



MIDDLE SCHOOL – ONE HUGE TRANSITION! HOW TO BEST SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

The tender ages of eleven to thirteen may seem to be anything but tender, especially at the beginning of the school year. Instead, the middle school child is an unstable mixture of tantrums and drama, anxiety of embarrassment, and contradictions of wanting Mom and Dad nearby yet resisting help/support/interest of any degree. These are the joys of the middle school years: the huge transition from the younger dependent child to a budding, independent adult. The challenge for the parent and child alike is that, during these three years, it is difficult to guess on any given day where that child may stand along the spectrum of the transition.

A middle school child tries on the persona of an emerging adult, only to become fearful and race back to the comforts of younger childhood until he or she becomes ready to sample adulthood again. In theory, it is a wonderfully-designed process of stepping forward and backward while sampling new stages of growth. In reality, the process is both intoxicating and absolutely exhausting. Parents need to set firm limits to shield the child from unsuspecting dangers when they attempt to reach too far into adulthood. At the same time, they need to comfort the child's fears when it all becomes too overwhelming. The parents' ultimate reward is watching their child discover the person he or she is developing into.

During all of this activity, these children attend school and are expected to master a significant amount of material. There are many steps – some great and some small - a parent can take to help a child succeed during that first year in middle school. By remembering the developing stage of your child, the process can be made easier. But consider yourself forewarned as you enter the blasting zone otherwise known as the “Middle School Years!”

Before the school year even starts, take advantage of “Jump Start” or “Open House” opportunities to introduce your child to all that awaits in middle school. Walking down the hallways, seeing the new teachers, being in the gymnasium and cafeteria -- and doing so with other kids they know -- provide a great comfort to an anxious child. Most often, students receive schedules, get locker assignments, buy gym uniforms and start to become more familiar with their new school. This is a great time to introduce yourself not only to the team of teachers, but parents of fellow classmates since most middle schools are feeder schools to a number of area elementary schools. Many students will be meeting each other for the first time and forming new friendships, and their parents can quickly become influential in the life of your child.

If your child has a 504/IEP/learning plan, contact the guidance counselor assigned to your child's grade level to share any concerns you may have. This counselor is responsible for reviewing the students' learning plans with teachers. Rather than one elementary school teacher, your middle school student will now work with a small team of teachers, changing classrooms for each subject. These teachers work closely together, share observations, and offer suggestions for increased success for the entire team of students. Some unique learning situations require more communication with teachers than a written plan alone, and sometimes meeting with the team of teachers near the beginning of the school year may prove helpful. These meetings allow a parent to explain the issues in greater detail, to illustrate how a team approach between school and home offers the best chance for success, by offering methods that have been successful in past years, and

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troubleshooting areas of concerns in the middle school dynamic. Cultivate a team commitment to maintain open communication all school year long through additional meetings, exchanging notes and using online resources to email concerns.

Once school has started, identify small ways to help guide your middle schooler without stifling budding independence. Tape a copy of the schedule on the front of the binder or homework pad and make sure your child understands how the schedules change from day to day. Most schools have a sophisticated system of rotating periods to prevent the typical "early afternoon burnout" from affecting the same subject. Make sure your child can read the schedule rotation, and feels comfortable approaching new teachers should it become confusing. Taking concerns to school personnel is a student's first step towards developing the vital tool of self-advocacy.

Organization takes on greater importance with seven periods' worth of papers and study needs. Your child's team of teachers will probably determine one preferred organization method for all students, and instruct that method. But no two individuals learn the same, and so too organizational needs may vary. The school may suggest one large binder, but your child may need individual spiral notebooks to help streamline his or her focus during class or when studying. A parent knows what truly is best for his or her child, and some adjustments may need to be made. It is best to discuss these concerns with the team to determine the best method for your child to be successful during the school year.

The actual school work can bring about a new level of discovery. Science comes to life through chemistry and physics experiments. Art projects might jump off the drawing pad and become a mural on a portion of the hallway. Social studies coursework broadens community borders and increases awareness of a global society. Homework and projects that accompany these new discoveries can be exciting, and overwhelming. Guiding the completion of such work requires a distant-closeness only perfected by middle school parents. Your child will insist he or she is grown up enough to complete the work independently, but really needs your presence in the room until everything is done. A backpack may not demand that you personally go through it each day, but you may need to remind your child each morning to do so. Your son or daughter may be great about stopping at the locker between classes to exchange needed materials, but you may need to send in a grocery bag or two each week to help remind them to clean out additional papers and items that gather weekly. It may be helpful to offer to read over homework sheets, but instead your child prefers to read them to you. It's the gentle guidance of doing it together -- and responding with appropriate assistance -- that helps bring about the greatest achievement for your middle schooler.

