

Getting the Most Out of Middle School





Dear Student,

Middle school is a wonderful, exciting adventure. Everything is new and different, bigger and better. As a middle school student, you will have more freedom, more independence, and more fun.

This booklet will tell you exactly what you need to do to be successful in school. If you follow the steps presented in this book, you're sure to have a great middle school experience!

We asked several eighth graders how to get the most out of middle school. You'll find quotes from these students throughout this book. They have some excellent tips and advice for you!

For the sake of simplicity, the term "middle school" refers to all junior high schools, middle schools, and intermediate schools.

Getting the Most Out of **Middle School**

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Know Your School

To get the most out of middle school, it's important to know the ins and outs of your school. The following are some things you should know.



School calendar

Every school has a calendar that shows when school will be closed for holidays and breaks, when each grading period begins and ends, and the dates of important events. Write these dates in your student planner and on your calendar at home.

Courses

While middle school student schedules are mostly made up of required courses (language arts, math, science, and social studies), students in middle school sometimes get to choose a few of their courses. For example, you may be able to take band, orchestra, advanced math, or a world language. Know what courses you're required to take each year, and learn about any courses you can choose to take. *If you're ever in a course that's too difficult or too easy, talk to your counselor.*

Attendance and tardy policies

Know what the attendance policies are for your school—and what you need to do if you're absent or late. *Most importantly, know that you are expected to be in school on time every day unless you are ill.*

Attendance matters!

To succeed in middle school, you must have good attendance.

It doesn't matter how good you are about making up your work—you can never make up all of the information and discussions you miss. Unless you have an extended illness or a medical condition, you shouldn't miss more than a few days of school a year.

Code of conduct/school rules

To provide students with a safe environment that encourages learning, schools have rules regarding student conduct and behavior. Most students understand that rules are necessary, and they follow them. For the students who don't follow the rules, there are consequences.

Consequences can range from detention to expulsion. The severity of the consequence generally depends on the rules that were broken and on the student's past behavior. Rules can be different from school to school, but no school allows weapons, drugs, violence, smoking, alcohol, or bullying.

All students need to take an active role in making their school a safe place where students want to come to learn. If you ever feel threatened, bullied, or harassed, or know of a situation that may put you or someone else at risk, tell a counselor, teacher, or principal immediately.

Principals and teachers make rules in order to create a safe learning environment—but it's the students who make their school a great place to be!

Where to get help

If you look around your school, you'll find teachers, counselors, tutors, librarians, principals, and secretaries. All of these people are there to help you have the best middle school experience possible.

At some point, you're probably going to have a question or problem that you need help with. You can usually get your questions answered and your problems taken care of just by going to the right office, or by talking to the right person.

If you ever have a problem and don't know who to talk to, see your counselor. Your counselor will be able to help you with whatever question or problem you have.

The person who can help you the most with any problem or concern is a parent. If you're having a problem with a class, teacher, or another student, tell a parent right away.



Know How to Get Good Grades

If you come to school every day and do the following, you're sure to have grades you can be proud of.

Be organized

Being organized makes your day run a lot more smoothly.

- ▶ Use a student planner every day.
- ▶ Keep your locker and backpack neat.
- ▶ Organize class notes in binders or notebooks.
- ▶ Get everything organized for the next day before you go to bed.

Manage your time well

With good time management, you have less stress and more free time.

- ▶ Use any extra time in school to get started on homework.
- ▶ Create a study plan that works for you.
- ▶ Allow more time for homework than you think you'll need.

"I make to-do lists and check things off when they're done." Gabriela



Be successful in the classroom

If you pay attention in class, you have less to learn on your own.

- ▶ Be in class on time every day.
- ▶ Learn how to get along with your teachers.
- ▶ Bring everything you need with you.
- ▶ Always do all of your homework.
- ▶ Participate in class discussions.

"I pay attention in class, do all of my homework, and I ask for help if I don't understand something." Marcus



For more class success tips, watch this short video.



Take good notes

Having good notes to study from will help you do better on tests.

- ▶ Pay attention and think about what your teacher is saying.
- ▶ Write down the information that's important.
- ▶ Take notes that are neat and easy to read.
- ▶ If you're absent, get copies of the notes you missed.

Know how to read a textbook

To help you remember what you read, go through these three steps.

- ▶ **SURVEY** – Before you start to read, look over the headings and the words in **bold** and *italic* print.
- ▶ **READ** – Read all of the pages that are assigned.
- ▶ **REVIEW** – When you're done, do a quick review of what you've read.

Study smart

Students who study smart spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades.

- ▶ Find a quiet place to study.
- ▶ Focus on one thing at a time.
- ▶ Break large assignments down into smaller parts.
- ▶ Do difficult assignments first, while you're still fresh and alert.



Use test-taking strategies

Using a few test-taking strategies will help you get better test grades.

- ▶ Before you start, look over the entire test and make a plan.
- ▶ Mark any questions you want to return to.
- ▶ Check your answers, and use all of the time your teacher gives you.

