

Next

Step

Middle

School

Info & Tips for
New Middle
Schoolers

Dear Middle Schooler

Middle school is an exciting new adventure. Everything is new and different, bigger and better. As a middle school student, you will have more freedom, more independence, and more fun. But you'll also have more responsibilities—in school and in life!

But don't worry. If you follow the advice in this booklet, go with the flow, and aren't afraid to reach out for help, you'll do great. You've got this!





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What to expect

Whenever you start something new, it's helpful to know what to expect. Here are some things you can expect to find in middle school.

New teachers and classmates

For many students, going to middle school means going to a different, and often larger, school. For all students, it means new teachers, new classes, and new friends.



New things to adjust to

Lunch periods, lockers, and changing classes are just a few of the new things most middle schoolers need to adjust to.

New classes

The courses are often more difficult and there's usually more homework. Middle school students are also expected to do more work on their own.

More activities and sports

Most middle schools offer a variety of activities, clubs, and athletic programs for their students.

More things to organize

In middle school, students have more classes, more teachers, and more homework. To keep up with everything, you need to be organized.

More socializing

There are more games and social events in middle school. Some students also feel that there's more social pressure.

Set some goals

There's no better time to set goals for yourself than at the beginning of a new school year. Set some academic and personal goals for yourself.

Set short-term and long-term goals

Short-term goals take hours or days to achieve. Long-term goals take weeks, months, or even years to achieve.

Examples of short-term goals:

- ▶ Get a B on my next history test
- ▶ Practice my soccer drills 3 times this week

Examples of long-term goals:

- ▶ Get all As and Bs on my next report card
- ▶ Make the soccer team next year
- ▶ Go to college

Make goals that are specific, measurable, and realistic

Not specific – I will do better in math.

Specific – I will get a B in math this semester.

Not measurable – I won't be so shy in class.

Measurable – I will raise my hand three times today.

Not realistic – I usually get all Cs on my report card, but this semester I will get straight As.

Realistic – I usually get all Cs on my report card, but this semester I'm going to get two Bs.



Get organized

Being organized saves you time and helps your day run more smoothly. When you're organized, you also have less stress, and you feel more in control of your life.

Use a planner every day

Use your planner to record assignments, tests, appointments, activities, and anything else you need to remember.

Organize your papers

Whether you use folders, binders, or notebooks, the important thing is that you have a specific place for all of your papers (notes, handouts, homework, and returned tests).

Keep your backpack and locker clean

You'll be able to quickly find what you need, and you'll be less likely to lose things.



Eliminate clutter

Put away or throw out anything you don't need.

Organize and save computer work

Make sure you save your work often. Regularly back up, clean up, and organize your computer files.

Prepare for your day the night before

Before you go to bed, get everything ready for the next day. Put your backpack and anything else you will need in the same place each night. If there's something you want to remember to do in the morning, leave yourself a note or set a reminder.

Manage your time



With good time-management skills, you will have time for the things you *need* to do—and for the things you *want* to do.

Use class time wisely

Use any extra time in class to start on your homework, and if you have a study hall, use it. Doing these things will reduce the amount of time you need to spend on homework at night.

Make to-do lists

Each day, make a list of all the things you need to do and cross things off as you complete them. At the end of each day, add the tasks that didn't get done to the next day's to-do list.

Combine tasks

Study while you're doing laundry, go over a speech in your head when you're going for a walk, or review your notes while you're waiting for a ride.

Create routines

Have a morning routine that includes eating breakfast and getting to school on time—and a nighttime routine that includes going to bed early enough to get 8–9 hours of sleep.

Limit time wasters

Social media, TV, and video games are fun, but they can easily take up too much of your time. Schedule small chunks of time for these activities, and stick to your schedule. You could also use one of your favorite activities as a reward for getting your schoolwork done.

Succeed in class

When you make the most of the time you spend in class, the time goes faster, you have less work to do outside of class, and you get better grades. Here is some advice to help make this happen.

Participate in class

Participating in class makes the class more interesting, and it helps keep your mind focused. Ask and answer questions, and participate in discussions. You'll learn more, and your teachers will be impressed.

Have your homework done

In many classes, homework is a significant portion of your final grade. Also, if you haven't read the short story that was assigned in English, you aren't going to get nearly as much out of the class discussion—and it might be bit stressful if your teacher calls on you.

Know your teachers

Different teachers have different rules, requirements, and pet peeves. Think about what's important to your teachers. Are they strict about rules? Do they give points for participation?

Ask for help

Teachers are usually happy to help you, but you have to ask. If you're struggling in a class, get help early.



To succeed in your classes you need to be a good test taker. For tips on how to ace your tests, watch this short video.

Study smart

Students who “study smart” often spend less time studying, and yet they get better grades. Here’s how you can “study smart.”

Get started

Getting started on your studying is often the hardest part. Set a time to start studying and stick to it. If you have a hard time getting started, begin with something you can finish quickly or with a subject you like.

Have a good place to study

Your study area should be quiet, comfortable, well-lit, and equipped with supplies—paper, pens, pencils, calculator. *To help you stay focused, turn off the TV and silence your phone.*



Create a study plan

Before you begin studying, decide exactly what you want to get done and the order in which you are going to do it. Be specific. For example: 1) do science report, 2) read history pages 51–70, 3) revise language arts paper.

