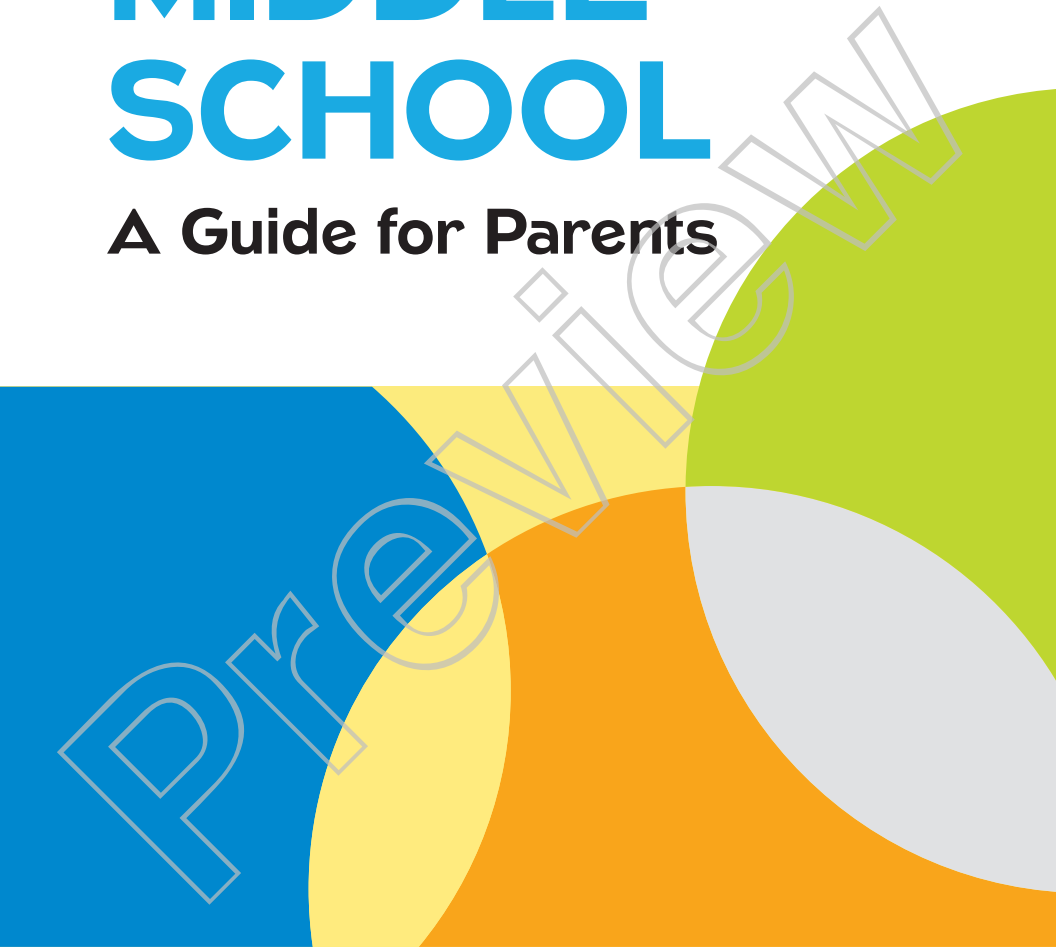


STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL

A Guide for Parents





Dear Parent,

Starting middle school is a big step—for both 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.

Here's to a great school year!

For some helpful middle school parent success tips, watch this short video.



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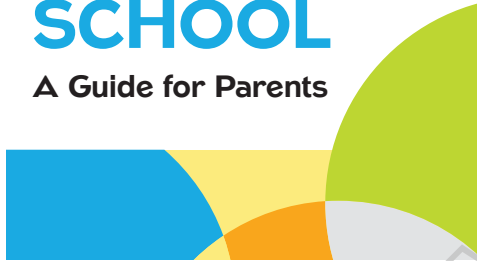


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COMMON STUDENT CONCERNS

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

getting lost

being late to class

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 they 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 they are most likely to be open to conversation, like when you’re cooking dinner or riding in the car.



