

**MIDDLE
SCHOOL
PARENT
GUIDEBOOK**

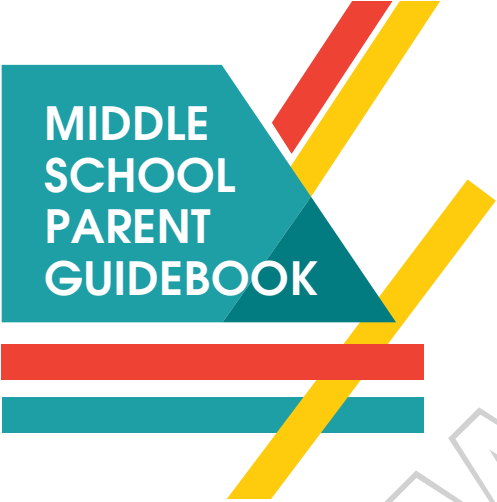


Dear Parent,

The middle school years are some of the most important in terms of growth and development. For parents, these years are often some of the most exciting and challenging.

This booklet will provide the information you need to help your child not only succeed academically, but to also thrive and grow. With your support and guidance, your child is sure to have a great middle school experience!

For the sake of simplicity, the term “parent” is used to refer to any primary caregiver—and the term “middle school” is used to refer to all junior high schools, middle schools, and intermediate schools.



MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENT GUIDEBOOK

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Stay informed

Be informed on the following topics and regularly check your school's website for news and updates.

School calendar

Every school has a calendar that shows when grading periods begin and end, when school will be closed for holidays and breaks, when parent-teacher conferences are scheduled, and other special dates. Make sure these dates are written on your online or print calendar at home.

Attendance policies

If your child is going to be absent for more than a couple of days and their teachers do not post assignments online, see if the school has a procedure for getting assignments. If your child has an extended illness or chronic health problem, provide your school with the required documentation.

Courses

In addition to the core academic subjects (language arts, math, science, social studies), middle school students may be able to take electives like art, music, a computer course, band, orchestra, or a world language. Some schools also offer more than one level of a specific subject or course. For example, there may be an advanced math course for students who excel in math.

If your child is struggling academically or is not sufficiently challenged, ask the school counselor if there might be courses or programs better suited for their level of learning.



If you ever have a question about your student's courses or are concerned about their academic progress, talk to their counselor.

School rules/code of conduct

Most students understand that rules are necessary, and they follow them. For the students who disobey the rules, there are consequences ranging from detention to expulsion.

Bullying and harassment are never allowed at school, though they can sometimes be a problem in middle school. If your child ever complains about being bullied or harassed, find out exactly what happened. Then, together decide how to best handle the situation.

Extracurricular activities

Studies show that students who are involved in extracurricular activities enjoy school more—and do better academically. Find out what activities are available at your student’s middle school and encourage your child to get involved in one or two.



Look at all grade reports

In addition to report cards, many schools also provide students with progress reports, interim reports, or midterm grades. Expect to see a midterm report halfway through the term and a final grade report soon after the grading period ends.

If you don’t see a midterm report or grade report, call the school immediately and ask for a copy. Do not just assume that someone will contact you if there’s a problem.

Standardized tests

Middle school students are often required to take standardized tests. Schools use the scores from these tests to assess student achievement and to improve their educational programs. While tests vary from state to state and school to school, all standardized tests compare student achievement with state and national averages.

Student test scores are provided to parents; however, test scores are sometimes difficult to understand. Make sure you receive all of your child’s test results and that you understand the scores. If you have questions, contact your child’s counselor.

Work with your school

Support and work with the teachers, counselors, and administrators at your child's school. Like you, they want your student to have a positive, rewarding middle school experience.

Support your child's school

A child's attitude about education and school is, to a great extent, determined by what their parents say and do. Your student needs to know that you support the teachers and the administrators at your school, and that you consider education to be a top priority.