Break large assignments down

Use a planner to break large assignments down into smaller parts. For example, if you have a paper due Friday:

Mon – create outline

Wed – revise and rewrite

Tues – write first draft

Thurs – write final report



Watch this short video for some additional tips on how to get the most out of your study time.

Navigate the social scene

For lots of middle school students, making friends and having a fun social life is very important. However, for many students, the social scene can be complicated.

Making friends

In middle school, “fitting in” and having a group of friends can feel really important. Here are some tips for building happy and healthy friendships.

Be open. Most friendships grow from everyday circumstances, like sitting next to someone on the bus or being in the same class. Strike up a conversation with a question or compliment like, “Who do you have for English?” or “I really like your shoes.”

Look for like-minded students. Pay attention to what other students are interested in, and if you have something in common, talk to them about it. Also, take notice of students who seem to be like you. If you happen to be quiet or shy, and another student seems to also be shy, introduce yourself.

Shyness can seem like a big problem to overcome, and it can make you feel lonely. Just know that all middle school students have fears, anxieties, and doubts. Once you get used to speaking up, it gets a lot easier.



Romantic relationships

Relationships at this age should be fun and casual, not serious or intense. If someone you like is possessive or gets in the way of your schoolwork, friends, or family obligations, this is a good sign that you should back away.

Stand up to bullying



Bullying is aggressive behavior that is harmful, intentional, and repeated. Bullying can take many forms—all of them are hurtful.

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 witness bullying...

Speak up and tell the bully to stop. You can also ask the person being bullied to come with you, then walk away together. If you feel uncomfortable speaking up, do not give the bully an audience. Later, find the student who was bullied and offer your support. Report any bullying incident 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 ever bullied, know that it's not your fault. Tell a parent or other trusted adult what's happening. Also tell your friends. Do not let anyone bully you into silence.

Make good choices

Being in middle school generally means that you have more freedom and independence. But with this new freedom comes responsibility. You are responsible for your behavior, your choices, and your decisions.

Think before you act

There are countless opportunities to do great things in middle school, like get on the honor roll, play a sport, or be an officer in a club. But there are also many opportunities to make poor choices. This is why it's important to think before you act.

When you're in a situation that requires you to make a 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 what you are about to do will likely have negative consequences for you. It's time to take a step back and reconsider.

It can be hard to focus on consequences when you're in a high-pressure situation. The excitement of a situation and/or pressure from peers can sometimes drive young people to act without considering the consequences. *This is why taking a few seconds to ask yourself the three questions above is so important.*

Your peers can be a huge influence on who you are now and who you will become. This is why it's important for you to be aware of the influence your peers have on you. Just remember to stick to your values and always think for yourself.

Be smart with technology

While technology can add a great deal to your life, it can also have some negative effects—especially on things that truly matter, like your relationships and your future.

Think before you post

To others, your posts online lack context and largely speak for themselves—so choose what you post carefully.

Be extra polite to people online. People can't see your expression or hear your tone of voice, so what you post or send can easily be misunderstood.

Remember that permanent means permanent. Somebody will always have access to what you've sent or posted, and it can always be recovered. Only send or post things you feel comfortable with people seeing forever.

Be safe

Don't put personal information (such as school, address, or favorite hangout) online. And never meet face-to-face with someone you've met online.

Take time to unplug

Research shows that spending too much time online can have a negative effect on the mental health of young people. *Take time to relax and do fun activities without technology.* You will experience the best moments of your life when you are out in the world with others—appreciating all of the challenges and triumphs that come your way.



Take care of your mental health

Mental health refers to your social, emotional, and psychological well-being. Although your mental health can be impacted by things you can't control, you can control how well you look after it.

Take care of your physical health

The amount of sleep you get, your diet, and how much you exercise all impact your mood. Make sure that you get at least eight hours of sleep each night. Also, try to eat a healthy diet and do something physical on a regular basis.

Reflect

Put your phone away, turn off the TV, and take time every day to rest, relax, and reflect. Try writing your thoughts in a journal, or just close your eyes and visualize being in a peaceful place.



Be grateful

Notice the things you are thankful for in your everyday life. Regularly reflect on and feel grateful for each of these things.

Talk about it

Talking about your feelings is a great way to process them, and to put things in perspective. Talk to a friend or family member when you have a problem or if something is bothering you.

Deal with stress

Make a list of the things that stress you out and come up with a plan to deal with each of them. If something is out of your control, let it go.

Know where to go for help

Middle school provides many opportunities, but it also brings new challenges. It's important to remember that you're not alone. If you have a problem, *someone can help*.

At some point this year, you'll likely find yourself feeling a little lost, confused, overwhelmed, or just plain stressed out. This is when it's important to do the responsible thing and communicate your feelings and needs.

If you...

- ▶ are having problems with a class—talk to your teacher.
- ▶ aren't feeling well or have lost something—go to the office.
- ▶ need help with a personal problem, are having trouble in your classes, or just aren't sure where else to go—see your counselor.
- ▶ are being bullied or harassed at school or online—tell a parent, teacher, counselor, or principal.

The person who can help you the most...

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. If you can't talk to a parent, reach out to another adult you trust.



Never stay silent when you're struggling—there's always someone who can help you find your way.

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