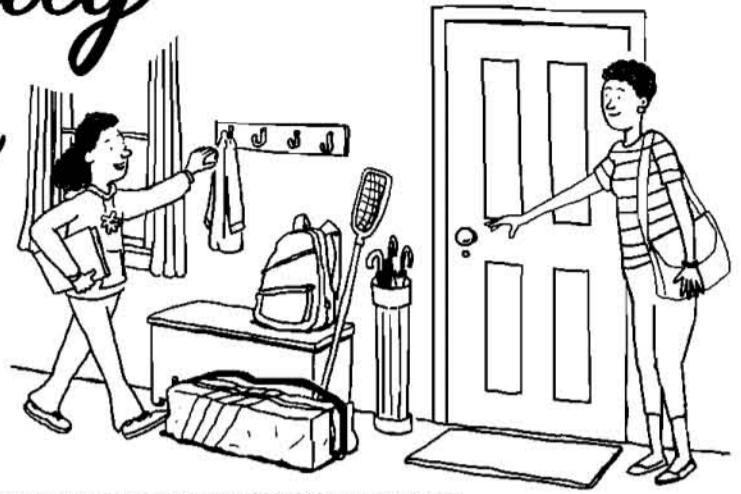


# Peaceful Family Relationships

Every family has its challenges. Busy schedules, sibling relationships, and changing roles can all create conflict, disrupting the peace that parents want. The good news? With some simple strategies, you can navigate the daily ins and outs of family life and help everyone get along. Try these ideas for overcoming common problems.



## AVOIDING THE RUSH

It's 7 a.m. and your middle grader is rushing to get out the door. You yell that she should have gotten up earlier. Frustration mounts as you wait for your child in the car.

You can make hectic times of day calmer by teaching your middle schooler to plan ahead. Suggest that she set her alarm 5–10 minutes earlier so she has more time to get ready. And show her how to prep the night before. She should think about what she'll need (clothes, homework in backpack, sports equipment) and put them where they'll be handy (clothes on dresser, backpack by the door).

Another way to minimize stress is to set a "load time." With your youngster, identify what time she needs to arrive somewhere (say, 5 p.m. for band practice), subtract how long it will take to get there (15 minutes), and deduct time for getting out the door, parking, and walking inside (10 minutes). That's when your child should be ready to go (4:35 p.m.).

## A LITTLE COOPERATION



You're making dinner and you ask your middle grader three times to set the table. He ignores you. You end up shouting, "Set the table! Now!"

Find a time to talk to your child when you're both calm. Explain that everyone in the family has to contribute, because one person can't do

everything. Point out how you feel when he doesn't cooperate ("I get frustrated if you don't respond when I ask for help"). Ask him how he would feel if he asked for your help and you ignored him or said, "I'll do it later"—and then never did.

You can also tell your middle schooler that when you all work together, you accomplish more—and you expect his help in the future. Then, phrase your requests as statements rather than questions. ("I need you to get the grocery bags from the trunk" instead of "Could you help me carry these?") Don't forget to thank your child when he does cooperate. ("That made it much easier. Thanks.")

## SHARED PROPERTY

A younger sibling borrowed your middle grader's skirt without asking, then got stains on it. Or they each want to use the computer at the same time. In both cases, a shouting match ensues.

You can help your children avoid arguments over borrowed or shared items by setting guidelines. For example, it's reasonable for a child to ask permission before using someone else's things. When something is borrowed, both parties should agree on when it will be returned ("I'll have it back by Friday after school"). Finally, anything borrowed must be given back in the same condition, or the borrower has to replace it.

When children want to use something at the same time, set a timer for 3–5 minutes and ask them to find a solution (take turns, create a schedule). By working things out on their own, they'll probably be happier with the outcome than if you stepped in. They may also come up with good ideas, like recording TV shows to watch later. Make it clear that if they can't reach an agreement by the time the timer goes off, no one will be allowed to use the item.



## Middle Years

continued

## BLENDING RIGHT IN

Many children live in stepfamilies or share time between two homes. No matter what the living arrangements are, peace can prevail. Try these ideas.

### STEPFAMILIES:

- Let biological parents take the lead on rules, especially at first. A child will be more accepting of someone who doesn't come in as the disciplinarian. Stepparents can enforce rules by simply stating the rule the parent has set ("Your mom says chores need to be done before you can go to your friend's house"). If the child doesn't obey, the biological parent can apply the consequences.

- Ask your middle grader for input when creating new family traditions for birthdays and holidays. Rather than doing away with old ways of celebrating, invite your child to help create a plan that includes everyone's ideas. He'll feel less resentful about changes if he helps make them.

- Allow your middle grader to express his feelings, as long as he's respectful. You might give him a journal or have him talk to a counselor. Bottling up his feelings will make him more likely to act out.

### SHARED PARENTING:

- Stick with consistent routines (bedtime, homework, meals). You and your ex-spouse probably won't agree on



every rule, but keep bigger ones the same (no drinking, no smoking). This provides your middle grader with stability.

- Make arrangements ahead of time for your child's activities. She should have reliable transportation no matter which parent she is staying with. Communicating early and often will help avoid mix-ups.

- Talk about co-parents positively in front of your child. They should be viewed as additional people who can love and support your middle schooler rather than as competition. Your child will feel more secure if she sees that everyone is working together.

## I BEG YOUR PARDON...



*Your middle grader rolls his eyes and sighs loudly while you're talking. He also puts down siblings and makes smart remarks.*

When your child is rude or talks back to you, how you respond will make the difference in whether the situation escalates. Speak in a regular

voice and call him on his behavior. Point out what he's doing that's not acceptable, and describe ways to communicate that would be more polite. ("Mom, I disagree with you," rather than, "I can't believe you're so old-fashioned!") Tell him that he can try again and be courteous, or you can take a break and finish talking later.

Siblings can also have a tendency to be rude to each other. Explain that using put-downs and insults is not okay. Here's an easy test: If your child wouldn't want his sibling to say

something to him, he shouldn't say it to his sibling. Tell your children that using manners with each other (saying "please" and "thank you") and speaking in a nice tone of voice will make your house more peaceful for everyone.

## IT'S NOT FAIR!

*Your high schooler has a later curfew than your middle grader, who says she's being treated like a baby. "It's not fair!" she complains.*

Explain that what's fair is what's right for each person. Ask her if it would be "fair" for a third-grader to have as much homework as an older student. ("Would a nine-year-old be able to concentrate for as long or study topics that were as complicated?")

You can also point out the benefits for your child of being her age. For instance, she has more freedom to do things than her little sister (such as going with friends to movies). She may also be more carefree than an older sibling who's feeling pressured to get good grades for college or trying to decide what to do after graduation.

## Middle Years

Resources for Educators, a division of CCH Incorporated ■ 128 N. Royal Avenue, Front Royal, VA 22630 ■ 540-636-4280

© 2011 Resources for Educators, a division of CCH Incorporated

MY11xx203E