

Parent's Guide to Middle School

Part 1: What to Expect in Middle School

An easy-to-use resource to prep parents and young learners for a new school year



- Changes in Teaching and Learning
- Why Are the Changes Happening?
- Developing a Connection With Your Child's Teacher



Changes in Teaching and Learning

The world of education has experienced many exciting changes over the years. Today's demands of college, the workforce, and the global marketplace have reframed the skills students need in order to meet those challenges. As a result, the way that we teach must also evolve to support the best possible learning outcomes. Oftentimes, that means the classrooms parents grew up with no longer resemble the classrooms of today.

	10 Years Ago	Today
How do students work?	mostly independently	independently and in small groups, with partners, and even with people across the globe!
How do students show what they know?	answering questions on multiple choice tests	through multiple choice tests, essays, and real-world tasks
What's important in learning?	memorizing facts and learning skills that aren't necessarily connected to each other	applying their learning in many different situations and using many skills and strategies to do so
What's important in solving problems?	there is one right answer and one right way to find a solution	there are many different ways to get to a solution, and being able to prove it is key
How do students answer questions?	using their outside knowledge and experience	using evidence from the text coupled with knowledge and experience
How important are literacy skills?	reading and writing are taught only in English class	literacy is practiced in math, social studies, science, and electives
What's the role of the teacher?	a lecturer	a coach and facilitator
What's the role of technology?	a separate subject	a tool for teaching and learning



Why Are the Changes Happening?



Teachers and parents across the country are working to prepare students for the higher demands of college and careers today and in the future. The changes in teaching and learning are to ensure all children will graduate high school with the skills they need to be successful.

As you experience school with your child this year, you might notice that what they are learning and practicing are also skills that will benefit them long after school is over!

Top 10 Skills Employers Seek

1. Ability to work in a team structure
2. Ability to make decisions, think creatively, and solve problems
3. Ability to communicate verbally with people inside and outside an organization
4. Ability to plan, organize, and prioritize work
5. Ability to obtain and process information
6. Ability to analyze quantitative data
7. Technical knowledge related to the job
8. Proficiency with computer software programs
9. Ability to create and/or edit written reports
10. Ability to sell and influence others

--Source: Forbes Magazine, 10/11/2013



Developing a Connection With Your Child's Teacher

A positive relationship between you, your child, and your child's teacher is important to a happy and productive year. Here are some tips to opening the door for that positive relationship!



- **Send a note or email in the first week:** Sending a short and simple note to your child's teacher always sets a positive tone for the school year. "Luna had a wonderful first day of school and loves her class and the book you read today. Looking forward to meeting you at Back to School Night!" Remember that back to school is one of the busiest times of the year for educators. You may not get a response right away, but an encouraging note will always be appreciated and is a great way to start the year.
- **Tell the teacher about your child:** Many teachers will ask you to complete a form, survey, or questionnaire about your child. You can also provide this information for your teacher.
- **Take the time to say thanks:** When your child reports that something good happens, or they liked the book they read, or something made them think, let the teacher know.
- **Reach out:** If there is an issue and you want to meet or have a phone call, reach out right away. Often conversations or events can be lost in translation from school to home when reported by your child. If something seems strange or unclear, ask!
- **Help your child be a problem solver:** If your child has a minor issue or concern, or something they are happy and excited about, encourage them to share it with the teacher. Sometimes it helps to role play with your child and practice what they might say. This builds independence and confidence in your middle schooler!

Parent's Guide to Middle School

Part 2: Home Support: Academics and Social Emotional Success

An easy-to-use resource to prep parents and young learners for a new school year



- Planning Homework
- Helping @ Home
- A Smart Space
- Supporting Social and Emotional Learning at Home



Helping @ Home

Below are some homework tips you can try at home.



Venting

Homework can be a source of stress for kids and sometimes they need to express themselves when it comes to doing homework. {Most adults usually need to vent before they can be productive!} In the case of your child, they generally just want to be heard and understood, even when we may think their feelings are a little out of proportion to the situation. Oftentimes, they don't have the words to express that need.

To help facilitate your child's tapping into those feelings, here are a few conversation starters:

- Wow, that's a lot of work.
- Yes, our schedule was packed this week.
- You sound upset. I would be upset too.
- How can I help?

Chunk it Out

Sometimes the hardest part of any task is simply getting started. Ann Dolin, author of *Homework Made Simple* calls this strategy "Five Minutes of Fury." Set a timer for 5 minutes and have your child do as much work as possible in that time. When the timer is up, take a break or keep going. Remember to make sure to check for errors or correct messiness before turning it in.

Role Reversal

We all learn better when we need to teach someone else. Here are some questions to help that process: *What were you doing in math today? Great, how have you been practicing it in class? I know one way to do that, but you probably know a different way. Can you please teach me how to do it?* Often through these conversations you will uncover the real assignment, and the real source of the confusion.

Call it Quits

No one wants tears at homework time! If you've reached the point the tears are coming (yours or your child's), it's okay to stop. Congratulate your child for perseverance through something hard. Put a sticky note on the homework: "I worked with Luna on her homework for 30 minutes tonight and it was a struggle. Could you please let me know how I can best explain this concept at home? We are happy to work on it again tonight with a little direction."

