



Help Your Child
Succeed in
Middle School

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Introduction

Moving up to middle school can be an exciting time for both you and your child. It might also be a little bit scary. Your student may have different teachers for different subjects, perhaps for the first time. The work may be more difficult and the expectations higher. Middle school can be a time of big changes socially, too. Your child may find new friends and develop new interests.

This handbook will show you how to be there for your child as they navigate middle school. Just as when they were in grade school, the key is to be an active partner in your child's education. This handbook will show you how to do that by offering tips for creating connections between home and school, working with your child's teachers, helping with homework, showing your child how to organize their time and more.



1. Get Involved in Your Child's Education

Parents tend to pull back from school involvement once their children reach middle school. But kids are never too old to benefit from their parents' contributions to school. Studies show that children whose parents are involved in their education tend to do better in school than those whose parents take a hands-off approach. In fact, research shows that parents' involvement is more important to their children's success than their own level of education, how much money they make or how old their children are.

Learn About Your Child's Middle School

Your child's school may be a lot different from the one you went to. Instead of chalkboards, teachers may use a smartboard to explain lessons. Your student may use a computer tablet along with traditional text books. Becoming familiar with the school and how it operates will help you feel part of the community.

- Read the school's handbook. The handbook will lay out the school's policies and educational philosophy. Find out about the school's rules on attendance, dress code, student behavior, use of electronics, cheating, vandalism and more.
- Discuss the school's rules and expectations with your child.
- Visit the school's website regularly for listings of events, holiday schedules and more. Find out if your child's teachers have their own pages on the website.
- Sign up for email, text, or phone alerts about important events and news happening at the school.
- Use the online parent portal, if your school offers this service. Your child's assignments, grades and classes will be listed there.
- Attend back-to-school night. Most schools hold these in the fall



Make the Most of Back-to-School Night

Back-to-school night at middle school offers a chance to see your child's classrooms, meet the teachers and other staff members, and learn more about your child's typical school day. The teachers will likely give formal presentations and there may be time for you to visit other areas of the school, such as the gym, media center and more.

During the evening, expect to find out about:

- The typical daily and weekly schedule
- The curriculum and learning goals for each subject
- Homework expectations and how grades are affected when homework is handed in late
- The policy on makeup work due to absences
- How the teacher will communicate to parents, for example through email, classroom newsletter or parent portal
- Opportunities for parent involvement

Get a feel for the school culture

Middle school can be a challenging time for children, socially. Your child will likely meet new kids who come from other elementary schools in the district. Look for signs that your child's middle school encourages students to be kind. Find out what the school does to help kids make new friends and get involved. The following questions will probably be answered during presentations from teachers and administrators at back-to-school night. If not, then raise your hand and ask!

- How does the school deal with bullying and cyberbullying? Does it focus on prevention? What happens when a student accuses another of bullying?
- What clubs, sports and extracurricular activities are offered?
- Do teachers offer many opportunities for children to work on group projects?
- Will there be any field trips?
- What events does the school host? Are there school dances? Talent shows? Plays?
- How is discipline handled?



Prepare for the Parent-Teacher Conference

Most schools hold parent-teacher conferences before the end of the first marking period. These meetings are usually brief because the teachers have a lot of parents to fit in during a short period of time.

- Ask your child if they have trouble with any subjects and which subjects are their favorites.
- Bring a list of questions to ask each teacher.
- Bring a pen and paper so you can jot down notes.
- If your child is not doing well in a subject, ask the teacher for specific ways you can help them get up to speed.
- When you get home, tell your child the good things the teachers had to say. Talk about any concerns they may have brought up and how you can all work together to address them.

Questions to Ask at Your Parent-Teacher Conference

During the parent-teacher conference, your child's teachers may show you examples of their work and update you on grades. Ask:

- What are my child's strengths and weaknesses?
- How is my child doing compared to their classmates?
- How is my child's behavior?
- How much time should my child spend on homework?
- What can I be doing at home to help my child do well in school?
- How can I help my child work independently and make the best use of their time?
- How can I help my child prepare for high school?



2. Volunteer at School

Parents are less likely to volunteer when their child is in middle school. They may feel that teachers don't need as much help, and their kids don't want them there, anyway. It's true that children are more independent by middle school age, and some kids might be embarrassed to see their mom or dad in school. But you can still contribute. Make sure your child is comfortable with your role. They may prefer that you participate in activities that they're not involved with.

