



WHAT YOU AND YOUR CHILD CAN DO TO MAKE THE MOST OF MIDDLE GRADES

Encourage an open mind: At this age, trying new things is key to discovering what school subjects, activities and sports, and even possible careers interest a student. Prepare your child so he is ready and excited for new experiences, and talk about his future in positive terms.



Break it down for your child:

Middle grade students need to learn how to plan and organize, but these are often tough tasks for tweens and teens. You can help by asking questions that break down the steps of planning and organizing: How long do you think this school project will take? What supplies do you need to get it done? What will be the most challenging part, and what will help you get that done well? Should you work on the project before or after other homework assignments?

Recognize all the changes your child faces:

During the middle grade years, kids undergo an enormous range of physical, emotional and mental changes. Fluctuating emotions and motivation, peer pressure and developing bodies — along with more rigorous schoolwork — make these especially challenging years. Be honest with your child about

the challenges, so she understands that these are normal parts of development.

Build toward adulthood

gradually: It's natural for students to want more independence at this age, so work together to help your student earn more responsibility and more privacy. Establish good habits and set ground

rules — about homework, chores, bedtime, etc. — for your child to follow on his own, then reward success with increased responsibility. Even as your student grows more independent, keep the lines of communication open. Kids this age still need a strong sense of family connection and support, even if they don't always want to admit it!

Be aware of everything kids are facing:

Eating disorders, depression, drug use, sexual experimentation — it can be hard for adults to admit that kids so young can have such tough problems. While many middle grade students never have these experiences, you should be aware of them, and be ready to intervene if your child is affected. Don't ignore any signs that your son or daughter is struggling, and seek help if you or your child feels overwhelmed.

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Take on the challenge: When someone is moody and unpredictable, it can be easy to lose patience. But these are normal behaviors at this age, and as a parent/guardian you need to stay involved. Keep asking your child specific questions about what's happening in her classes (How did the science test go? What can you tell me about the main character of the book you're reading in English?). Volunteer in school, attend school events, and show your child the love and support she needs. Listening to your teen is an important part of parent-child communication. And when the going gets tough, make sure there are other people (older siblings, adult family friends, other relatives) whom your child can turn to for support.

Remember, it's all in their heads: Teen brains have not yet developed enough to keep track of multiple ideas. That's why kids this age often have trouble deciding what to do first, second, and third. They tend to leap before they look, which means your child will need your guidance more than ever. Be prepared for your child to test limits, and remind him that you always expect him to do well.

Make use of school and community resources: Meet with the school counselor for advice on helping your child with the middle grades, and use her/him as a resource in the years ahead. The counselor can guide your student in picking classes and after-school activities, as well as helping your family with the emotional challenges. Get to know your child's teachers, so that you can work as a team to monitor her progress. Ask the school if it offers parenting workshops and what community-based organizations in the area offer programs for middle grade kids and families. The more connected you and your child feel, the better.

If your child is headed to a middle school, here are some additional tips.

Ease the transition: Starting a new middle school means leaving behind a familiar elementary school, but each school transition is filled with lots of exciting experiences. Focus on these by asking questions like: Won't it be fun to meet some new friends? What new freedoms exist that you didn't have in elementary school? What kinds of afterschool activities can you get involved in?

Make what's new feel familiar: Take your student to visit her new middle school. Plan out what a typical school day routine will be, so that she knows what to expect. Find out what events (student performances, cultural festivals, etc.) your family can attend this year, so your whole family feels like part of the school community even before your student starts school.