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.



Electronics: Creating a balance

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. 👍

Tinker with engineering

STEM activities are popular with tweens these days. Encourage your child to explore the "E" in STEM with these engineering ideas.

■ **Take apart.** Have him disassemble—and then reassemble—simple mechanical objects like a pen or flashlight. In the process, he can figure out what each part is used for and how it works.

■ **Design.** Let your middle grader draw an invention to solve an engineering problem. He might sketch a more efficient system for delivering clean water to areas that lack it, for instance.

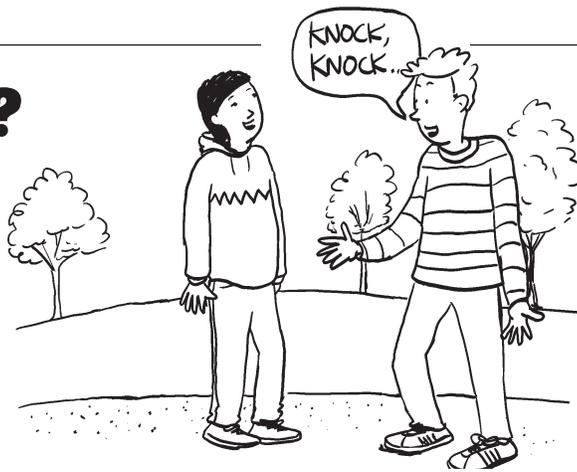
■ **Build.** Suggest that your tween use household materials to engineer projects related to what he's studying in class. If he's learning about thermal energy, he could make a pizza-box solar oven. 👍



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. 🍷



Parent to Parent Still in touch with school

Recently, I started feeling bogged down with the school-year routine. I wasn't keeping up with papers my daughter Molly brought home. When another parent mentioned a meeting I didn't know about, I realized I had to get back to being more involved.

Thanks to the other parent, Molly and I attended a meeting for next fall's cross country team. We



learned about summer conditioning and signed up for coaches' updates. Had we skipped the meeting, Molly might have missed out on participating altogether.

Now I've started opening school emails right away. I also have Molly put papers on my nightstand so I'm reminded to read them before bed. Staying in touch has made me more enthusiastic about her school and activities. And I think it makes Molly feel good in knowing I care. 🍷

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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. 🍷



Q & A A successful IEP meeting

Q My son was just diagnosed with a learning disability. What can I expect at our first IEP meeting?

A An IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting lets you talk with an entire team about how everyone can help your son learn.

Before the meeting, write down questions and concerns. Get your son's input, too. What does he feel he's doing well? What is hard for him? What goals would he like to set?



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. 🍷