Benefits of volunteering in middle school

- You'll get to know your child's teachers, the administrators, and the other staff and faculty who make an impact on your child each day.
- You'll meet other middle school parents.
- You'll experience the culture of the school first-hand. Watching kids interact and seeing what they're wearing, saying, and doing will give you insight into your child's own daily experiences.
- You'll have the satisfaction of knowing you're contributing to your child's school.

Ways to get involved

Volunteer with kids

- Help out with a school club or team. Make costumes or build sets for drama club. Coach the chess team. Become an advisor for the school newspaper. Chaperone when the track team travels for meets. Help out with the science fair.
- Become a tutor. Work one-on-one with students in a particular subject or in teaching organizational or study skills.
- Offer your services as a translator if you're fluent in a language other than English.
- Volunteer as a hall, lunchroom or recess monitor.

Volunteer behind the scenes

- Serve on the school's parent advisory committee.
- Work with administrators to put together the school newsletter or update its website.
- Join a booster club for a sports team, band or chorus.
- Work with the art teachers to hang artwork or install art exhibits in the corridors.
- Help plant, weed, and maintain the school's flower beds with your family on weekends or after work.

Volunteer occasionally

- Speak at career day.
- Chaperone field trips.
- Volunteer to help at evening or weekend special events such as book fairs, science fairs and school dances.

The Parent Teacher Organization

Your school's parent-teacher organization offers a window into your child's school and the people who work there. As an active PTO member, you will meet other parents and school personnel and enjoy meaningful opportunities to support the school.

PTOs generally meet once a month in the evening. If you can't make it to the meetings, read the organization's newsletter or website so you can stay up-to-date on what's happening. Support the parent group by attending its events and participating in its fundraisers. Sign up to be a volunteer. Indicate the type of projects or events that you are interested in helping with.

Other Ways to Be Engaged

- Go to school concerts, plays, family nights, etc. Bring siblings and relatives, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles
- Attend school board meetings. If you can't make it to the meetings, find out if they're aired on local cable TV or live-streamed online. Your local newspaper may also cover board meetings.
- Get to know other parents and exchange contact information.



3. Know Your Child's Learning Style

You may already have an idea of how your child learns. Some kids are happiest with their nose in a book. Others can't sit still. They absorb information best when they're moving. Many children use a combination of methods to learn, though they may prefer one over the others.

The chart below will help you and your student understand how they learn best. Encourage them to use the strategies that match their learning style.

How Does Your Middle Schooler Learn Best?			
Learning Style	Likes to ...	Ways to Help Your Child in the Classroom	Ways to Help Your Child Study
Visual	Read Watch videos Look at pictures, images, maps, and charts	Have your child sit near the front of the classroom where they can easily see the teacher Encourage your child to take notes in class to read later Ask your child to picture in their head what they are learning	Use flash cards to help with studying Give your child highlighters and colored sticky notes for underlining and color-coding Have your child draw pictures or diagrams of concepts that they are learning
Auditory	Listen to directions and lessons Sing Play instruments	See if your student can be seated away from noisy distractions Encourage your student to discuss topics with classmates Suggest your student verbally describe illustrations and charts they see in textbooks	Use rhymes and other memory aids to help with memorization Have your child record themselves explaining a lesson and play it back Have your child read their notes out loud
Physical	Be active physically Use body and hand gestures when telling a story Learn by doing	Show your child how to organize information into steps Encourage your child to take part in class discussions Make the most of hands-on learning activities and classroom projects	Encourage your student to take study breaks by getting up and moving Have your child act out the material they are studying Give your child a stress ball to play with while studying or doing homework

4. Support Learning at Home

Your child's education doesn't end with the last bell of the school day. As a parent, you can encourage learning at home and make sure your child has the tools that make learning possible.

- Feed your child a nutritious diet. Kids need the right kind of fuel to function at their best. Send your child off to school with a healthy breakfast rich in protein, whole grains and fiber.
- Limit your child's screen time. Talk about what type of and how much media your child may use each day. Create "media-free" zones in your home, such as bedrooms and the dinner table.
- Make sure your child has at least one hour of physical activity each day.
- Give your child time to wind down at the end of the day. Try not to schedule extracurricular activities, lessons or sports in the evening.
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep. Children ages 6-12 need 9-12 hours hour of sleep per night, while teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep.



Help Your Child Be Organized

Organization is an important skill, especially in middle school where your child may have several different teachers assigning homework each night. When a child does poorly in school, being disorganized is often the reason why.