The development of the adolescent brain proves that while children between the ages of eleven and thirteen are capable of more independent thinking and work, they still need as much parental attention and guidance as a toddler at this stage of development. Struggles for independence at the middle school level will echo those seen ten years ago. Children are learning to problem solve, think critically, plan and control impulses, and stand on their own two feet. At times they will stumble and want a nearby parent to pick them up and hug them. Other times they will scream at the first hint of assistance, instead picking themselves up and trying again on their own. On the surface, it may seem a bit different tackling middle school concerns, but underneath it is all part of the process of growing up.

Wishing great success to all middle school students, and their parents!

BRAIN BYTE



DID YOU KNOW?

YOUR GREATEST ABILITY TO REMEMBER SOMETHING IS THROUGH A MULTI-SENSORY APPROACH.

YOU'LL REMEMBER:

- 10% of what you read
- 20% of what you hear
- 30% of what you see
- 50% of what you see and hear
- 70% of what you say
- 90% of what you say and do

**studies vary on specific percentages, but in total conclude a person remembers things best with a combined approach towards learning*

GET ORGANIZED FOR A GREAT SCHOOL YEAR!

Everyone loves to start out a new school year with nicely covered textbooks, a neat locker, a new stylish backpack, and a large school binder complete with color dividers and extra pens and pencils. By the second or third week of school however, the "Back to School" honeymoon is over. This portrait of the successful and highly organized student fades for some. Other students fall into a pit of disarray: mounds of papers multiplying in the backpack, jackets and trash gathering in the hall locker, and daily assignments stop getting noted on the homework pad pages. Are these students doomed to fail at the hand of their own disorganization???

It may seem that way, but there are options. It is true that some individuals are just naturally organized, but keeping things in order is a skill like any other. And while one's natural organization ability may leave you envious, you don't have to let disorganization take over. *Improvement in behavior requires the conscious decision to invest time and energy to respond to things differently.* It will take some work, and persistence, but you too can keep your school things maintained and in order to increase your academic success!

The most important component to changing any bad habit or behavior is a daily re-commitment to the desired one. Write down your goal and re-read it each morning. Writing something down is a method for your conscious mind to communicate to your subconscious mind. Even Michael Phelps, today's most decorated Olympian, secretly writes down a target time before each swim meet!

Here are some basics to put into practice to prevent disorganization overload:

1. Homework pads can be a student's best friend....BUT ONLY IF USED! Write down each and every assignment, every permission slip that needs to be signed, each school supply that needs to be purchased, or anything that needs to be reviewed. Recognize and accept you will not remember it all. Do not trust your brain to keep it straight. Use a paperclip or binder clip to mark your page for easy review at the end of the school day -- *before leaving the building* -- to make sure everything needed is brought home. When doing homework, check off each item after it is completed. Check it off again after handing things in to ensure it is actually turned in. What is more frustrating than completing your homework and not receiving credit because it wasn't given to the teacher?!

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2. If your homework pad does not include a calendar, obtain one and use it solely to organize your school assignments. Notate anything on the calendar that is not due the very next day. If it is a large project, break it down into sections and assign deadlines for each part. Check off each item when it is completed. Keep the calendar with your homework pad and other school essentials.
3. Color code materials to make locating what you need easier. Give each subject a different color and cover your textbook the same color as the spiral notebook and the folder for handouts. If possible, keep all spirals and folders in one large binder.
4. Maintain one folder just for daily assignments: one side for items to go home and the other for items to go to school. Permission slips, study guides, or homework dittos needing your attention are in one easy-to-locate place both at home and when back in the classroom.
5. Designate a "CLEAN OUT DAY" each week. On this day, go through your locker and backpack and take out anything that doesn't belong: trash, old papers, notes, moldy food. Replace any necessary school supplies: pencils, pens, loose leaf paper. If you use a computer memory stick, evaluate the organization of your documents, and move/delete as needed.
6. Slow down enough to stay committed. Staying organized really doesn't take long, but the steps to maintain it are easy to ignore when running from class to class or balancing a number of after-school activities. The moment or two you take to write down your assignments, or review your homework pad, can make a dramatic difference in your preparedness for an upcoming test or multi-step project. It can have an even greater effect on your growing self-confidence as a more capable and successful student.
7. Create a back-up plan. Identify a person in each class you can contact after school and on weekends should you accidentally forget a book, lose a homework page, or not write down a due date for a project. Even with the best of efforts it will happen, so have your support system in place. Make sure to have all phone numbers and emails so you can contact them easily should you need to. It's a wise person who accepts he or she is human and may make mistakes and plans accordingly.

Compliment your daily achievement. Refrain from black and white thinking, and instead notice the grayness of your continuous improvement. Maybe a locker that doesn't smell of last week's tuna salad is a step in the right direction! Allow yourself to be proud of the progress you are making – however small – and focus on the positive direction. Plan an appropriate reward after a time period of improvement: treat yourself to a tempting dessert after successfully using your homework pad all week, download an old movie favorite after a month with a clean locker, or maybe schedule a manicure after a handful of positive progress reports are sent home to parents. Let those good intentions that start out a new school year develop into great success all year long!

INSPIRATION CORNER

"All glory comes from daring to begin."

EUGENE F. WARE

