

Helping Students Learn®

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tips Families Can Use to Help Students Do Better in School



September 2013

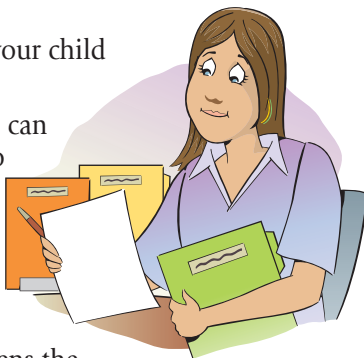
Grand Erie District School Board
Growing Excellence ... Inspiring Success

Organization leads to school success

Middle schoolers are generally enthusiastic, energetic and inquisitive. But organized? Not usually. The added responsibility of staying on top of several classes, each with a different teacher, as well as extracurricular activities can be overwhelming. Even students who did very well in elementary school struggle with it.

Here are some ways you can help. To get your child organized and motivated to learn, have her:

- **Make a checklist for the basics.** This can include where to put her backpack, how to keep a supply of materials such as pencils and sticky notes, and also a reminder to check her daily homework planner.
- **Establish a homework area.** Encourage her to avoid spreading work all over the house. Keeping it in one area lessens the chance of losing an important assignment.
- **Use three folders for homework:** 1. To-do; 2. Work in progress; 3. Completed. Have her create a reminder that work from the "Completed" folder goes into the backpack to take to school.
- **Use an assignment book.** At the beginning of each class, she should open it and leave it open—until she has written down the assignment for that class.
- **Use a large calendar.** She should mark all due dates, test dates and activities on it.



Source: A.K. Dolin, *Homework Made Simple: Tips, Tools and Solutions for Stress-Free Homework*, Advantage Books.



Bullying prevention is up to everyone

Bullying prevention is an important discussion to have at the beginning of the school year. Talk about the responsibilities of bystanders, the students who "just mind their own business and stay out of trouble." Remind your child that:

If an adult is nearby, a bystander's responsibility is to:

- **Say "Stop!"** to the bully.
- **Walk away** if the bully doesn't stop.
- **Tell an adult** what is going on.

If an adult is not nearby, a bystander has a responsibility to:

- **Be a friend** to the victim. Stand near him and label the behavior: "That's bullying!"

- **Call others to help.** "Come. Jeremy needs help!"
- **Reduce the audience.** Tell onlookers, "What are you looking at! You should be helping to stop this!"
- **Report the incident** to an adult as soon as possible.

Source: *Bullying: Engaging Parents, Students and Staff in Your Anti-Bullying Program*, The Parent Institute, www.parent-institute.com.

Stay involved in your child's education this year!

Who has the biggest impact on your child's overall success in school? If you think it's his teachers, think again. Years of research have proven that *parents* have the most effect on their children's ultimate success in the classroom.

Homework is your child's responsibility

What's the critical thing to remember about your child's homework? That it's *her* homework. To be responsible, it helps to follow a routine. Your child should:



- **Determine when she's at her best.** Is it the moment she gets off the bus? Or does she need an hour to unwind? Have her find the right time and stick to it.
- **Avoid distractions.** Your child shouldn't study in the same room where someone is watching television.
- **Develop a system** for bringing home materials she needs to complete her assignments, such as placing sticky notes on books.

Regular attendance leads to future success

Research shows that regular school attendance often means higher grades. Students who have good attendance are usually better adjusted at school and later on as adults.

Students with good attendance:

- **Do** better on tests.
- **Help** the reputation of their schools.
- **Form** healthy relationships with teachers and other students.



Source: M. Gottfried, "Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools," *American Educational Research Journal*, June 2010, <http://aer.sagepub.com/content/47/2/434.abstract>.

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How can I adjust to having a student in middle school?

Q: My child is excited about starting middle school, but I'm a mess! Between horror stories about out-of-control adolescents and news reports of violence in schools, I'm frantic. What should I do?

A: Adolescence can be tricky, but remind yourself that the values you've instilled in your child will continue to be there as he strives for success in middle school and beyond. As he gains independence, he will probably challenge—and occasionally ignore—those values. But it's not likely that he will turn his back on everything he's been taught.

As for school violence, it's a scary and serious problem. The reality is that major episodes of school violence are unusual. Yet it is important to take the issue seriously. Talk to your child. Ask if there are places at school where he doesn't feel safe. Talk to his friends. Kids often know before adults do about situations that could turn violent at school. Attend school meetings. Learn what your child's school is doing to maintain a safe learning environment. Make sure your child understands what the school is doing to ensure his safety.

None of this means that watching your child grow up and become independent will be easy. It won't. But by staying involved in his education you're making a huge contribution to his success.



Are you prepared to navigate through the beginning of middle school?

Middle school brings a large set of changes and transitions. Take this quiz to see if you are prepared to help your child through the first two weeks. Answer *yes* for something you are doing and *no* for something you aren't.

- ___ **1. Do you review** the names of all your child's teachers, their subjects, and her counselor's name with her?
- ___ **2. Do you talk** with your child about whether she can open her locker and find her classes?
- ___ **3. Do you understand** that your child has more things to remember now? Help her use calendars and other reminders.
- ___ **4. Do you stay** patient with your child? Some days she will seem independent, and others she will need you more than ever.

- ___ **5. Do you remember** that school is new for your child, so home should be a place of familiar comfort?

How did you do?

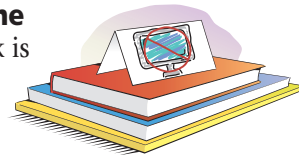
Mostly yes answers mean you are a guide for your child as she navigates the beginning of middle school. Mostly no? Check the quiz for some suggestions.

"Parents need to know when to be quiet and when to act."
—Thomas W. Phelan, Ph.D.

Take time to set limits on your child's screen time

Summertime was for relaxing. For many middle schoolers, that included TV, social media, video games and texting friends. Now that your child has to focus on schoolwork, it's time to agree on some rules, such as:

- **No electronics** during homework time.
- **No screen time** until homework is completed.
- **No TV** or video games right before bedtime.
- **No cell phone** in the bedroom at night.



Source: Nemours Foundation, "Healthy Habits for TV, Video Games, and the Internet," KidsHealth.org, http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/family/tv_habits.html.

Help your child set new goals for a new school year

Your child has her school supplies: new pens, backpack, clothes and shoes. But there's something else she needs: new goals. Have her write down:

- **Two things she wants** to accomplish in school this year.
- **The steps she needs** to take to reach those goals.

Build your child's self-confidence with activities

Everyone wants to fit in—particularly in middle school. This can be tough, especially for new sixth graders.

If your child is struggling to fit in, don't let him get discouraged. Help him brainstorm ways to get involved at school. What has he enjoyed in the past? Creative writing? Sports? Chess club? Joining one of these activities will build self-confidence and lead to improved academic performance.

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