

Moving to Middle School

Entering middle school is an exciting time. New friends, classes, freedoms and responsibilities await incoming students. The transition to middle school can be a difficult one though, as new academic pressures are too much for many students to handle alone. However, there are some simple ways to help your child succeed at their new school.

Help Your Child Stay Organized

One of the biggest challenges facing new middle school students is keeping track of assignments. With four or more academic classes, homework can seem like an overwhelming burden. Writing down assignments regularly is a great way to keep on top of things. Have your child write down homework assignments daily for each class, including the exact textbook pages, problems, and due dates.

Some schools hand out daily planners for their students to keep track of their work. If your school does not, buy one from an office supply store. If your child forgets or resists writing down assignments, provide an incentive. For example, if all assignments are copied correctly for a week, they might get to go to a movie of their choice (make the reward something that they choose so they will want it.)

Believe it or not, some students don't turn in their homework because they simply can't find it. Keep your child's backpack from becoming a black hole by investing in a couple of folders with pockets. Dedicate one folder for homework, using one pocket for homework to be completed and the other for finished work. When an assignment is finished, they simply transfer it from one side to the other. Use the other folder for

announcements and forms that come home from school, which also have a tendency to get lost. This way, paperwork is always in the same place and easy to find.

Communicate with the Classroom

Communication between home and the classroom is paramount to student success and parental sanity. Oftentimes the beginning of parent-teacher contact begins after the arrival of a report card loaded with D's and F's. By that time, students are usually behind and have to scramble to catch up with the rest of the class.

Take the initiative and contact your child's teachers when the school year starts. Teachers are available by phone, but some prefer to use email to communicate with parents. Many have websites with information on policies and grading. Most teachers genuinely care about their student's well being; if there is information that can help a child succeed in the classroom, pass it along.

Get Informed and Involved

School functions not only keep you informed about school events, but also generally give you an idea about your school's priorities. Make sure to attend Back to School Night or send someone in your place if you can't. Back to School Night will give insight on an instructor's teaching style, classroom atmosphere, and policies on grading and late work. It is also a great time to ask questions about assignments, curriculum or rules (usually teachers won't have time to answer questions about your child specifically).

Another way to stay in touch is get involved. Joining the PTA will inform you of fundraisers and other school concerns. Volunteering at school is another great way to

stay in tune with the school environment and help out. Schools have various events during the year that require parent involvement.

Start Big Projects When They Are Assigned

In middle school, you can generally expect more demanding school projects. Long-term assignments require time management and big-picture thinking, skills that are not innate to most students. Finding out about big, time-intensive projects the weekend or night before they are due can mean late nights and lots of stress for parents and students.

This situation can be easily avoided. Contact your child's teachers and find out when they expect to assign their projects. Most will be able to give you at least a general idea of what projects will be required and when they will be due. When a project is first assigned, have your child make a list of the supplies that they will need and shop for them together. Set aside time each night to work on the project. If your child has difficulties with time management, create some deadlines that they can meet. For example, with two weeks to complete a report, aim to have the rough draft done by the end of the first week, leaving a week to edit and complete the final copy.

Be Proactive in Getting Help

In general, the work in middle school will be more demanding than elementary school. If your child has a history of struggling in reading or math, they will likely continue to struggle at the middle school level without help. Make sure that your child has support from the beginning of the school year—don't wait until they are already overwhelmed. It is better to provide support early and find it's not needed versus

realizing too late that help was needed from the start. Many schools and local libraries offer free tutoring, and there are many professional options.

Middle school is a time of big changes, but it doesn't have to be a time of big stress. Your child will be enjoying new freedoms, but more than ever, they will need a guiding hand to success.