▶ **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 them figure out how to deal with it.

▶ **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

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.



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.

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 breaks. Put all of these dates in your calendar.

■ Attendance policies

Know your school's attendance and tardy policies. Also know what you need to do if your child is ill, is 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, and code of conduct.

■ Class schedule

Check your child's schedule to make sure they are 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 your child should prepare.

■ Extracurricular 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 student knows how to make 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 they need. In addition to paper, pens, and pencils, students generally need folders, notebooks, a calculator, backpack, planner (if your school doesn't provide one), 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 supplies.

3 Insist on good attendance.

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

4 Develop routines.

Having a good morning and nighttime routine makes everyone's day run much more smoothly. 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 their phone, laptop, tablet, and/or home computer. *Set limits and guidelines.* Limits might include turning off all 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 9:00 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, or you might focus more on study habits, such as 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 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 of their 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 their planner to every class, and to use it every day to record assignments, tests, quizzes, and anything else they need 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, they 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 needs or wants to keep, such as returned tests, essays, reports, and artwork. (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 they are absent or have a question, they will then have someone to call.

▶ Backpack/locker

Encourage your child to clean out their backpack and locker regularly. Remind them that all papers should be put in a notebook or folder—not left loose in a book, locker, or backpack.

▶ Teacher websites

Have your student bookmark teacher websites and/or progress-monitoring sites 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. They will have a lot less to do at night.

Create a study plan.

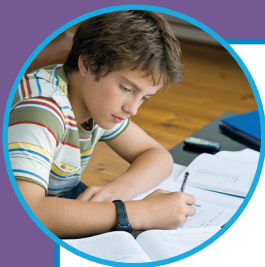
Help your student determine the best time to do homework and help them create a study plan. For example, doing homework right after dinner often works well.

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

This quick video will give your student some great organization tips.



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 their 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 they are 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 them prioritize the work. You want to make sure there's enough time for the things that are most important.
- Encourage your child to do difficult assignments first, while they are 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. Encourage communication.

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

5. If homework isn't being completed, find out why.

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.

Be available to help if your child gets stuck, or if they need someone to look over an essay, help review for a test, or listen to a speech. 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's very important for middle school students to be successful in their classes and 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.



Help your student improve their study skills with this short video.

THE SOCIAL SCENE

Friends are very important to middle school students, and many students have 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.

Extracurricular 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 their 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 their “old friends,” but to work on making new ones, too.

■ **Discuss bullying.**

Bullying can sometimes be a problem in middle school. If your child is concerned about bullying, encourage them 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 at school or online, find out exactly what 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 their 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 them to know that you are always available if they ever need your help.

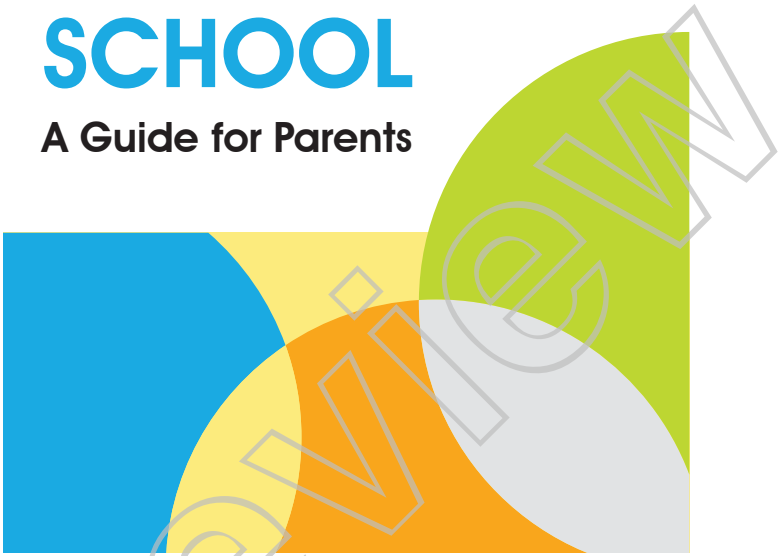


Final thoughts

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

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