Middle schoolers can even write those notes on their own!



A Smart Space

Your child might do their homework all over the place: riding in the car, at dance practice, or in front of the television. However, a consistent and quiet environment can make all the difference in how much learning happens during homework time. Below are some tips for how to transform a small corner of your home into a smart study space!

Your Middle Schooler's Smart Space

1. **A Message Board:** Use a bulletin board or magnetic whiteboard to post notes and reminders. Rotate through schoolwork that makes your child proud. Add a note of encouragement!
2. **Clock or Timer:** Give homework a time limit, or practice in smaller chunks. Don't forget to work in some brain breaks if needed! Even just a few minutes of physical activity can recharge their brains.
3. **Flexible Seating:** Everyone has a different preference on workspace. Make it okay to sit, stand, or sprawl.
4. **Calendar:** Post a calendar on the wall to record tests, study times, and extracurricular activities. Use the calendar to chunk out big projects.
5. **Supply Caddy & Supplies:** It's important to have all the supplies you might need at hand. Corral all of these items in a caddy or container to keep clutter at bay.
6. **Snacks:** We all work better when we're well fed! Have healthy snacks to help homework time be delicious, and more productive.



Supporting Social and Emotional Learning at Home

We want our kids to do well in school, but we also want them to do well in life. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), helping kids process their emotions and get along with others, is an important component in both of these pursuits. SEL includes skills like understanding emotions, setting and achieving goals, developing empathy, and making good decisions. SEL skills have been shown to not only help students form and maintain positive relationships, but also to do well in school.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines five key components of SEL:

- self-awareness
- self-management
- social awareness
- relationship skills
- responsible decision making

Research has found that kids do best when these components are worked on at school and at home. To support your child at home, try these suggestions:

Self-Awareness

Help develop self-awareness by encouraging emotional awareness. Have your child name the emotions that they experience. It's also important to give your child opportunities to reflect on their strengths and areas of growth. Normalize struggle by encouraging your child to talk about things that they find hard. For example, if making friends is challenging for your child, talk about what your child is currently doing. Make a plan for how to help your child develop friendship skills, like walking through exactly what to say when approaching a potential friend.

Self-Management

Self-management is the ability to manage your impulses, control stress, and meet goals. Teach your child that all emotions are okay, but there are positive and negative ways to react to emotions. Help your child learn calm-down strategies to help process strong emotions. Empower your child to pick go-to calm-down strategies that work for them. Not everyone will find the same strategies helpful, which is totally okay!



Social Awareness

Encourage your child to see other people's perspectives in real life and while reading. Using literature is a great way to help your child practice analyzing others' motivations and developing empathy. As you read, ask questions like, "Why do you think she did that?" or "What do you think he is feeling?" Then transfer this approach to real life. As your child has disagreements or misunderstandings with others, encourage the use of the same questions.

Relationship Skills

You have likely already taught your child the basics of how to get along with others. But relationship skills have a wide variety of components, from resolving conflicts to resisting inappropriate peer pressure. Help your child negotiate the complexities of relationships through conversation and role plays. For example, if you have noticed your child being persuaded by a friend to exclude another classmate, role play this situation. Show your child exactly what could be done to resist peer pressure in this situation.

