



STUCK IN THE MIDDLE: SAMPLE LESSON

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STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

WEEK 2: INDEPENDENCE

BIBLE: Proverbs 1:8 (ERV); Ephesians 6:1-3 (NLT); Proverbs 15:23 (NLT)

BOTTOM LINE: The path to independence is learning to be responsible and to communicate with your parents in a healthy way.

SUPPLIES

Series Prep

- Online Version: Setup breakout rooms in advance.

Game

- In-Person: Small bag of individual candies or small crackers for each preteen
- Online Version: Small bowl of individual candies, crackers, chips or popcorn, extra bowl

INTRODUCTION

Say: Welcome, preteens!

Who can remind us what our series is about?

Allow for responses.

What was our focus last week?

Allow for responses.

We are going to continue our “Stuck in the Middle” series this week by talking about independence.

What is independence?

Allow for a couple of preteens to answer.

Great thoughts!

Think about the difference between a baby’s total dependence on his/her parents to take care of everything for him/her and an adult’s ability to do almost everything by him/herself.

As a preteen, you are beginning to learn how to do many things by yourself.

What are some things you can't do by yourself as a preteen but are about ready to learn to do as a teen?

Allow for a couple of preteens to answer.

Some answers might be drive, vote, go to different classes for different subjects, do laundry, get a job, hang out with friends alone, etc.

What do you need to do to have that kind of independence?

Allow for a couple of preteens to answer.

We are going to play a game that will help us think more about independence and its connection to responsibility.

OPENING GAME: EARNING POINTS (IN-PERSON VERSION)

GAME PREP

Hand out a small bag of individual candies or crackers to each preteen (M&Ms, Skittles, Goldfish, etc.) instructing them NOT to eat the candy until the end of the game.

Say: Take a few minutes and grab a bowlful of individual snacks or treats like M&Ms, Skittles, chips, popcorn, or Goldfish and an extra bowl.

You are going to count your points using those edible items, so don't eat them until the game is over!

Allow time for the preteens to get their snacks.

What kind of snacks or treats did you get?

Allow a few preteens to answer.

HOW TO PLAY THE GAME

The object of the game is to get as many points as you can.

Say: You will take the candies from your bag (or bowl) and make a little pile in front of you (*or line them up on your leg if you are sitting in chairs without tables*) to keep track of your points.

I'll tell you how to get points as we play the game,

1. If you cleaned your room this week, give yourself one point.

2. If you did it *without being asked*, give yourself an extra point.
3. If you complained about cleaning your room, take one point away (put that point back in the original bag/bowl).
4. If you got all your stuff (backpack, lunch box, water bottle) ready for school at least one day this week, give yourself one point.
5. If you got all your stuff ready for school *without being asked*, give yourself an extra point.
6. If you complained even one time about getting your stuff ready for school, take one point away.
7. If you finished your responsibilities/chores list last week, give yourself one point.
8. If you finished your responsibilities/chores list last week *without being asked*, give yourself an extra point.
9. If you complained about doing any chore at any point last week, take one point away.
10. If you got ready for bed last night by brushing your teeth, putting on your pajamas, and doing any other normal nighttime routine things the first time you were asked, give yourself a point.

Count your points and show everyone your points by putting up your fingers.

No matter how many points you got, you can eat your snacks as your prize as we move on to our teaching time!

OPENING GAME: EARNING POINTS (ONLINE VERSION)

GAME PREP

Say: Take a few minutes and grab a bowlful of individual snacks or treats like M&Ms, Skittles, chips, popcorn, or Goldfish and an extra bowl.

You are going to count your points using those edible items, so don't eat them until the game is over!

Allow time for the preteens to get their snacks.

What kind of snacks or treats did you get?

Allow a few preteens to answer.

The object of the game is to get as many points as you can.

Say: You will take the candies from your bag (or bowl) and make a little pile in front of you (*or line them up on your leg if you are sitting in chairs without tables*) to keep track of your points.

You will take the pieces/chips/crackers from one bowl and put them into the other bowl to keep track of your points as we play the game.

I'll tell you how to get points as we play the game,

1. If you cleaned your room this week, give yourself one point.
2. If you did it *without being asked*, give yourself an extra point.
3. If you complained about cleaning your room, take one point away (put that point back in the original bag/bowl).
4. If you got all your stuff (backpack, lunch box, water bottle) ready for school at least one day this week, give yourself one point.
5. If you got all your stuff ready for school *without being asked*, give yourself an extra point.
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Count your points and show everyone your points by putting up your fingers.

No matter how many points you got, you can eat your snacks as your prize as we move on to our teaching time!

TEACH

Say: What were the kind of things you earned points for doing in this game?

Allow for a couple of preteens to answer.

What were the actions that gave you extra points?

Allow for an answer.

What made you lose points in the game?

Allow for an answer.

Put up your fingers to choose the best option in the following actions to help you earn independence:

Option 1: Obeying your parents.

Option 2: Obeying your parents without being reminded.

Option 3: Obeying your parents without being reminded and without complaining.