You can best convey your interest in education and your support of your child's school by doing the following.

- ▶ Insist that your student be in school every day.
- ▶ Show an interest in what your child is studying.
- ▶ Expect your child to work up to their potential.
- ▶ Talk about the importance of getting a good education.
- ▶ Attend all parent programs and parent-teacher conferences.
- ▶ Show consistent interest in your child's academic progress.



Communicate with your school

Don't ever hesitate to ask for information or help. If there's a situation that might be adversely affecting your child's attitude or school performance—such as a health problem, a death in the family, or a divorce—contact your child's counselor and explain the situation.

Help your student resolve problems

Being able to get their questions answered and their problems resolved helps students gain confidence and become more independent. It also gives them a sense of empowerment. If your child has a question or problem, help them figure out how to take care of it on their own. *While you want to help your child become more independent, it is also important for them to know that you are always available if they need your help.*

Make the most of parent-teacher conferences

Parent-teacher conferences provide an excellent opportunity for parents to both give and receive information. Teachers are able to provide information on how a student is performing in a specific class, and parents can share information that will help teachers better understand their child.

Before you go to a parent-teacher conference, make a list of the information you want to share, along with any questions or concerns you may have. Also ask your child if there's anything you should talk to the teacher about.

Below are some suggested parent-teacher discussion topics, along with specific questions to ask.



- ▶ **Attendance and punctuality** – Is my child in class on time every day?
- ▶ **Organization** – Does my student seem organized?
- ▶ **Class participation** – Does my child ask questions, volunteer answers, and participate in discussions?
- ▶ **Homework** – Is my child's homework completed thoroughly, accurately, and on time?
- ▶ **Classroom time management** – Does my child use class time wisely?
- ▶ **Focus** – Does my student pay attention in class?
- ▶ **Academic success** – Overall, how is my child doing in this class? Are they working up to their potential?
- ▶ **Social adjustment** – Is my student respectful and courteous to teachers and classmates? Do they get along with the other students?
- ▶ **Strengths and weaknesses** – What are my child's strengths? What do they need to work on?
- ▶ **Additional comments** – Do you have any suggestions or advice for me or my child? What is the best way for me to contact you if I have a question or concern?

Help your child succeed

Middle school students need their parents to be interested and involved in their academic progress. Here's what you can do to help your child succeed.

Help your student set goals

At the beginning of each grading period, help your child determine what grade they should realistically be able to earn in each course. Setting goals will help your child understand what your expectations are—and give them something specific to work toward.



Provide school supplies and a place to study

Make sure your student has the supplies they need: a backpack, folders, notebooks, planner, calculator, pens, and pencils. They should also have a quiet, well-lit, comfortable place to study.

Set limits and boundaries

Adolescents need their parents to make rules and set limits. Middle school students also need to understand that they will be held accountable for their actions and behavior. Even though young people often complain about parental rules and restrictions, knowing that they have a parent who cares enough to make sure they stay on track gives adolescents a much needed sense of security.

Insist on daily attendance

When students miss school, they miss lectures, notes, class discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn't matter how conscientious students are about making up their work, they can never make up all of what they miss. If your child doesn't want to go to school, or if you're seeing a pattern of excuses to miss school, talk to them and to their counselor.

For more on why regular attendance is so important, check out this short video.



Help improve organizational skills

With more teachers, more classes, more homework, and more activities, it's important for middle schoolers to develop good organizational skills. When students are organized, they get better grades—and they have more time for family and friends.

- ▶ See that your child has a folder, binder, or notebook that's clearly labeled for each class. Create a file at home for the returned papers, quizzes, and tests your child wants to keep.
- ▶ Encourage your child to use a student planner, assignment notebook, or agenda to keep track of assignments. Check it periodically to make sure your child is using it correctly.
- ▶ If your student has a lot of homework, help them organize and prioritize assignments.
- ▶ Remind your child to put papers, handouts, and assignments in the appropriate folder or binder. Loose papers should never be stuck inside books or stuffed into a backpack.

