

*Dear Parent: We are sharing this resource with you in advance of your child coming to Middle School and we believe that you will find it very informative. Please read this booklet prior to your Parent Orientation as it will answer many questions about the Middle School experience and use this booklet throughout the school year.*

# What to Expect...

## When You Are Expecting Your Child to Succeed in Middle School

Welcome to the next level on your journey...

**Middle School.** Those two words can create a number of feelings as you get ready to help your child take the next big step academically, socially, and personally. For incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders, middle school gets them excited about new adventures, friends, and academic challenges. For others, it may create a sense of worry or fear that comes with change, bigger buildings, and more students. All of this is perfectly natural.

But let's be honest, it does the same things to us as parents. How will my child do academically? How will they handle multiple classes, multiple teachers, and multiple assignments? Who will their teachers be and will they know and understand my son/daughter? Am I ready to take on the rollercoaster ride that is adolescence? In light of those adventures or challenges, we want every student coming into the 6<sup>th</sup> grade to equip themselves with insight and information about how they can prepare for success at this next level.

The following is meant to aide you and your incoming 6<sup>th</sup> grader in preparing them mentally, emotionally, socially, and practically as they begin their middle school journey. Remember, it is a *journey* not a race. Along the ride, you, as parent will take on many roles. Try to engage, challenge, mentor and motivate your child, but don't be afraid to put your foot down.

# What to Expect...

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## ***The spring/summer before middle school***

*“My 5<sup>th</sup> Grader is headed to middle school. What can I do now to help prepare my child?”*

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- **Student Orientation**

- Your child will have several opportunities to start to explore the world of middle school. The first opportunity will be the visit to the middle school in May. Make sure your child doesn't miss school on this day. This visit begins their orientation about the Centerville middle school experience and environment. Your child's future counselor will talk about everything from advisory to lunch, changing classes and extra-curricular activities. This is a great first session devoted to exploring the world of middle school.
- During the visit to the middle school, your child will have the opportunity to tour the building, meet some of the students, see teachers in action, and meet the principal. Tours in most buildings are led by current middle school students who will show them the sights, sounds, and smells of middle school.

**Talking Points** - Throughout the middle school years, communication is key. In these “Talking Points” sections, you will find some discussion ideas and conversation starters to help maintain open dialogue between you and your child.

*Conversation Starters: “How are you feeling about middle school? What are you excited about and what are you concerned about? What goals do you have for middle school (academic, social, and extra-curricular)? What is one activity you would like to be a part of this upcoming year?”*

- **Parent Orientation**

- Another important transition meeting is the Parent Orientation which also happens in May. This takes place at your child's future middle school. We encourage you to attend this meeting and hear more information about what you can look forward to in middle school.

- **Organization**

Reflect on what worked for your child in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. What didn't work? How do you think this system will work in middle school? How will it be used with multiple classroom settings? Remember to start out simple and add on (if needed) as you go.

- The Agenda Planner: The assignment notebook in middle school is called an **Agenda Planner**. Writing down assignments, tasks, important dates, or other important information is a life skill. Middle school teachers provide the information that should be recorded but don't check each student's planner as they may do in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. It's part of your child taking on more responsibility.
- Before the end of 5<sup>th</sup> grade, really emphasize making your child become more and more independent in using his/her planner. Make them use the planner for all sorts of activities, events, and expectations (school and after school activities).
- During the summer, encourage your child to write things down by using lists to organize his/her free time (reading time, social time, screen time) along with summer vacations and activities.

## Preparing for the 1<sup>st</sup> Day of School

- Create a plan for having your student get to school on time. Is he or she responsible enough to do this on his/her own? Do you need to secure child care? Do you have a safety / backup

- Talking points: Really emphasize the positives of the first day: moving into middle school, cool to be growing up, and the great opportunities that come with gaining new responsibilities. While focusing on the positives, it's ok to recognize that they are nervous and/or anxious (you can even empathize about your own feelings of being nervous/anxious about the first day).

- Conversation starters:  
*"What are you excited about / looking forward to about middle school?  
What are you concerned about?"*

plan for your student if he or she misses the bus or gets locked out?