"As soon as I get my test, I write anything I need to remember at the top of the page." Jayden

Lots of students get good grades in elementary school, but when they get to middle school, they let their grades slip. Work hard to get the best grades you can in middle school. You want to be ready for high school!.

Set Goals

Setting goals is important for people of all ages. Get in the habit of setting both short-term and long-term goals.

Goals help you determine where you want to go and what you want to achieve. They give you focus, direction, and purpose. Having a goal also helps you determine a plan of action. For example, if your goal is to go to college, there are specific things you must do to achieve your goal.

Set goals that are SMART

While goals can be **short-term** (get a B on your math test) or **long-term** (graduate with a 3.0 grade point average), every goal should be **SMART**: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound.

Specific goals are clear and exact. Instead of, "I want to do better in school," a more specific goal would be, "I want to earn a 3.0 GPA."

Measurable goals make it easier to know how successful you are. Instead of, "I will get in shape," a better goal would be, "I will be able to walk a mile in less than 20 minutes."

Achievable goals set you up for success because they're goals you can actually accomplish. Improving your math grade one letter is achievable. Raising a grade from a D to an A probably isn't.

Relevant goals are goals that are worth your time and effort. For example, learning a new computer program is a more worthwhile goal than beating a video game score.

Time-bound goals have a definite time or date when you want to reach them. "Complete my science project by Friday" is more motivating than "Complete my science project."

Write down your goals

At the beginning of each term, write down two academic and two personal goals. Research shows that you're much more likely to achieve a goal that's written down.



Have a Growth Mindset

Sometimes your successes, failures, talents, and shortcomings are defined by how you look at them—and by the mindset you have.

Fixed vs. growth mindset

A fixed mindset is the belief that you either are or aren't good at something. A growth mindset, on the other hand, means you believe that with effort, you can improve your skills and abilities. Here are some examples.



Fixed mindset	Growth mindset
If you aren't good at something right away, you'll probably never be good at it.	Anyone can be good at something as long as they practice and work hard at it.
It's better to stick with what you know so you don't fail.	Stepping out of your comfort zone helps you learn and grow.
Failure is something to fear.	Failure is an opportunity to learn.

Ways to build a growth mindset

Use the power of yet. When you feel frustrated because something isn't going well, adding the word *yet* reminds you to be patient and keep at it. "I don't know how to do this...yet."

Use kind self-talk. When you talk to yourself, be kind. If the voice in your head is mean or judgmental, change the message and use self-talk that's positive and encouraging.

Have a can-do attitude. Being afraid to fail holds so many people back in life. When you believe that you can do whatever you set your mind to, you open yourself up to exciting new experiences and growth.

Learn from your mistakes. When you make a mistake, you can be upset with yourself—or you can accept that mistakes happen and figure out what you can do differently next time.

Get Involved



Middle school is like anything else—the more you put into it, the more you get out of it.

Get involved in activities

Being involved in school activities provides you with the opportunity to do the following:

- ▶ Spend time with friends and meet new people
“Band is so much fun. We’re all friends and we have a great time together.” Hannah
- ▶ Enjoy school more
“I didn’t like school last year, but this year I’m on the football team. I know more kids now, and school’s more fun.” Terrence
- ▶ Try something new
“My English teacher told me that I should try out for the school play. It was a lot of fun, and everyone said that I was really good.” Diego
- ▶ Relieve stress
“I get rid of a lot of stress during basketball practice. It’s great to be with my friends and just forget about school for a while.” Corinna

Get involved outside of school

There are lots of wonderful programs outside of school for students your age, such as scouting, sports, and church activities. You can also volunteer. Volunteering at a nursing home, animal shelter, or charity event is a great way to have fun and to do something worthwhile.

Find things to do on your own

Participating in group activities is great, but it’s also important to have things that you enjoy doing by yourself. Here are some ideas.

cook	start a collection	hike	listen to music
read	make jewelry	garden	shoot hoops
juggle	take pictures	exercise	create a web page
dance	write stories	draw	help an elderly relative

Make Good Choices

When you make good choices and decisions, you reap the rewards. Make poor choices and decisions, and you suffer the consequences.

Now that you're in middle school, you likely have more freedom and independence than you've ever had before. Of course, with greater freedom comes greater responsibility. Remember, you are responsible for your actions and for the choices you make.

When you're in a situation that requires you to make a quick decision, ask yourself:

- ▶ Is this the right thing to do?
- ▶ Is this a safe thing to do?
- ▶ Will I feel good about myself if I do this?



If the answer to any of these questions is no, then it's time to take a step back and reconsider.

Deal with peer pressure

Pressure from friends can sometimes cause young people to act without thinking clearly. This is why taking a few seconds to ask yourself the three questions above is so important.

When you're thinking about doing something you know isn't a good idea, remember your dreams and goals—and what you want out of life. Think about something you're looking forward to and how your decision might change your future. *If a decision could get you in trouble, or be one you might regret, then you know what you should do.*

Be smart online

Choose what you post carefully—and remember that when you send or post something, it's permanent. *Only put things online you feel comfortable with people seeing forever.*

Navigate the Social Scene

Friendships are very important in middle school.