Deal effectively with homework

Students must be responsible for keeping track of their assignments, completing them accurately, and turning them in on time.

If your child is not doing their homework as they should, first talk to them to make sure the homework isn't too difficult or that there isn't a problem with the class. You then need to devise a plan in which the completion of homework becomes your teen's responsibility, and if it's not completed, it becomes their problem.

Provide academic support

All students need encouragement, support, and a little extra help from time to time. Be available to help if your child is stuck or needs someone to look over an essay, listen to a speech, or help review for a test. However, don't provide more help than is wanted, and if something doesn't get done, don't automatically come to the rescue. If you do, your child won't feel the need to be responsible in the future.



Provide guidance and support

The following tips and information will help you guide and support your child through the middle school years.

Help your child develop a healthy self-image.

Students change a great deal physically during middle school. Because they mature at such different rates, middle school students have a wide variety of body types and sizes. Have a frank conversation about puberty if you haven't already. Reassure your child that these changes are normal, and that they are growing and developing as they should.

Be patient with moodiness.

Middle school students often experience mood swings. These shifts in mood are the normal result of the changes in their bodies—and of their need to figure out how they fit into this new and complicated middle school world. Parents can best help their children by providing encouragement, support, love, and a stable home environment.



Support social development.

Friends are very important to middle schoolers, and many of them spend a great deal of time on their phones and with friends. Because “fitting in” is so important to middle schoolers, they are often susceptible to peer pressure and to the images and messages they get from the media.

Students with a positive self-image are less influenced by peer pressure and media messages. Therefore, it is important for parents to help their children build a strong sense of who they are.

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

Be aware and informed

A whole new world has opened up to middle school students and this is often the time when they may be tempted to try new things.

When your child leaves the house, know who they are going to be with, where they are going, and what they'll be doing. When children know their parents are keeping an eye on them, they're less tempted to do things they shouldn't.



Communicate with your child

Communicating with middle school students can be a challenge. Be available to listen when your child wants to talk. Also, look for times when your child is most likely to be open to conversation (such as after getting home from school or before going to bed).

Teach responsibility

Middle schoolers need to understand that with increased independence comes increased responsibility. Base the amount of freedom your child is given on how responsibly they act. Also, talk to your child about the importance of making good choices and decisions, even when it's difficult. Help them figure out what to do in specific situations. For example, your child should know what they're going to say and do before they're offered drugs or alcohol. Reassure them that they can always use you as an excuse: *"I just got a text from my mom and I have to get home."*

Provide appropriate consequences

Children make mistakes, and sometimes they make bad choices. Understanding that there are consequences for bad choices and decisions is part of growing up. When your child has made a bad choice or mistake, use logical consequences whenever possible. For example, *"You're not allowed to play video games after 9:00 pm, so no video games tomorrow."* Don't take away a positive activity, like sports, as a consequence.

For more tips on helping your child make good decisions, check out this short video.



Provide technology guidelines and limits

Children are often more tech-savvy than their parents, but they still need their parents to provide guidelines and set limits.

Provide guidelines

- ▶ Remind your child to never post personal information online, such as their full name, age, address, phone number, or school.
- ▶ Have your child show you their profile, and discuss what information is appropriate (and inappropriate) to post on social media.
- ▶ Emphasize the importance of privacy. Access to your child's profile should be limited to people they know.
- ▶ Talk about how anything put on the internet becomes public—and *stays there forever*. Remind your child not to post anything online they would not want a relative, teacher, or coach to see.
- ▶ Make sure your child knows that you expect them to use technology responsibly, and to never post, send, or share anything that's inappropriate or hurtful to others.