- Take advantage of Orientation and/or Open House to have your student walk his or her schedule and for you to walk your student's schedule.
- Communicate as a family how your 6<sup>th</sup> grader will get to/from school (walk, parent pick-up, or bus). Once you've made a decision, determine where those drop-offs will happen at school. From the point of entry into the building, find the best route to your child's advisory.

o Talking points: Talk to your child everyday about what homework he/she has and how long it will take. There is no choice about whether or not you do homework, but how/where /when you do it has options.

On average, your child should do an hour of homework a night. If your student is consistently doing 2-3 hours of homework a night, make contact with your advisor, teacher, or counselor.

Conversation Starter: *"What is something new you learned today?"* Make sure to balance "questioning" without "drilling" them for information. A helpful way to do this is to ask about a "High Point" and "Low Point" for the day. Continue to build patterns of healthy communication with your child by making this a daily routine.

- Basic supplies for the first day: a folder, some paper, and a pen and pencil. Oh, and don't forget a lunch or lunch money. The reason for so few supplies is that you can get a general supply list online at your schools CCS website ([www.centerville.k12.oh.us](http://www.centerville.k12.oh.us)) and you may get further details from specific teachers. Again the philosophy is - keep it simple the first day.

- Up to a week before school starts, have your child start getting into the school sleep schedule. Not only does it get the body ready for school but maybe, more importantly, the mind.

## Understanding the First 2 Weeks of Middle School

The agenda planner (formerly known as the assignment notebook) is a life saver; eat, sleep and breathe it.

- In elementary school, teachers may have communicated both homework and assignments completed in class. In middle school, teachers are going to record homework on a board in the classroom. This is done every day for students to write down in their planners. Teachers will provide reminders but it is the responsibility of the student to record the assignments each day.

- The Agenda Planner contains school rules, policies and procedures. If you or your child has a question about the rules in middle school, check the agenda.
- Depending on teacher and school, the agenda planner is also your student's hall pass. Depending on how your building uses it for that purpose, you can see how much your student is out of class for bathroom, water breaks, nurse visits, etc.
- Each of the days in the planner is organized by subject. Expect your student to write all assignments in the designated subject areas daily. Assignments for World Language, Related Arts, and Math / Reading Support classes should be recorded in the blank space provided.
- For the first few weeks, check your student's planner daily (just like elementary school) to see how he/she is using the planner. For the first few weeks, this is a big coaching area. Set clear expectations about how to use the planner and use lots of encouragement and personal stories about how this will help your student achieve success. After the first couple of weeks, begin to reinforce expectations with consequences, if needed. These consequences may include addressing the positives for using it well along with the negative consequences for not using it effectively (i.e. bad grades, extra stress, etc.).

## Homework

- Homework expectation: From the second week of school on, you should **expect homework every night**. Though the amount varies by content/subject area, you can expect homework every night in math. You can ease your child's transition into middle school and maintain good habits by having your child read every night even if they have little or no homework on a particular night.
- Create a learning environment at home. Have a quiet space for studying and homework completion.
- Set homework time as a priority each day no matter what other activities your student may be involved with (band, athletics, dance, etc.)

- Check on your student during homework time (or at some point when you get home from work).
- Remind your child to do homework at HOME – don't save it for advisory or study hall.
- One good idea is for your child to have a homework buddy for each class, sort of like an accountability partner. They can contact their homework buddy if they have forgotten to write down an assignment or have a question about something that happened in class.
- Talk about whether or not the organizational system your child chose at the beginning of the year is still effective. Does it stay the same, need to be tweaked, or need a complete overhaul? One way to determine this is by asking your student to review this organizational system with you: how are the binders/folders set up, how is his/her locker organized? You might have a "pop locker quiz" where you spontaneously take your student to their school and check out his/her locker. Remember your child's definition of organized/effective could be very different from yours.
- Remember that if a student misses a day of school, **that student is required to make up the work that is missed.** If your child is ill, prompt him/her to talk with each teacher throughout the day to find out what has been missed.