Put a system in place

- Color code notebooks and folders by subject area. Or use a large binder with different color tabs for each subject.
- Give your child a planner to keep track of assignments, due dates, and tests. Some middle schools provide these to students.
- Encourage your child to look ahead in the planner each day for upcoming assignments. Have him make a plan for completing the assignment by its due date.

Make it hard to forget

- Get your child in the habit of reviewing the planner at the end of each school day so they'll know which textbooks and folders to bring home.
- Teach your student to put completed homework in the correct subject folder and into the backpack as soon as it's done. Pens, pencils and other supplies should be returned to the backpack when they're done using them, too.
- Keep everything together and have a place for everything. Have a designated spot for your child's backpack and other things they bring back and forth to school each day

Prepare ahead of time

- Have your middle schooler pack their lunch and backpack and pick out the next day's clothes the night before.
- Have them periodically empty and organize their backpack, throwing away worksheets and other items they no longer needs.
- Know your child's assignment schedule. Are vocabulary sheets due on Wednesdays? Are there math quizzes every Friday? If you know, you can make sure they stay on track.



Talk With Your Child About School

Your once talkative grade schooler may have clammed up now that they've become an adolescent. Don't worry. Your child still wants to talk with you, but on their terms. The key is to be available when they're ready to have a conversation.

- Let conversations happen naturally. Don't pepper your child with questions.
- Adolescents tend to talk more readily when they're not face-to-face, such as while riding in the car, walking the dog, or doing dishes with you. Take advantage of these times together by getting the conversation going.
- Ask open-ended questions, such as "What did you like best about today?" or "Tell me about one thing that you learned today."
- Tell your child something interesting or funny about your own day. Sometimes that can be the opening your child needs to describe their own day.



Bringing Lessons Home

Connect the classroom with home to make lessons relevant and to spark your middle schooler's love of learning.

Math and Science

Show your middle schooler how to stretch their allowance by shopping the sales. How much money will they save on that 25% markdown? In the supermarket, have them calculate the price per ounce of their favorite breakfast cereal. Does the cost differ according to the size of the box? Which is the better value?

While cooking dinner, calculate by how much you would need to increase the ingredients if 75 hungry people showed up at your door. What if you were to charge those people for their meals? How much would each person have to pay in order for you to break even? Remember to factor in the value of your labor as well as the cost of ingredients.

Set up a home weather station, with thermometer, barometer, and precipitation collector. Track the weather for a full season or longer. Chart and average daily high and low temperatures and average the amount of precipitation.

English and Social studies

Many works of literature have been made into movies. After your child reads the book, watch the film together and discuss how they differed.

Find a documentary about a subject that your student is studying in school. Look for movies and television shows about historical periods and other cultures that your child is studying.

Tell stories from your own personal and family history. Did you live through an historical event that your student is learning about? Share your memories with your child. Go through old photo albums and share stories from grandparents and other relatives.

Language

If your child is learning a foreign language in school, watch YouTube videos, movies and television shows together in that language. If possible, visit an ethnic restaurant, store or other business where the language is spoken.

5. Helping With Homework

Homework is harder in middle school, and there's usually more of it than in younger grades. Let your child know that homework is a priority in your household by helping in the following ways:

- Give your child a place to do their homework. It might be a desk in their room or a place at the kitchen table.
- Stock the area or a portable caddy with supplies, such as pens, pencils, erasers, paper and a ruler.
- Limit distractions, including the phone and TV. Consider making homework time “quiet time” for the entire family.
- Be on hand to help your child without doing the homework for them.
- Ask your child's teacher to recommend resources for when your child gets stuck on an assignment that you can't help with. These may include homework hotlines, textbook websites and online videos.

Studying for Tests

Studying should go beyond memorizing formulas or facts. Help your child truly understand the material by encouraging them to do the following:

- Remove distractions, including mobile devices and TVs.
- Map out or diagram concepts.
- Underline passages using colored highlighters.
- Make study cards or flash cards.
- Apply the material in different ways. Use vocabulary words in sentences. Practice math formulas in different equations.
- Think up essay questions and answer them.

Other ways to prepare for tests

- Encourage your child to form study groups with classmates.
- Teach your child to use memory aids. For example, the name Roy G. Biv will help your child recall the correct order of the colors of the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet). Or make up your own funny ways to remember facts.
- Have your child carry study materials with them especially when there's a big test coming up. That way they can pull them out during down times—while waiting at the orthodontist's office or in the car on the way to soccer practice, for example.

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