

STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Guide for Parents



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Dear Parent,

Starting middle school is a big step—both for students and parents. Students are usually a little nervous about this new adventure, and parents often have a number of questions and concerns.

During this time of transition, it's important to provide your middle school student with lots of support and guidance, and to keep the lines of communication open.

This booklet will give you information and tips on how you can help your child make a smooth, successful transition to middle school/junior high.

Here's to a great school year!

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COMMON Student Concerns

While most students are excited about starting middle school, many are also a little apprehensive

Here are some of the concerns new middle school students often have.

Changing Classes

Being late to class

Getting Lost

Having someone to sit with at lunch

Opening their locker

Dressing for P.E.



Making New Friends

Being teased or bullied

Remembering their schedule

Classes that are challenging

More Homework



Sit down with your child and talk about any concerns he/she may have.

Discussing the topics covered in this booklet will help alleviate your child's concerns, and show your child how to have a successful start to this very important year.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Keeping the lines of communication open those first few weeks is particularly important. Here are some tips to help you do that.

▶ **Ask open-ended questions**

Instead of “How was school?” say, “Tell me about your day,” or ask “What are you studying in science?” “What’s that book about?” or “What was the best part of your day?”

▶ **Be available to listen**

Timing is important. Be available to listen when your child wants to talk. Also, look for times when he/she is most likely to be open to conversation (e.g., when you’re fixing dinner, driving in the car, before bed).



▶ **Recognize your child’s concerns**

Something that may seem like a small thing to you could be a big thing to your middle school student. If your child has a concern or problem, listen attentively, and help him/her figure out how to deal with it and move forward.

▶ **Pay attention to nonverbal communication**

Children aren’t always able to put into words the things they need you to know. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to your child’s body language, eating and sleeping patterns, moods, and school performance. These can be good indicators of how things are going at school and with friends.

LEARN ABOUT Your Child's School

At the beginning of the year, students are concerned about what to wear, what their friends are doing, and getting used to a new schedule. They're not thinking about some of the more important, but less exciting, issues such as the school's attendance policy.

Many schools have a scheduled day prior to the start of school for students to tour the building and find their classes. Make sure you have this date marked on your calendar.



Learn about the following, and share the most important and pertinent information with your student.

All of the following will most likely be discussed in your school's handbook and/or on their website.

■ **School Calendar**

Every school has a calendar that shows when grading periods begin and end, when parent-teacher conferences are scheduled, and when your school will be closed for holidays and vacations. Write all of these dates on your calendar at home.

■ **Attendance Policies**

Know your school's attendance and tardy policies. Also know what you need to do if your child is ill, going to be late, or needs to leave early for an appointment.

■ **School Rules**

All schools have rules regarding student conduct and behavior. Learn about your school's dress code, cell phone policies, rules regarding medications, etc.

■ **Class schedule**

Check your child's schedule to make sure he/she is in the correct classes. If you ever feel that a course is too difficult or "not right" for your middle school student, talk to the counselor.

■ **Testing**

Know what standardized test(s) your child will be taking, when these tests will be given, and how students should prepare.

■ **Extra-Curricular Activities**

Students who participate in school activities generally enjoy school more and get better grades. Find out what activities are available in your school and encourage your student to get involved in at least one activity.

■ **School Counselor**

Most middle schools have school counselors who monitor student progress, and help students figure out how to deal with difficult situations. Find out who your child's counselor is and make sure your middle school student knows how to go about making an appointment. *Counselors are not only excellent resources for students, they are also great resources for parents.*



CHECK INFORMATION ONLINE

Many teachers post student grades and homework assignments online, and email is often the preferred way of communicating with teachers. Take advantage of your school's online communication systems, and check your school's website regularly for information and updates.

A BLUEPRINT For Success



New middle school students need a lot of parental guidance and support. Use these tips to help your child get the school year off to a great start.

1 Purchase school supplies

Make sure your child has the tools he, she needs. In addition to paper, pens, and pencils, students generally need folders, notebooks, a calculator, watch, assignment notebook (if your school doesn't provide planners), alarm clock, combination lock, backpack, and/or locker shelves.

2 Provide a place to study

Your student needs a place at home to study that's quiet, well-lit, and comfortable. This area should have a surface for writing and be equipped with paper, pencils, calculator, etc.

3 Insist on good attendance

Your student needs to be in school on time every day unless he/she is ill. *Attendance is the #1 school success factor!*

4 Develop routines

Having a good morning and nighttime routine makes everyone's day run much smoother. Help your child establish routines that include going to bed on time, and getting up early enough to eat a good breakfast.

5 Monitor technology use

Be aware of how, and for what purposes, your child is using his/her cell phone, laptop, tablet, and/or home computer. *Set limits and guidelines.* Limits might include turning off all cell phones during dinner, having a computer with internet access available only in a common area, and/or having all phones docked in a common place at 9 pm.

6 Set goals

At the beginning of the year, help your student set some academic goals. Together you might determine what grade your child should realistically be able to earn in each course that grading period, or you might focus more on study habits (e.g., having all homework completed by 8:30 each night).

Setting goals will help your child understand what your expectations are, and goals give your student something specific to work towards.

7 Encourage a healthy lifestyle

With all of the changes middle school students are going through, it's important that they eat right, exercise, and get plenty of sleep. Have nutritious food at home, make sure your child gets some exercise or does something physical on a regular basis, and insist on a reasonable bedtime.



Monitor Early Grades

Check graded homework, quizzes, and tests to make sure your student is getting off to a good start in all his/her classes. If you have a concern about your child's progress in a class, contact the teacher.

Help Your Child GET ORGANIZED

With more teachers, more classes, more homework, and more activities, middle school students need to be organized in order to keep up with everything.