Allow for all preteens to hold up their answer.

There is a great verse that reminds us of the importance of listening to and obeying our parents that we can read together.

Proverbs 1:8 says *My son, listen to your father when he corrects you, and don't ignore what your mother teaches you. What you learn from your parents will bring you honor and respect, like a crown or a gold medal.*

Sometimes you may not want to listen to your parents' correction and discipline because it might make you feel frustrated or embarrassed, but this passage tells us that listening to your parents will earn you cool rewards, like honor and respect.

Sometimes you won't fully agree with a decision your parent makes about an expectation s/he has of you.

No matter whether you agree or not, it is important to be respectful and obedient.

If you have a valid concern about something, it's important to obey right away and then find a time to talk to your parent about your concern *after* you have shown you can be trusted to obey (even if you don't agree).

Showing you can be trusted is a HUGE part of earning independence.

When you show you can be responsible and trustworthy, your parents will be more open to giving you more responsibility and independence.

Let's see how this plays out when Tyler and his mom interact.

"Tyler, please come to the kitchen," Mom calls out.

Tyler lets out a sigh, pauses his game, and goes down to the kitchen.

"Thank you for coming right away, Tyler. I know you were playing, but this will only take a moment." Mom says as she puts her keys in her purse.

"Sure, Mom!" Tyler was glad she noticed he came right away.

"I need to run to the store and pick up a few more groceries to make dinner tonight. I need you to keep an eye on your little sister so she can stay home and finish her homework."

Tyler's eyes got big, and he sat down. "Mom, you've never let me watch Haley before. Is it okay with dad?"

Tyler had been asking his parents to let him stay home alone and watch Haley for a couple of months because he wanted to show them he was responsible.

"Dad thought it was a good practice time because I will only be gone about 20-30 minutes. You have my phone number memorized, right?" Mom asked.

"Yes! 555-224-2244," Tyler said sitting up straighter, proud of himself for remembering.

"Ok, I want you to keep your door open and stop your game to help your sister with her math if she asks you for help. Otherwise, just keep your ears open. Don't open the front door for anyone or tell anyone you are home alone. Call 9-1-1 if there is an emergency, then call me right away. I think you will be just fine." Mom gave Tyler a little hug.

"You have been doing a great job listening and obeying right away. You have earned this more important responsibility. Show me that I can trust you with this today, buddy, okay?" Mom nodded to him as she walked out the door to the garage.

"Totally, Mom. I'll take good care of Haley. You can count on me." Tyler said as he waved and then shut the garage door.

He couldn't believe it!

His mom was actually leaving him home alone to take care of his sister.

He grabbed a bowl of chips and a soda and climbed the stairs to his sister's room to make sure she was ok.

She was quietly working on her math.

"Haley, I'll be in my room if you need me," Tyler said, as he cracked her door.

"Okay, but Mom said she wouldn't be gone long, though," Haley called to him.

"Yeah, but it's still cool that we're home alone. You can come to hang out and play video games with me when you are done with your math if you want," Tyler said.

Think back to the game we played earlier.

What did Tyler do to obey his mom?

Some possible answers: came when called, be willing to watch his sister, memorized his mom's phone number

What did Tyler do that he didn't have to be reminded to do?

Possible answer: Came when called.

What did Tyler do without complaining?

Possible answer: came when called (and paused the video game), watched his sister

What did Tyler do that was above and beyond what his mom asked him to do (showing he is even more responsible and able to be trusted)?

Possible answer: checked in on his sister and invited her to hang out when she was done with homework

Tyler is excited for the opportunity to prove to his parents that he is responsible, which is the first step in earning independence.

The second step in earning independence is healthy communication with your parents.

BIBLE CONNECTION

Ephesians 6:1-3 says, *Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father and mother." This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth."*

If you don't honor your parents by listening to them and obeying them, things will NOT go well for you.

I am going to give you a few different scenarios of how Tyler COULD have responded to his mom. and then you tell me how that afternoon would have gone differently.

"Tyler, please come to the kitchen." Mom calls up the stairs.

Tyler lets out a sigh, pretends he didn't hear his mom, and keeps playing his video game.

A few minutes later, Mom *yells* up the stairs, "*Tyler, come to the kitchen.*"

"Just a minute mom. I'm almost done with this level!" Tyler yells back.

"Tyler John, shut off your game and come downstairs RIGHT NOW!" Mom barks.

Tyler saves his game, shuts off the tv, and slowly lumbers down the stairs.

What are some possible reactions from Tyler's mom?

Allow a few responses from preteens.

Possible answers: taking away video games, making him go shopping with her, making him do extra chores, not letting him stay home by himself or to watch his sister

Now, let's say Tyler came right away, but when his mom asked him to watch his sister, he reacted differently.

"I need to run to the store and pick up a few more things to make cookies for your bake sale tomorrow. I need you to keep an eye on your little sister, so she can finish up her homework."

"Can't you just take her with you, Mom?" Tyler complained, "She can just finish her homework when you guys get home. Then I won't have to worry about her coming in my room, interrupting my game, and asking me dumb questions. Please, just take her with you!"