## Using the online gradebook

- Our district uses the Home Access Center (HAC) through Eschool Plus. This software technology allows both parents and students to access student information (via Internet access) reported directly from teachers' records.
- You will be given a username and password at the beginning of the school year. Keep this information in a safe place and save your username / password in your browser. If you misplace this information, you will need to give a signed letter requesting this information to the office at your middle school.
- By using this system, you will be able to see your child's daily schedule, their attendance record as well as your child's grades in each class. Many teachers will make comments regarding specific assignments using the bubble just above the students score for that assignment.

- Please remember, all teachers grade differently. Many create different categories with different weights for different assignments. You will find that some teachers will update grades on a daily basis. Some teachers may update grades once a week. Please be patient and remember that grades for an assignment probably won't appear in the gradebook the next day after the assignment is turned in to the teacher.
- Early in a quarter, one late assignment or low quiz score can drastically impact the overall grade that you see in the gradebook. As more grades are entered throughout the quarter, one low grade will not impact the grade so severely.
- The online gradebook may not be available for brief times when grades are being finalized or during routine maintenance.
- When you encounter issues with missing assignments, first start with your child. Have him/her check through folders, binders, and locker. If the assignment is still missing, have your child talk with that teacher about the assignment.
- Missing assignments are typically marked with a "Z" (meaning zero). Some teachers record a missing assignment with an actual zero. An "X" indicates that the child does not need to complete the assignment.

## Maintaining Success Throughout the Year = Creating Good Habits

The transition to middle school is more of a marathon than a sprint. As your child moves further into the school year, this is a good time to reflect upon the formation of HABITS. Sean Covey's book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, is a great resource and may be something you will want to read with your child.

Just as we are reinforcing good habits with your child, parents also need to set up good habits to support their child's success.



## Home & School

### Communication: Habits to Build

- You will notice that home/school communication changes as your child moves into middle school. We are all working together to help your child grow in independence, develop responsibility, and learn to advocate for themselves. Remember this goal when you have questions about assignments, grades, and teacher expectations. Ask your child the question in multiple ways or when appropriate, ask your child to address the question with the teacher.
- You may be used to getting notes from your child's teacher in the assignment notebook. You may now find these in the online gradebook.
- Parents should check the online gradebook (HAC) on a weekly basis. Have your child check every couple of days. Teachers will use the bubble next to a grade to give you and you're an explanation/feedback on his/her performance.
- By using the grade notification feature, you can receive an alert if your child's grade falls below the percentage you indicate or an alert to celebrate grades above a percentage that you indicate. We encourage you to use this feature so that you know when a student is in jeopardy of failing a course. A good parameter to set is to receive an alert if the grade falls below 70%.

## Parent & Child

### Communication Habits

- As we've mentioned in the TALKING POINTS sections, establish a good routine when talking with your child about school.
- Water the flowers, not the weeds. We have a tendency to focus on the missing assignment, the low test grade, or the referral they received. These are important to address with your child but don't forget to use encouragement ("I believe in you") when problem solving.
- When talking with your child, remember it is a lot like "Jeopardy", give your answers in the form of a question. Also, remember to not drill them for information, as they may not want to share. Establish a regular "talk time" (at dinner, in the car, at bedtime – some kind of regular routine where you are checking in with them). Remember, a great way to "check – in" is with a simple Hi's & Lo's - "What was the high point of your day?" and "What was the low point of your day?"

- Make sure to attend Fall Conferences. At this meeting, you will meet with your child's advisor and discuss your child's overall performance. Your child's advisor will have collected feedback from each of your child's teachers and will review this with you at this meeting.
- Your child's advisor is your first line of support. They are the first adult your child sees every day and can assist you and your child with the academic, social, and emotional ups and downs of middle school. Your child's advisor can help you or your child understand school policies and procedures, get to know a teacher's style, and help your child with his/her organization.
- If after addressing the question with your child, and you still have unanswered questions about a grade, assignment, or project, email your child's teacher directly. They can help you with those specific questions.
- At the end of the day, if you are ever unsure of where to go with a question or issue, please contact your building counselor or principal. We are here to help. The email addresses of all of the teachers, counselor, and principal can be found at [www.centerville.k12.oh.us](http://www.centerville.k12.oh.us).

