

Middle School 101: What You and Your Child Need to Know

Handout

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**Middle School 101:
What You and Your Child Need to Know**

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Abner Oakes

Agenda

- The middle school student
- Middle school changes and expectations
- School-related communications
- Study and organizational skills – academics at home
- Resources
- Questions, comments

Adolescent psycho-social development

- Acutely aware of world outside their families
- Struggle for both personal and group identity
- Social issues very important – self-efficacy framed within need to feel competent and socially included

The middle school student

- Learns best
 - Actively engaged with content
 - Participates in hands-on, inquiry-based learning
 - Cooperative, flexible settings
 - Interacts with materials and each other
 - Is allowed time

Elementary versus middle school

- The structural changes, such as with multiple classes
- The change in size
- Bottom of the pile (6th grade), compared with top of the pile (5th grade)
- Academically more rigorous – and performance-focused as compared with task-focused

What's on their minds

- Physical and logistical concerns – finding and opening a locker, changing classrooms, dealing with locker rooms and crowded hallways
- Social concerns – making new friends, re-connecting with old friends, dealing with issues that might emerge from older students
- Academic concerns – meeting increased academic demands, organizing for multiple subjects and long term assignments

Middle school transition activities

- Familiar with new school
- Supportive social environment
- Academic

Communicating with school

- Identifying the right people
- Online tools
- Proactive parent conferences – outside of normal window
- Communicating first – and over-communicating

When there's an issue or concern

- Beforehand, understand the school roles, from principal to assistant principal to counselor to teacher
- Also – what is the process that the school promotes?
- Phone calls and face-to-face
- Collecting the evidence
- A plan, with benchmarks and follow up

Study at home



MetLife survey

- Most parents view homework as an opportunity for parent-child communication.
 - 9 in 10 parents reported that helping their child with homework gives an opportunity for them to talk and spend time together. Parents don't see homework as getting in the way of family time or as major source of stress and disagreement.

Interactive homework

- Parents receive clear guidelines that spell out role
- Teachers don't expect parents to act as experts regarding content or attempt to teach content
- Parents ask questions to help students clarify and summarize what they've learned

Study at home

- Don't do it for them
 - No pen or pencil in your hand
- Guidance is great
- Be encouraging
- Expand their brains
- Know when to call for help

A few words on technology



A few words on technology

- ELMO projectors, interactive whiteboards, and classroom response systems: Presentation technology
- Presentation technology vs. interactive technology
- Personalized learning
- Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, and other social platforms: The baby's bath water

Speak Up 2011 national findings

- Students, teachers, administrators and parents increasingly recognize value of social learning in personal and professional lives
- Students have aspirations for more effectively leveraging social learning tools to enhance engagement in the learning process
- New cohort of school administrators interested in leveraging social learning more extensively within instruction

Resources

- Please handout packet for resources, handouts, and tip sheets.
 - National organizations, blogs, curricular, etc.

Thank You

- Please take a moment to complete the evaluation form provided, your input is appreciated.

Ages and Stages of Child Development

Use these as guidelines only

Anticipate your young school-ager to...

- Be curious and eager to learn
- Understand the differences between right and wrong, fantasy and reality
- Be more interested in real tasks with concrete goals
- Begin to develop a conscience, sense of morality, and sense of justice
- Test the limits of physical abilities, sometimes recklessly
- Need to make choices and decisions within limits
- Understand relationship between behavior and consequences
- Feel attached to parents but want more independence
- Be influenced by peer group
- Seek recognition and appreciate praise
- Show empathy; Understand other people's feelings
- Be sensitive to failure

Anticipate your teen to...

- Cope with physical, emotional, and intellectual changes
- Search for their own identity and separate from their parents
- Be critical of their parents
- Be moody and self-centered
- Be unpredictable and interested in trying out new behaviors
- Be strongly influenced by peer group values and opinions
- Establish personal system of values and uses it to make appropriate choices
- Challenge rules and systems within society and the family

DRUG AND ALCOHOL PREVENTION TIPS

The year your child enters middle school or junior high school is both an exciting and a challenging time. They are little fish in a big pond and often want desperately to fit in. Because your children may now see older students using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and may think they are cool and self-assured, your children may be tempted to try drugs too. Drug use goes up dramatically in the first year of middle school or junior high.