Middle school students often need help with organization. *This is one area in which parents can really make a difference!*



Use this information to help your child become a more organized, successful student.

▶ **Student Planner**

Many schools provide students with planners or agendas. If your school doesn't provide these, purchase one yourself. Encourage your student to take his/her planner to every class, and to use it every day to record assignments, tests, quizzes, and anything else he/she needs to remember.

▶ **Three-Ring Notebooks**

Using a three-ring notebook with tabs for different classes is a great way to keep notes organized. Handouts can easily be inserted, and if your child misses a class, he/she can copy someone else's notes and insert them where they belong.

▶ **Folders**

Purchase a different colored pocket folder for each class. Encourage your student to use these folders for current assignments, returned assignments, and graded tests.

▶ Home File

Have a place at home to store anything your child wants to keep or may need later—returned tests, essays, reports, artwork, etc. (Returned tests may help with preparation for future tests.)

▶ Phone Numbers

Make sure your child has a phone number for at least one other student in each class. If your middle schooler is absent or has a question, he/she will then have someone to call.

▶ Backpack / Locker

Encourage your child to clean out his/her backpack and locker regularly. Remind your middle schooler that all papers should be put in a notebook or folder—never stuck loose in a book, locker, or backpack.

▶ Teacher Websites

Have your student bookmark teacher websites and/or progress books to make it easy to check grades.

TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

With good time management, students have less stress and more free time. They also feel more in control of their lives.

Use Time in School

Encourage your child to use any free time in school to start on homework. He/she will have a lot less to do at night.

Create a Study Plan

Some students want to get their homework done right after school; others want to take a break and do it later.

Help your student determine the best time to do homework, and help create a study plan. For example, doing homework right after dinner (before starting any other activity) often works well.

The important thing is that students start on their homework early.

Help Develop Good STUDY HABITS



Most middle school students have a significant amount of homework, and a lot of reading to do. Having good study habits is therefore very important.

Use these tips to help your child develop good study habits—and get his/her classes off to a great start.

1. Help organize and prioritize homework

- Before starting on homework, have your child decide exactly what needs to be done, and the order in which he/she is going to do it. For example:
 1. *Read short story for English*
 2. *Do math problems on page 9*
 3. *Answer science Review Questions*
- If your middle schooler has a lot to do, help prioritize the work to make sure there's enough time for the things that are the most important.
- Encourage your child to do difficult assignments first, while he/she is still fresh and alert.

2. Emphasize the importance of keeping up

Once students get behind, it can be difficult to catch up. Encourage your middle school student to keep up on homework and reading assignments, and to start projects early.



3. Help break down large assignments

Large assignments can seem overwhelming, and sometimes middle school students need help figuring out where to begin. Show your student how to break large assignments and projects down into smaller, more manageable tasks.

4. If your child has a question or problem...

Encourage your child to talk to the teacher either before or after class whenever he/she has a question or problem. Teachers are generally happy to help, but students need to let their teacher know they need it.

5. If your child is not doing his/her homework...

First make sure the homework isn't too difficult, or that there isn't some problem with the class. You then need to come up with a plan in which the completion of homework becomes your child's responsibility.

6. Be available to help—but don't do the work

All students need encouragement and support, and most middle school students need a little extra help from time to time. Be available to help if your child gets stuck, or if he/she needs someone to look over an essay, listen to a speech, or help review for a test.

However, don't give more help than is wanted, and don't do the work yourself. If something doesn't get done, don't come to the rescue.

If you do, your middle schooler won't feel the need to be responsible in the future.



Monitor Progress

It is very important for middle school students to be successful in their classes, and for them to feel competent and capable.

If you see your child struggling in a class or spending an excessive amount of time on homework, contact the teacher and discuss your concerns.

THE SOCIAL SCENE

Friends are very important to middle school students, and many students have some concerns or apprehensions regarding the social scene.



Here are some things you can do to help your child feel good about this important aspect of middle school.

- **Encourage after-school activities**

Extra-curricular activities are a great way for students to meet other students with similar interests. Being part of a team, club, or group also gives students a sense of belonging.

- **Maintain family activities**

While being with friends is important to middle schoolers, doing things with their parents and families provides them with a much needed sense of security.

Spend one-on-one time with your child, plan family outings, and eat dinner as a family as often as possible. During dinner, turn off the TV, silence all phones, and talk about your day.

- **Build self-esteem**

Students with a positive self image are less influenced by peer pressure and less affected by social concerns. Foster your child's strengths through family activities, and help your child develop his/her interests and skills. Students who have a broad social network develop more self confidence and generally aren't as sensitive to middle school drama.

■ **Expect friendship shifts**

In middle school, friendships often shift and change. A best friend in elementary school may now have new interests and be making new friends. Encourage your child to keep his/her “old friends,” and to work on making new ones.

■ **Discuss bullying**

Bullying can sometimes be a problem in middle school. If your child is concerned about bullying, encourage him/her to stand tall, walk confidently, and use body language that shows self-confidence. (Bullies tend to target students who are passive or quiet.)

If your child ever mentions anything about being harassed or bullied in school or online, find out exactly what has happened, and talk about how to best deal with the situation. You may also want to discuss what has happened with the school counselor or principal.

■ **Promote independence**

If your middle school student has a question or problem, try to help your child figure out how to take care of it on his/her own. Being able to get their questions answered and their problems resolved helps students gain confidence—and it gives them a sense of empowerment.

You want your child to become more independent and self-sufficient; however, it's important for your middle schooler to know that you are always available if he/she ever needs your help.



Final Thoughts

Middle school students are going through a lot of changes. More than anything, your child needs your support, patience, and lots of hugs.

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