## Academic Habits

We know that the children who do well in middle school tend to do well in high school. This has more to do with the study habits they develop rather than innate ability. You may find that your very bright child struggles with a class or a concept for the very first time. This is where the formation of study habits becomes essential.

- **Study Habits:**
  - Consistency is a key factor in academic success. Routines such as meal times, study times, and bed times are essential for promoting overall success.
  - Set a specific time every night for studying and completing homework.
  - At the elementary level, studying is often embedded in the classwork. At the middle school level, many students have to (for the first time) learn how to study.
  - Give your child a quiet place to study away from TV and other distractions.

- Ask your child what they have for homework and check back when they are finished (check for completion not for accuracy).
- Remind your child to put the finished assignment in the appropriate binder/folder so that they have it to turn in for the next day.
- **Ways to study** vary depending upon the class and the teacher. Parents can assist in building these study skills by giving their children study options. Set the expectation that they do study but allow your child to select the best method for him/her. Below are some possible options:
  - Re-read the text, even math.
  - Review math homework and have your child redo any missed problems.
  - Make flashcards using [quizlet.com](http://quizlet.com) or index cards.
  - Review notes and other assigned readings.
  - Review questions from homework and rework any problems that were incorrect.
  - Have someone quiz them on spelling words, vocabulary, or word study / word roots.
  - For some students, rewriting notes can serve as an excellent review.
  - Talk about what has been studied. Having the student tell you verbally what he/she has learned is another great way to review.
  - Learning is best developed by studying a little each night (15-20 minutes) rather than cramming the night before. At some point students will have multiple tests for multiple teachers. Help them establish a study schedule, a little studying for each test each night, so that preparation is given to each subject.

## **Parenting Habits in the Digital World**

Your middle school child is growing up in a very different time than we experienced. Technology offers many wonderful opportunities for learning, social connectedness, and

entertainment. However, with the good also comes the bad. Each family needs to discuss which digital tools your child is mature enough to handle responsibly.

- Set clear academic expectations with your child. Academics come first, before screen time.
- Establish rules for your child's use of technology. Make sure that they know that you will be monitoring his/her use of games, websites, and social media.
- Put limits on screen time (no more than 2 hours per day). Also, make sure you have set times when phones, tablets, and TVs are turned off (i.e. no screens during dinner, homework, after 9 P.M., etc.)
- If your child has a cell phone, have a way to check who they are calling or texting. Most children do not need a data plan and access to apps or the web. If your child does use apps and the web from his/her phone, get in the habit of checking what is being said and seen online. Remember to check the age restrictions for apps/websites such as Snap Chat, Instagram, Facebook, Kik, etc.
- Maintain a list of your child's passwords for apps and websites.

## Parenting the Pre-teen

Throughout this guide we have provided suggestions on how to help your child make a successful transition into middle school. This section will focus on addressing the social and emotional needs of your middle school student.

It is important to remember the following points:

- Children may enter into developmental stages at different times. What may be typical of most eleven year old children may not be a developmental stage that your child has reached.
- Social relationships will take a front seat to academics for some students. Our job is to help them find balance.
- Middle school offers more freedom but with freedom comes increased responsibility.
- Tread carefully, as too much adult/parental input contaminates an otherwise good idea.

## **Make New Friends but Keep the Old - Maybe Not**

Middle school can be a "fresh start" socially for many children. Be aware that friendship changes are normal in middle school. As students mature at different rates, their interests may

change and their friends may change. Allow your child to explore new friendships and guide him/her in the process of how to make and select friends. Welcome new friends to your home so that you know with whom your child is spending time.

Explore the topics on *Talking Points* with your student.

If a conflict arises with a peer, it is important to know when parental intervention is needed. Students will have disagreements, feel excluded (remember relationships are changing), and possibly get involved in drama. It is important to allow your child to practice resolving conflicts so that they know how to address problems when they arise. **Remind them to avoid listening to gossip**, talk to the person face to face (texting, emailing, Instagram, etc. are not good ways to resolve a conflict) and if needed, involve an adult. If your child is reluctant to share his or her problem with you, encourage them to talk to a trusted adult – advisor, teacher, aunt, coach, counselor, etc.