Set limits

- ▶ Require that all electronic devices be turned off during family times.
- ▶ Use parental control software to filter inappropriate content, block websites, and/or monitor social media.
- ▶ If you're concerned about your child making late-night posts and texts, consider requiring that phones be plugged in for recharging in a central location in your home an hour before bedtime.
- ▶ Consider having your child sign an internet safety contract. (Several examples are available online.)



For tips on teen screen time and internet use, watch this short video.



Support your student's mental health

Whether your child is generally happy and healthy or struggles with their mental health, it's important that you and your child work together to help them feel safe and supported.

Be open and aware

Encourage your child to talk about how they feel, especially if something seems to be bothering them. Remember, young people often do not come to their parents when something is wrong. This is why it's so important to regularly check in with your teen to see how things are going.

Make sure your child takes care of their body

Getting regular exercise, eating a healthy diet, and getting enough sleep have a positive impact on mental health. Middle school students should get 8–10 hours of sleep a night.

Help your child deal with stress

Stress is a part of everyday life, but too much stress can have a negative impact on your child's health. Encourage them to take time to relax and recharge, but more importantly, be available to listen. The problems of middle schoolers can sometimes seem like minor issues to adults, but they often don't feel minor to the students. Be a good listener, don't judge, and be there if your child needs to vent or just talk.



Don't neglect your mental health

In order to support your child through their transition to adolescence, you need to be at your best as well. Take care of yourself, make time for relaxation, and remember to recognize what you're grateful for. *If you or your child ever need more help than you can provide yourself, speak to your doctor or to a mental health professional. There's no need to go it alone.*

Discuss career and college options

Students need their parents to help them explore and evaluate their career and education options.

Identify abilities and interests

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone. You can, therefore, be an invaluable resource in helping your child identify their interests, talents, strengths, and values.



Help your child see how their personality traits and abilities can be valuable assets in the right career. Remember, there are many talents that aren't directly measured or evaluated in school, such as the ability to work with people, leadership, and creativity.

Explore career options

Take some time to help your student explore their career options, and encourage them to do the following.

Read and do online research. To help your child learn about specific careers, visit www.bls.gov/ooh. This government website provides accurate, up-to-date information on hundreds of careers.

Talk about it. Talk to your child about what you wanted to be when you were their age, and how your feelings changed over the years. Encourage your child to also ask other family members about their careers. What do they do? How did they prepare for their career?

Consider an interest assessment

If your child would like some help figuring out what career areas might be a good fit for them, taking the short interest test at mynextmove.org may give your child some ideas.

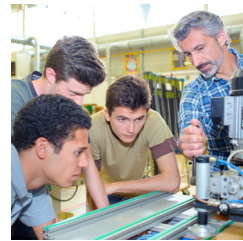
Discuss education options

Most careers require education and/or training beyond a general high school education. Some careers require a four-year college degree; others require just one or two years of additional education. A student's career choice will often determine which education option is most appropriate.

While there are many factors that determine the kinds of opportunities someone will have in life, the most significant determining factor is education. Encourage your child to continue their education after high school, and to also think about which of the following education options might be best for them.

High school career-technology program. Most high schools offer career-technology programs in a variety of career fields, such as medical assisting, computer technology, skilled trades, and business. These programs are most appropriate for students who prefer a more practical, hands-on approach to learning.