To help your children make good choices during this critical phase, you should:

- Make sure they are well-versed in the reasons to avoid alcohol, tobacco and drugs;
- Get to know their friends by taking them to and from after-school activities, games, the library and movies (while being sensitive to their need to feel independent);
- Volunteer for activities where you can observe your child at school; and
- Get acquainted with the parents of your children's friends and learn about their children's interests and habits. If it seems that your child is attracted to those with bad habits, reiterate why drug use is unacceptable.

To make sure that your child's life is structured in such a way that drugs have no place in it, you should:

- **If possible, arrange to have your children looked after and engaged in the after-school hours if you cannot be with them.** Encourage them to get involved with reputable youth groups, arts, music, sports, community service and academic clubs.
- **Make sure children who are unattended for periods during the day feel your presence.** Give them a schedule and set limits on their behavior. Give them household chores to accomplish. Enforce a strict phone-in-to-you policy. Leave notes for them around the house. Provide easy-to-find snacks.
- **Get to know the parents of your child's friends. Exchange phone numbers and addresses.** Agree to forbid each others' children from consuming alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in their homes, and pledge that you will inform each other if one of you becomes aware of a child who violates this pact.
- **Call parents whose home is to be used for a party.** Make sure they can assure you that no alcoholic beverages or illegal substances will be dispensed. Don't be afraid to check out the party yourself to see that adult supervision is in place.
- **Make it easy for your child to leave a place where substances are being used.** Discuss with your child in advance how to contact you or another designated adult in order to get a ride home. If another adult provides the transportation, be available to talk to your child about the situation when he or she arrives home.
- **Set curfews and enforce them.** Weekend curfews might range from 9 p.m. for a fifth-grader to 12:30 a.m. for a senior in high school.

- **Encourage open dialogue with your children about their experiences.** Tell your child, "I love you and trust you, but I don't trust the world around you, and I need to know what's going on in your life so I can be a good parent to you."

Tips to Help Your Child through Early Adolescence -- Helping Your Child through Early Adolescence

1. Learn as much as you can about early adolescence. Good information can help you make good decisions. Find out what changes you can expect during these years. Learn about what goes on in your child's school.
2. Stay involved in your child's life, both inside and outside of school. A positive relationship with a parent or other adult is the best safeguard your child has as he grows and explores. Find new and different ways to stay involved that work well with your child.
3. Provide both unconditional love and appropriate limits to help your child thrive and feel safe.
4. Talk with your child often about what's most important to her. Include the tough and sensitive subjects. Listen to what she has to say. Connected children are generally happier and do better in school and in life.
5. Hold your child to high but realistic standards both in school and in life. Let him know that you expect him to work hard, cooperate with teachers and other students and do his best.
6. Show that you value education. Stay in touch with your child's teachers and school officials. Check to see that he gets to school on time, completes homework assignments successfully and is signed up for classes required for college.
7. Provide opportunities for your young teen to succeed. Help your child to discover and develop her strengths. Success produces confidence.
8. Monitor friendships. Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Talk with him about friends, friendship and about choices he makes when with friends.
9. Work with your child to become more aware of the media and how to use it appropriately. Discuss what TV and movies to watch and what computer games to play. Become aware of the music she listens to and the magazines she reads.
10. Model good behavior. The best way to raise a child who is loving, decent and respectful is to live the values and behavior you hope he will develop.
11. Be alert to major problems, such as drug use, depression or an eating disorder. If the problem is too big to handle alone, get help from some of the many resources available.
12. Hang in there when times are tough. Most youngsters weather the bumps of early adolescence successfully and grow into successful adults. You play a major role in making that happen.

Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level

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Many parents who are actively involved in the education of their children at the elementary school level become less involved when their children reach middle school. However, parent involvement in a child's education during the middle school years (ages 10 to 14) is just as important in a child's success at school as it is in earlier grades. If the school doesn't have a formal participation plan for parents, it is important that parents take the initiative to continue their involvement and collaboration in their children's school.

What Is a Middle School?