Parents should intervene if a child's relationships involve any of the following:

- Bullying/harassment
- Inappropriate electronic communications
- Illegal behavior
- Depression

## Appearances

As your student starts their journey into puberty, they will have a variety of thoughts, opinions, and unfortunately, cynicism about their changing bodies. Girls may worry about their weight, physical development, hair color, and of course, clothes; while boys may be concerned with their height and their athletic ability. It is normal for students to be self-conscious at various times. Reassure them that they look great. Listen to their concerns and offer your help and support.

It's natural for middle school students to try out new looks. Be clear and up front about your expectations regarding acceptable attire with your child. If you are uncomfortable with your

### Talking Points:

- What qualities do you want in a friend (a friend who is honest, outgoing, a good student, or even, makes you laugh)?
- What qualities do you bring to a friendship?
- Are there things that you do that might make it hard for you to maintain friendships (being bossy, overly sarcastic, or negative)?
- Discuss cliques and who excludes others with your child.
- Be proactive - have conversations or role play how to start peer conversations.
- Role-play potential problem situations so that your child feels equipped to deal with conflict and knows how to problem solve as well as compromise.

child's appearance, consider what concerns you the most and what his/her look says to you. This is typically not an issue at 6<sup>th</sup> grade, but some students may be influenced by older siblings, friends of older siblings, relatives, entertainers, etc. Think about needs versus wants. The school's dress code can be a helpful guide if you are uncertain about specific clothing. Remember, you're paying for the clothing, so it should also meet your approval.

## Checking-In (*Communication*)

Establish a good relationship with your child. This will be the stage of development where they begin to confide in others and seek advice from others. Remember, you are your child's first teacher and your opinion does matter. Take advantage of opportunities when they are ready to talk; sometimes this window of opportunity can close very quickly. Establish routine talking time while you are cooking dinner, driving to practice, or cleaning the kitchen after dinner. Forcing conversation during their favorite TV show or when they are texting with a friend will surely limit how much they share with you. What follows are some tips to help you bridge the communication divide:

- Show genuine interest in what your child is talking about.
- Ask prompting questions that are open ended –“Tell me about your presentation today?”
- Show support for your child's constructive behaviors.
- Show displeasure and annoyance in response to your child's negative behaviors.
- Confront sassy or disobedient behavior.
- *Consider* your child's wishes and solicit their opinion.
- Be warm, involved, and responsive.
- Expect mature and independent behavior (that is age appropriate).
- Ask them to share the high points and low points of their day.
- Try to do more listening than talking; often adolescents just need you to be a sounding board.
- Let them come to you – if you constantly question them, they may not want to share anything.
- Don't get side tracked by things that are said for shock value. Remain calm, take a deep breath and continue to listen. They may be 'testing the waters' to gauge if they should broach a certain topic with you.
- Remember to listen for feelings. Now is not the time for you to stroll down memory lane. Relevant reflections which help them see that you have experienced similar problems are great to share, but keep your reflections brief and keep the focus on your child.

- If your student is reluctant to talk to you about a problem, write them a note and encourage them to share their thoughts in writing. *Don't judge the letter for spelling, punctuation, etc. You are reading for thoughts and feelings.*

## The Many Moods of a Middle School Student

Sixth graders are navigating the big and sometimes confusing world of middle school. This stage of life begins your child's journey to *start* managing most aspects of his/her life (with your continued guidance). Increased academic responsibility, making and maintaining friendships, understanding their changing bodies, and for some, dealing with drama, creates challenges that your child may not have encountered in elementary school. Your child's interpretation of these new experiences will partially predict how he/she handles these experiences. If your child is overly concerned with what others think of them, they will likely encounter many stressors in middle school. Our goal, in partnership with you, is to help your child be able to problem solve in such a way that they can manage stressors that they encounter. Children learn how to use coping skills by watching what you do to manage stress, cope with problems, and resolve conflict.

Children need to have confidence in their ability to successfully handle their problems. You can help them start this process by letting your child manage small issues with their siblings, peers, and asking your child, "What would you do in this situation?"