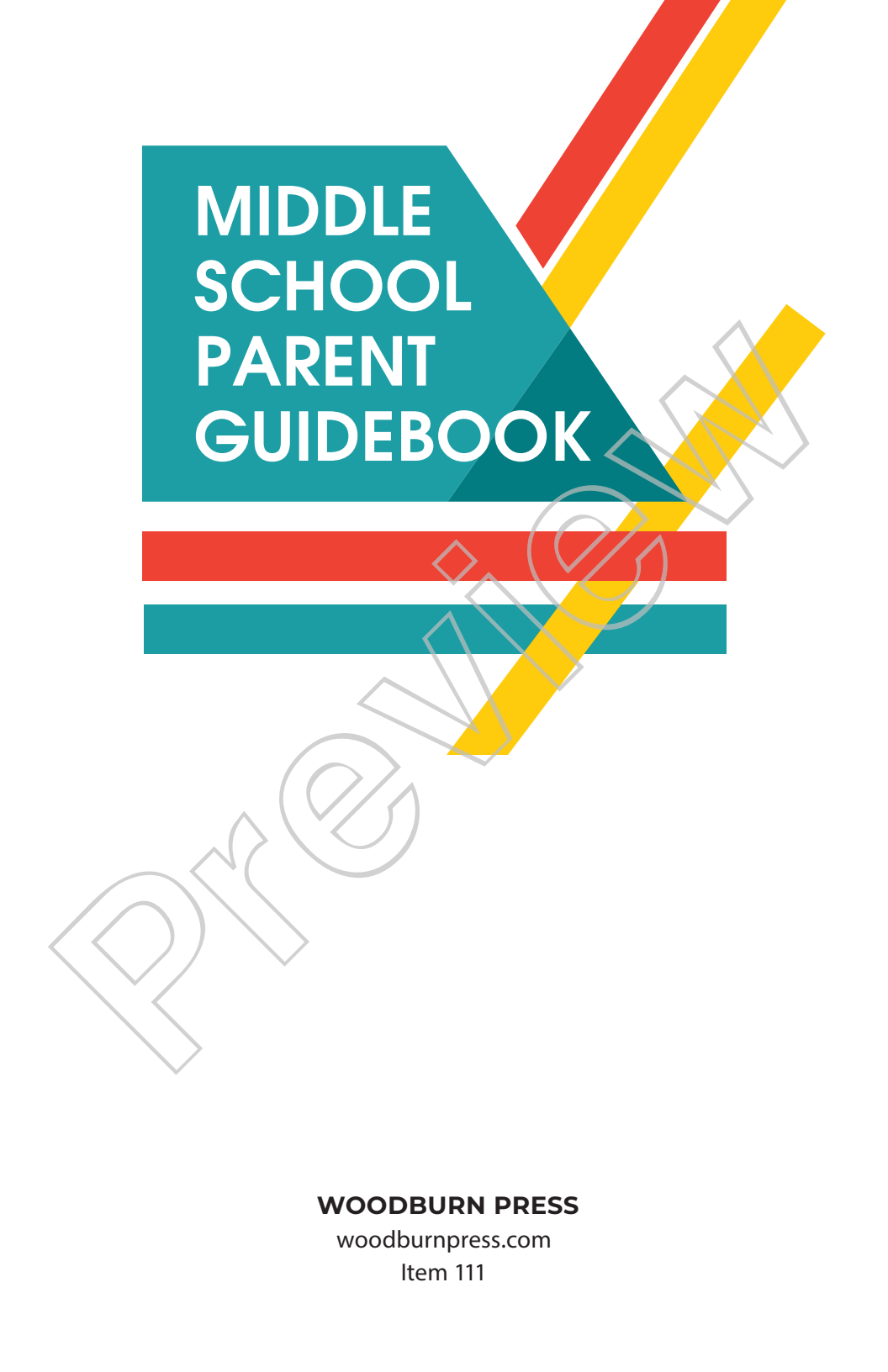
Two-year college. Two-year colleges provide affordable, career-oriented programs that enable students to begin their career after two years of college or less. Students can also attend a community college for a year or two, and then transfer to a four-year college to earn a bachelor's degree.



Four-year college. A four-year college degree can open doors and provide a range of career opportunities. While four-year colleges vary greatly in size, costs, admission policies, and majors offered, they all want students who are prepared for college-level work.

Career/trade school. Career and trade schools offer short-term programs in a wide variety of career fields. While some programs last only a few weeks, others take up to two years to complete.

Apprenticeship. Students who prefer a hands-on approach to learning may want to consider applying for an apprenticeship program. Apprentices learn a skilled trade through a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training.



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