

Supporting the Transition to Middle School

The move into middle school is a big step for students. It means many changes from what they are used to in elementary school. The changes can be fun and exciting but they can also be stressful. For example, students must now deal with a larger building, more teachers, more students, and changing classes. Parents are the most important sources of support for smooth transitions to middle school by helping students develop:

- Good study habits and time management skills
- Social skills for dealing with peers and teachers
- Simple techniques to help them relax and feel less stressed

How To Help Your Child Handle Homework

- Make homework and academic achievement a priority in your house. That means homework and studying come before play, TV, errands, computers, instant messaging, telephone, etc.
- Limit after school activities. It is important that your child have ample time to complete homework. It is easy for kids to get "over scheduled" leaving little time and energy for schoolwork.
- Check to make sure your child is doing his/her homework. By checking for homework completion you are sending a clear message that you care about academic achievement and you will hold them accountable for their work.
- Do not do your child's homework. If you are too involved in the production of the homework product, the teacher will not know if your child needs extra help.
- Encourage independent student behavior. If your child is struggling with a subject, have them see their teacher for extra help first. This places the "ownership of the problem" on their shoulders and teaches responsibility. You can get involved if the initial student/teacher meeting doesn't solve the problem.
- Provide regular feedback to your child about his/her homework completion and academic achievement. If you are pleased with their progress, let them know!

Social Skills and the Issue of Bullying

A common fear of students transitioning into middle school is bullying. Even though your child's middle school may send a strong, clear message that bullying behavior will not be tolerated, you may have some concerns.

Signs Your Child May Be Bullied:

- Excuses for not wanting to go to school
- Unexplained bruises or torn clothing
- Continually "loses" belongings and school supplies
- Problems sleeping/nightmares
- Sudden loss of appetite
- Sudden academic problems
- Ravenous after school
- Rushes to the bathroom after school

Steps to Bully-Proof Your Child:

- Let the school know your safety worries immediately.
- Teach your child self-respect—confident kids are less likely to become a target.
- Let your child know it is okay to express anger if done appropriately.
- Encourage friendships—there is strength in numbers.
- Teach your child effective skills for making friends such as how to compromise, apologize, use "I" statements, change the topic to avoid conflict, and use a "diplomatic" approach.
- Don't advise either ignoring or physically attacking the bully.

What To Do If You Find Out Your Child Bullies Others:

- Do not use physical punishment for discipline; that encourages a child to hurt others. Instead, remove privileges or add jobs around the house.
- Provide as much parental (or substitute parental) supervision as possible.
- Put an immediate stop to any bullying you observe. Always have the child act in a more appropriate way.
- Emphasize praise and positive feedback. Reward the child for caring and appropriate behaviors.

How to Help Your Child Build Stress Busters

With all of the new things to deal with in middle school, lots of students experience an increase in stress. Here are some ideas to try with your son or daughter. (They work for parents, too!)

- Practice deep breathing—Take long, slow deep breaths into your stomach. Expel the air slowly and completely. Repeat three times.
- Add some stretches—Extend the arms out to the sides and slowly raise them above the head until the palms touch. Hold this position for a couple of seconds. Exhale audibly ("swoosh") while slowly lowering the arms to the sides. Make the exhale twice as long as the inhale. Repeat six to eight times.
- The Big Sponge—Have your child imagine that he or she is a big sponge, full of tension. To squeeze out the tension, tighten all of the muscles in all parts of your body at once. Hold this position as you slowly count to five. Then relax all of your muscles at once. Repeat several times.
- Remember to laugh—it's great medicine!