What are some possible reactions from Tyler's mom?

Allow a few responses from preteens.

The way you speak to your parents matters.

When your parents know they can trust you to listen and obey, they are more open to give you more independence and freedom.

ALSO, communicating clearly and respectfully will help your parents know you understand them and their expectations.

When you clearly and respectfully communicate, you earn more trust with your parents because they can trust you to be respectful to others when they aren't with you.

If Tyler is always talking back to his mom, complaining or whining every time she asks him to do something, she will be less inclined to let him go to his friends' houses to hang out, because she doesn't know how he will speak to his friends' parents.

If she can't trust Tyler to listen to and obey her, she won't trust him to be willing and able to listen to and obey a coach or activity director.

If Tyler can't be trusted at home, it may mean he won't be able to play soccer anymore or join any other after school clubs or activities.

How you respond to our parents affects many more things than you might think.

If your friends' parents hear you being disrespectful to your parents, they may not let their preteens hang out with you very much (and maybe at all), because you could be a bad influence.

Remember **Ephesians 6:1** says, *“Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do.”*

You listen to and obey your parents with respect in order to earn independence and because it is the right thing to do.

Sometimes it is hard because you may feel like you want more freedom than you are currently given.

You will see classmates whose parents give them much more “freedom,” but those preteens are often not trained and prepared for the freedoms they are given.

Trust your parents to give you independence and freedom when they believe you are ready for it and have earned it.

God gave you your parents on purpose.

If you ever feel like decisions your parents make are not right, wait for the right time to talk to them about it.

Proverbs 15:23 says *Everyone enjoys a fitting reply; it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time!*

You can also ask your small group leader for advice if you are struggling with a situation with your parents and s/he will pray with you about how to approach your parents in a way that honors God!

Speaking of Small Groups, it's time to break into our Small Groups for a fun activity!

The important thing to remember is the path to independence is learning to be responsible and to communicate with your parents in a healthy way.

Close in prayer and dismiss to small groups (or Zoom breakout rooms).

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

Say: We are going to play a quick game.

IN-PERSON VERSION

Split preteens into pairs standing and facing each other 6-feet apart.

I am going to tell you a quick scenario and you are going to compete to see which of you can guess which of the people in the scenario is communicating in a healthy way.

ONLINE VERSION

I am going to tell you a quick scenario and you are going to see if you can guess which of the people in the scenario is communicating in a healthy way.

This would be a good time for you to stand up to stretch your legs while we play!

IN-PERSON & ONLINE VERSION

If the first person is the one communicating in a healthy way, hold up one finger.

If the second person is the one communicating in a healthy way, hold up two fingers.

If both people are communicating in a healthy way, hold up both hands.

The first person trips over her sister's backpack sitting in the middle of the kitchen floor.

The first person picks up the backpack and carries it into her sister's room and dumps it out on her sister's bed.

The sister (second person) says calmly, "Thank you for bringing me my backpack. I'm sorry I left it in the kitchen."

Which person communicated in a healthy way?

Allow a moment for the preteens to hold up their finger(s) or hands to say which person communicated in a healthy way.

The first person knocked on the door of the bathroom and said, "As soon as you are done in the bathroom, I need to go, please."

The person in the bathroom (second person) yells through the door, "I'll be done when I'm done. You took 20 minutes today, so I have 15 more minutes to make it fair. Just hold it."

Allow a moment for the preteens to hold up their finger(s) or hands to say which person communicated in a healthy way.

The first person sits next to the second person on the couch and says, "When you get to a good stopping place in your game, will you please let me know so I can ask you a question?"

The second person says, "Sure, it'll just be a minute."

Then the second person gets to a safe pause point in the game, turns and looks at the first person, and says, “Thanks for waiting. What did you want to talk about?”

Allow a moment for the preteens to hold up their finger(s) or hands to say which person communicated in a healthy way.

Great job voting on who were the healthy communicators!

Have everyone sit back down.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you know who the people were who were communicating in a healthy way?
2. What can be hard about communicating in a healthy and respectful way with your parents?
3. Why do you think it's important to listen to and obey your parents when you are trying to earn independence?
4. Why do you think many preteens are so focused on having more freedom and independence?
5. What is something that stood out to you from Tyler's interaction with his mom in today's lesson?
6. How do controlling your emotions and earning independence work together?
7. What are a couple of things are you looking forward to having more freedom and independence to do?
8. What is something you are concerned about having independence as a teen or an adult? Why is that a concern for you?
9. Who is someone you admire for the way s/he handles his/her independence and freedom? Why do you admire that person?
10. How can we pray for you today?

Say: That's all we have for today, but I'll see you next week when we explore the world of preteen friendships!

Let's look at our prayer point and close in prayer.

Prayer Point: Independence

Let's pray for each other and take time to thank God that He gave us the ability to earn more freedom and independence as we grow up.

Let's also ask Him to give us wisdom as we become more independent!

Close in prayer.