Middle schools are schools that group students between the ages of 10 and 14. In some parts of the country, children from fifth to ninth grades are grouped together; in other parts, seventh- and eighth-graders are in one school. One of the most common middle school arrangements groups children from sixth to eighth grades.

What Are Middle Schoolers Like?

As children grow, they begin to experience physical, intellectual, and emotional changes. The way they learn, feel, see the world, and relate to other people becomes different from when they were younger. These changes, along with demands from present-day society and peer pressure, create conflicts and tension in the adolescent, which are reflected in their behavior in school and at home.

Young people at this age show a good number of contradictions and conflicts, which is normal. There is no "model" adolescent. All young persons are individuals with strong and weak points and with positive and negative qualities. There are some common characteristics that should be kept in mind in order to understand and help the middle schooler in daily activities at home and at school:

- Adolescents have high levels of physical and emotional energy, which may contrast with long periods of idleness, generally disapproved of by adults.
- They take risks, are curious, and love danger and adventure, yet their feelings can be hurt easily. This is the time when they feel immortal, but they worry a lot about what their friends think about them.
- They want to be independent from their families, and at the same time, they need to be pampered and protected.
- They withdraw and want a private life, and at the same time, they worry about being accepted by their peers.

- They demand privileges but avoid responsibilities. At the same time, they are developing an awareness of social problems and the welfare of others.

Adolescents from other cultures sometimes face an additional burden as they develop their identities and try to comply with the requirements of home and school. On one side, they have the values and customs of the home that the family wants to maintain, and on the other, they have to respond to the demands of their peers and teachers, who have a different set of rules.

Why Is It Important For Parents To Be Involved at the Middle School Level?

The results of recent research are very clear: When parents are actively involved in their children's education, they do better in school. *The academic level of the parents, their socioeconomic level, and their ethnic or racial origin are not determining factors for academic success.* It is essential for parents to have a positive attitude regarding education, and to demonstrate trust that their children can do well.

How Will Your Children and Your School Benefit From Your Involvement?

When parents become involved, both students and school benefit:

- Grades and test results are higher;
- Students' attitudes and behavior are more positive;
- Academic programs are more successful; and
- The schools, as a whole, are more effective.

The participation of all parents, including those with limited knowledge of English, is important to the academic achievement of their children. Such participation has many positive consequences for the family, the school, and especially for the young adolescent:

- The family has the chance to understand the school system better.
- The teachers can understand students who come from other cultures more easily.
- The students receive support from adults in order to confront the problems of adolescence-particularly where these problems are accentuated by the conflicting cultures of home, friends, and school.
- The school can become the natural extension of the home, aiding in the preservation of families' cultures and values.

What Can Parents Do To Support Education at Home?

There are many ways that parents can demonstrate to their adolescent children that they are interested in academic success and that they are available to offer support and protection when there are problems. Here are some suggestions:

- Talk with your child about what happens at school every day. Ask often if there are messages from the school.
- Spend some relaxed time with your children. Share a meal or a snack. Tell them often what you like about them.
- Listen to and share their worries. Support what you believe to be good about the school and offer your help to change any school practices that you believe could be harmful to your child.
- Avoid scoldings and arguments when your teenagers bring bad news home. Listen to their reasons and offer your help to improve the situation. It helps if your children know you believe they will be successful.
- Value their education by encouraging homework and reading. Help your children choose a good time and place to do their assignments and special projects. Provide the necessary materials and give them your unconditional support.

What Can Parents Do in the Middle School?

The way that parents become involved in the middle school can be somewhat different from what they were accustomed to in the elementary school. Generally, the building is larger, and it could be located farther from home. A middle school student may have several teachers, not just one as in the elementary school. The schedule is probably more complicated.

Don't be surprised if your teenagers feel embarrassed when you go to their school. It is not uncommon for them to resent their parents' presence at school. Here are some suggestions to increase your involvement:

- Get to know several teachers, not just one. Don't wait for a problem to talk to them.
- Keep in touch with the guidance counselors. They generally know all of the students in the school, and they can keep you informed regarding the progress and behavior of your child.
- Read all information on school policies and curriculum carefully. Normally, schools send this information home at the beginning of the school year.

