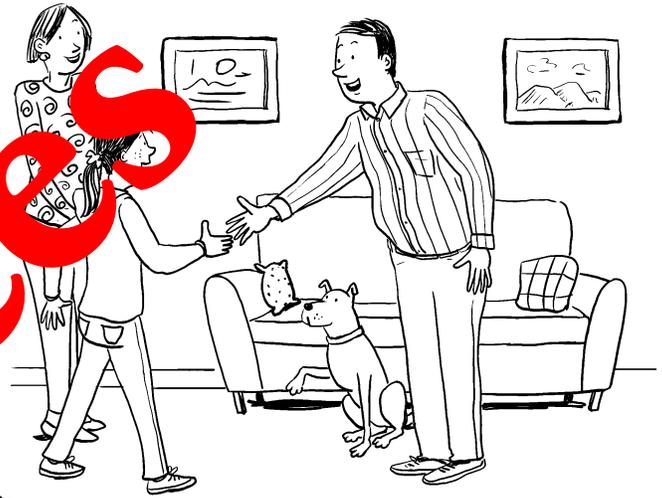


# Build Interpersonal Skills

Through the middle years and beyond, your child will need to get along with all kinds of people—from adults like teachers and administrators to classmates and coworkers. Strong social and communication skills will help her make connections, build relationships, and interact well with others. Use these suggestions.



## Start conversations

Have your tween practice introducing herself. If she is to be a teacher or student she hasn't met before, suggest that she smile, say "Hello," and tell a little about herself. ("Hi, Nicole, and I'm in seventh grade.") Then, she could ask questions about the other person. ("What subject do you teach?" or "Where did you go to school before you moved here?") She can finish the conversation on a friendly note by saying something like "I'm looking forward to your class."

With people your tween already knows, she might create conversation by bringing up shared interests ("Did you see the latest comic book?") or relevant topics ("What are you doing for your history project on? Mine's on the Reconstruction Era").

## Read body language

Nodding, smiling, and looking people in the eye all show that someone is interested in what you're saying and probably wants to keep talking. On the other hand, moving or looking away is a signal that a person is ready to end the conversa-

tion. Talk about polite ways for your child to excuse himself if he senses those cues. ("Thank you for the help, Mrs. Smith, or "I have to go. See you later!")

Remind your middle grader to be aware of a person's face, expression, posture, and tone of voice. If a classmate says "That's great," but she's rolling her eyes, she may not mean it the way she said.



## Resolve conflict

Conflict can crop up in any relationship. Learning how to handle it will give your child a valuable tool for solving problems while maintaining good relationships.

Encourage your middle schooler to look for ways to settle issues peacefully. For example, if he and a friend can't agree on an activity, they might do what each person wants for part of the time. Or if he and a project partner both want to choose the images for a presentation, they could each pick half or decide together.



Suggest that you listen as much as he talks so both parties can present their sides in an argument. *Idea:* Let his teen enact disagreement at home like this. Have

him set up two chairs facing each other and alternate sitting in one, then the other, to role-play each side of the dispute. When he has to make points for the "other" side, it will open up his mind to another way of seeing things.

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