Most middle school students are more interested and involved in social activities than they were in elementary school. There are parties, dances, sporting events, and lots of gossip. Students are interested in how other students act and what they wear, and everyone is worried about how they look.

The middle school social scene can be exciting, crazy, and sometimes difficult to deal with. We talked to several eighth graders, and here are their suggestions on how to deal with it.



- ▶ *“Go out of your way to be friendly. Smile and talk to people—even to people you don’t know.” Luis*
- ▶ *“Find friends who have the same interests as you do, and who like you for who you are.” Thomas*
- ▶ *“Don’t do something that isn’t you just to be cool.” Justin*
- ▶ *“Don’t talk badly about others—it will get back to them!” Imani*
- ▶ *“Be careful about what you post online and text.” Violet*
- ▶ *“Don’t get caught up in the drama and dumb fights.” Arianna*
- ▶ *“It’s a lot easier to make friends when you’re in sports or band or something.” Jeremiah*
- ▶ *“Don’t take people too seriously, and let stuff go.” Jordyn*

Get along with your parents

During middle school, you and your parents will go through different stages, and sometimes you’ll disagree. Remember, you and your parents are more likely to get along if you do well in school, are respectful, and keep up on your chores.

Stand Up to Bullying

In middle school, you'll probably run into some students who act like jerks. You may also see a few students who are bullies.



Types of bullying

- ▶ **physical bullying:** pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, stealing or damaging one's property
- ▶ **verbal bullying:** making insulting or embarrassing comments, teasing, or calling people names
- ▶ **social bullying:** spreading rumors, lies, or gossip
- ▶ **cyberbullying:** using technology to bully someone

If you see bullying...

Speak up and tell the bully to stop. You can also ask the person being bullied to come with you and walk away together. If you feel uncomfortable speaking up, don't give the bully an audience. Later, find the student who was bullied and offer your help. Report any bullying you see to a teacher, counselor, or trusted adult.

Support your classmates

You can help make your school bully-free by supporting your classmates and doing what you can to make other students feel accepted. Just making eye contact, giving a friendly smile, and saying "hi" can help someone feel like they belong.

If you are bullied...

If you're having a problem with a bully at school or online, let your friends know what's going on and ask for their support. Also, tell a parent, counselor, or teacher. If a bully is causing you problems, they're probably causing problems for other students too. When you tell someone what's happening, you're taking action to protect yourself and you're making your school a better, safer place for everyone.

Deal with Stress

While middle school can be fun and exciting, it can also be stressful. Too much stress can make it difficult to take advantage of all that middle school has to offer.

When you're feeling stressed out, try one of these relaxation techniques.

- ▶ Take a deep breath, and then slowly release it. Do this until you feel your body relax.
- ▶ Starting at the top of your head, flex and then relax each part of your body.
- ▶ Think of a place where you feel relaxed and calm. Close your eyes and picture yourself there.



Whenever you're under a lot of stress, spend time with your family and friends and talk to them about what's going on. Talking is good because it helps you sort things out. Also, try to figure out what you can do to make your life less stressful. If you've taken on too much, think about which activities you can get rid of or put off until later.

When you're feeling stressed, take good care of yourself. Get plenty of sleep, eat right, and get some exercise. (Physical activity can actually reduce stress.) Also, try to keep a sense of humor, and do things that help you feel calm and relaxed. Find a quiet place, take a bath, read a book, or play with a pet.

We asked our group of eighth graders what they do to relieve stress. Here are some of their responses.

"I go outside and take a walk." Minh

"I get rid of my stress on the soccer field." Terrell

"I find a quiet place and listen to music." Kate

If you're ever under so much stress that you can't sleep or eat, or if you feel overwhelmed, talk to a parent or to your counselor. They can help you.

For some simple calming techniques, watch this short video.



Think About Your Future

Middle school is a good time for you to start thinking about what kind of career you might like to have—and about what kind of education you'll need after high school to prepare for your career.

Choose a career that's right for you

In order to choose a career that's going to be right for you, you need to consider your **abilities** (what you're good at), your **interests** (what you like to do), and your **aptitudes** (what you have a natural talent for). You also need to think about what's important to you. These are your **values**.



Think about your education options

Most careers require education and/or training beyond a general high school education. Some careers require two or four years of college; others require only one year of training. In many cases, your career choice will determine which education option is best for you.

Four-year colleges prepare students for a variety of careers. There are thousands of four-year colleges and they are all different. However, all four-year colleges are looking for students who are ready for college-level work. *Students who plan to attend a four-year college need to take college prep courses in high school and work hard to get good grades.*

Two-year colleges prepare students for a career in two years or less. Students take just the courses they need to prepare for their chosen career field. Students can also start at a two-year college and transfer to a four-year college.

Career and trade schools train people to work in careers such as truck driving, cosmetology, and dental assisting. While some programs last only a few weeks, others take up to two years to complete.

When you graduate from high school, you want to be able to look ahead to a future that's full of opportunities and choices. The better your education, the more choices and opportunities you will have in life!

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