- Review your child's school records each year. It is your right, and you should know what information is in the file.
- Keep informed about your child's grades and test results, especially in any subjects in which he or she has problems. Ask for help if it is needed.
- Request periodic meetings with the teachers. If you don't speak or understand English, ask for a translator or bring a bilingual friend or family member with you. Request information concerning programs that the school offers for students with limited English proficiency. Be sure your child is placed in the program that best meets his or her needs.
- Get to know other parents and form support groups to work on problems and issues of mutual interest.
- Answer notes and other correspondence the school sends. If you do not understand these messages due to language problems, ask the principal to send them to you in the language you understand.

Parenting assessment

The following questions will be helpful in assessing your parenting skills. Please circle the appropriate number on the scale that best describes you or your interactions with your child(ren).

Key: 1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = about half the time; 4 = usually; 5 = always

I respect my children as people.	1	2	3	4	5
I clearly define limits and expectations of acceptable behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
I am consistent in my actions and words.	1	2	3	4	5
I have the confidence needed to clearly and firmly communicate my needs and wants to my children.	1	2	3	4	5
I openly invite my children to participate in the rule-making process.	1	2	3	4	5
I look for occasions to "catch my children being good."	1	2	3	4	5
I find time daily to have a friendly talk with my children.	1	2	3	4	5
I listen to my children in a non-judgmental and understanding manner.	1	2	3	4	5
I recognize that my children's feelings are important and need attention.	1	2	3	4	5
I encourage my children to be individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
I recognize the need to be involved with my children and share activities with them.	1	2	3	4	5
I teach my children the value of working for what they want.	1	2	3	4	5
I discuss drugs, sex, AIDS, and other "hot" topics with my children.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel my expectations are realistic for my children's ages and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
I try to be a good role model for my children and "practice what I preach."	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy my children and show them I think they're special.	1	2	3	4	5

This self-assessment is an ideal model. Don't worry if you don't feel that you measure up all the time. Even the best of parents can fall short from time to time. This seminar will help you sharpen your understanding and skills and give you tips on how to improve your parenting approach.



Do you need help finding quality child care?

1-800-777-1720

NIH employees and contractors have
free unlimited access to the
NIH Child Care Resource & Referral Service.

A Work/Life Specialist can help you to assess your
family's needs and find resources on a range of topics,
such as:

- Evaluating care options
- Finding licensed providers
- Child Care Centers
- Family Child Care Homes
- Nanny care
- Pre-schools & Nursery
- Before & after school care
- Back-up care
- Summer camp
- Adoption resources
- Special needs resources
- College planning

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For more information, visit:
<http://childcare.ors.nih.gov>



Middle School 101: Research and Resources

Research and writing

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National organizations and teacher sites

- Association for Middle Level Education, <http://www.amle.org/>
- Southern Regional Education Board, Making Middle Grades Work, http://www.sreb.org/page/1080/making_middle_grades_work.html
- The National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform, <http://www.middlegradesforum.org/>
- Turning Points: Transforming Middle Schools, <http://www.turningpts.org/index.html>
- MiddleWeb, <http://www.middleweb.com/>
- Edutopia, <http://www.edutopia.org/>
- PBS Kids, It's My Life, <http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/index.html>

Curriculum

- The Common Core, <http://www.corestandards.org>
- Fairfax County Public Schools curriculum and instruction, <http://www.fcps.edu/is/offices/prek12/index.shtml>
- Howard County Public Schools Middle School Program of Study, http://www.hcpss.org/academics/ms_program/

- District of Columbia Middle School Guide, <http://dc.gov/DCPS/Files/downloads/Learn-About-Schools/DCPS-Middle-School-Guide-2010-2011.pdf>
- Montgomery County Public Schools middle school curriculum, <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/curriculum/middleschool/>

Blogs

- Dy/dan, <http://blog.mrmeyer.com/>
- ScienceFix.com, <http://www.sciencefix.com/>
- Teacher in a Strange Land, http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teacher_in_a_strange_land/
- TweenTeacher, <http://tweenteacher.com/>
- Dangerously Irrelevant, <http://www.dangerouslyirrelevant.org/>
- Learning is Messy, <http://learningismessy.com/blog/>

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