Occasional mood swings are to be expected in middle school. Mood swings that persist longer than two weeks should be watched carefully. Prolonged stress can lead to depression. Below are some warning signs to help determine if your child is at risk for developing depression:

- Withdrawing from friends and activities previously enjoyed
- Missing school
- Lack of energy, complaints of being tired
- Changes in eating habits (eating more/less)
- Changes in sleep patterns (oversleeping/insomnia – children this age need approximately 9-10 hours of sleep nightly.)

Anxiety is another problem for some middle school students. We have all encountered events that may create anxiety; flying in an airplane, speaking in front of a large audience, or performing in front of a crowd. Some anxiety is normal. It is important to acknowledge your child's fears without minimizing his/her feelings or over emphasizing the situation. Make sure your child hears that you believe in his/her ability to overcome obstacles. Share tips with your child on how to handle his/her nerves and the importance of facing fears. Be aware of anxiety that is becoming unmanageable. Here are a few signs:

- Withdrawing from social situations
- Complaining of frequent headaches or stomach aches
- Expressing generalized fears with no known origins

If your child is experiencing these symptoms of depression and/or anxiety for more than two weeks, you should consider consulting with your child's pediatrician or a mental health counselor. Remember to talk with your child's advisor to gain any insight into school related stressors.

## Balancing School and Activities

Busy kids, busy parents, and busy families - these seem to be the new way of life. While keeping students involved in extra-curricular and enrichment activities is important, it is more important not to over-schedule your child. If your daily schedule does not allow for sufficient time for your child to complete his/her homework, you should look at how your child is spending his/her time and make any needed adjustments. ***Don't be afraid to be the parent and give your child boundaries with choices that meet your approval.*** Here are some ideas to guide you in this process:

- Use a family calendar to visually display upcoming activities.
- Stay off the bandwagon when signing up for activities, less is sometimes more.
- If your child is reluctant to become involved in any activities, encourage him/her to pair up with a friend to participate.
- Respect your child's emerging individuality and encourage him/her to explore new interests.
- Let your child participate in the decision making process.
- Encourage your child to follow through on commitments (practicing regularly, finishing the season, and completing homework).
- Help your child realize the consequences for failing to follow through on his/her commitments (failing grades, letting the team down, performing poorly).
- Plan for relaxation / downtime.

## Family – The Heart of it All

Middle school can sometimes be an emotional rollercoaster. At a time when children are least secure emotionally, we are asking them to make new friends, learn complex math processes, think deeper, use critical writing skills, get involved in an activity, and so on and so on. They are tackling middle school dances, social media, first crushes, physical and hormonal changes. Wow, that's a lot of stuff. As parents, you are the life preserver they can grab onto when it



feels like their ship is sinking. Home is where your middle school student will recharge his/her battery. The love, support, encouragement, tears, and structure you provide during this journey to the next level will largely predict how well your child navigates the middle school years. Remember to stay the course. Children find security in structure and boundaries. In order to stay afloat, try some of these ideas:

- Plan to do things together as a family regularly.
- Clearly communicate your expectations.
- Appreciate the importance of other adults in your child's life; create a support team or a village for your child. This might include his/her advisor, a teacher, an aunt or uncle, minister, coach, counselor, mature older sibling, neighbor, grandparent(s), etc.
- Have weekly or mid-week check-ins as a family.
- Give your child responsibilities.
- Use consequences as a teaching tool when needed.
- Celebrate the small wins – surviving a presentation, raising a grade, confronting a problem, etc.
- Talk to other parents, share, and bounce ideas off of them.
- **Practice patience!**

## Closing Thoughts

This resource is by no means meant to be an exhaustive guide to parenting a 6<sup>th</sup> grader or transitioning your child from elementary to middle school (though by its length it may have felt like it!). Hopefully you found it helpful in some way. We simply wanted to support families by giving you some tools to help, whether this is your first or last child entering the middle school years. Along the journey, it is everyone's goal both in the home and at school to help children be successful. Remember this quote as you start this journey: Success is knowing we cannot direct the winds but we can adjust the sails. May this help you and your child do just that as the middle school years begin.