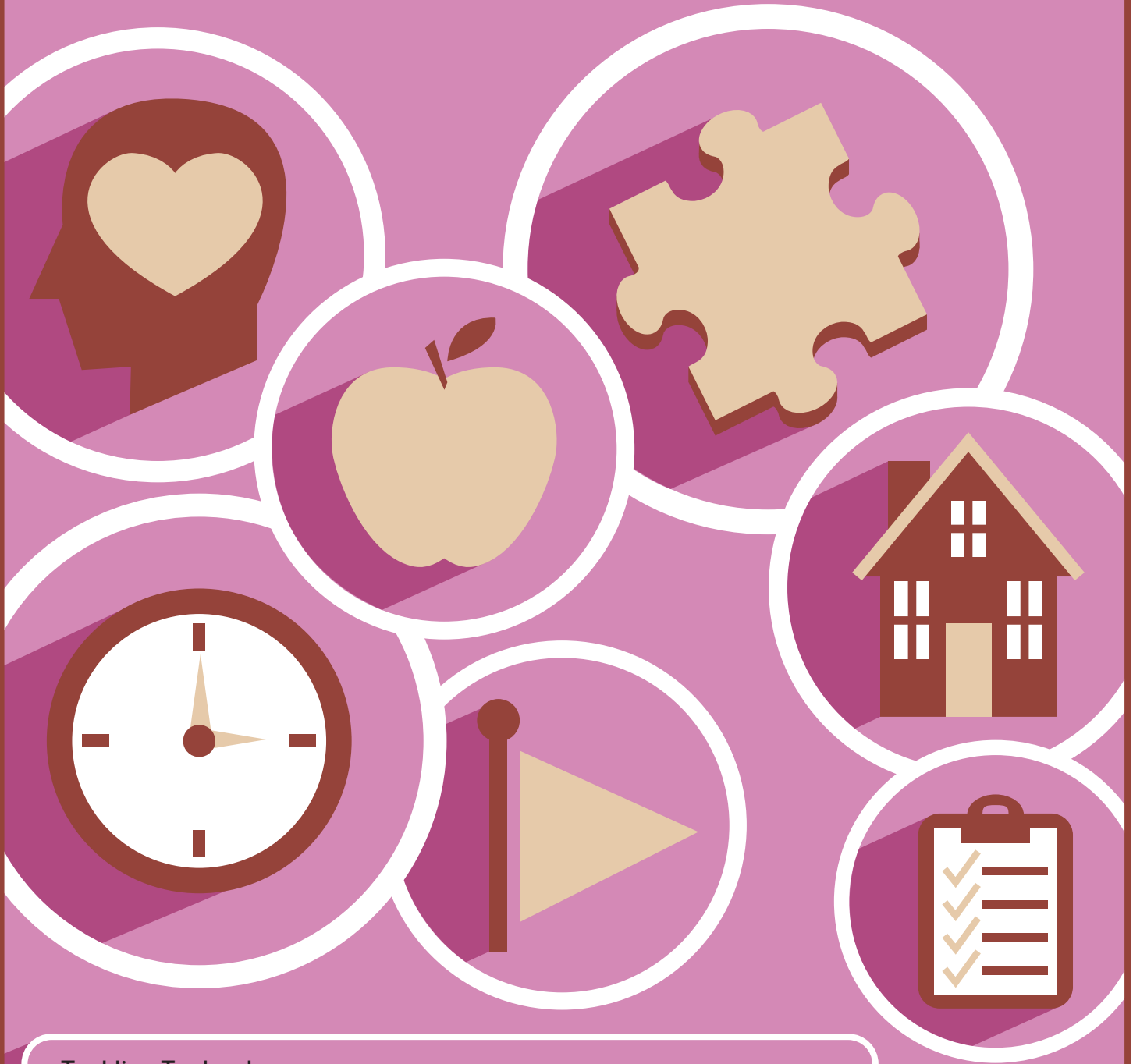
Responsible Decision Making

All of us, no matter the age, have to make so many decisions throughout a single day. When making decisions, encourage your child to consider who will be affected by the decision. By developing forward-thinking skills, your child will learn how to anticipate the consequences of decisions. Consider walking through different outcomes that would come from different decisions by asking questions like, "What do you think would happen if you did that?" and "What would happen if you chose a different approach?"

Parent's Guide to Middle School

Part 3: Promoting Internet Safety

An easy-to-use resource to prep parents and young learners for a new school year



- Tackling Technology
- Healthy Screen Time Habits
- Digital Citizenship



Tackling Technology

Technology is everywhere! In today's schools it can take the form of computers, televisions, tablets, and, yes, even cellphones. Educators often see an increase in learning and engagement with technology use. Digital tools can help accommodate various learning styles and support audio and visual learning.

While technology can be an engaging tool for learning, socializing, and fun, parents still need to set boundaries on technology use! Talk to your child often about how to use technology appropriately and how to stay safe online.

Helping @ Home

Be available and present when your child is using technology, especially when completing online assignments for school. Below are some suggestions on how to support and encourage the safe and effective use of technology.



1. **Talk to your child.** Parents ask their children where they are going and who they are going with whenever they leave the house. They should take the same approach when their children go on the Internet—where are they going and who are they with?
2. **Develop rules.** Together with your child, develop rules about acceptable and safe behaviors for all electronic media.
3. **Explore the Internet.** Visit the websites your child frequents. Many websites and online activities are beneficial.
4. **Talk with others.** Talk to other parents about how they have discussed technology use with their middle schoolers.
5. **Educate yourself.** Stay informed about the new devices and websites your child is using. Continually talk with your child and explore the technology yourself.

Source: Centers for Disease Control



Healthy Screen Time Habits

Screen time is almost inevitable in the home and classroom. While computers, televisions, and tablets are used in the classroom as educational tools, middle schoolers should only spend a limited time on the screen. Setting screen time limits—and helping kids moderate their own habits—are all about finding the right balance for your family's needs and lifestyle.



After you and your child have agreed on what they'll do on the screen, discuss your expectations and set limits on their use. The limits can be in time, but you can also limit the types of programs or websites your middle schooler interacts with.

Tips to Foster Healthy Screen Time Habits

- Make rules about screen use, including place (e.g., only in the living room and not in the dining room or bedroom) and time (e.g., 60 minutes a day on the weekends). Setting a timer is a great strategy for kids.
- Try to be with your child and interact with them while they are on the screen. Talk about the game or app they are playing, and encourage them to tell you their thinking process. The same goes for TV shows or videos—talk to your child and have them describe what they watch.
- Research each app or game before you let your child use it. Many games claim to be educational but aren't actually age-appropriate or instructive. Read reviews and pay attention to what pediatricians, educators, and other parents say.
- Avoid screen time before bed. If your child avoids screens prior to bedtime, they are more likely to fall asleep easily.
- Schedule physical activity and outdoor time as much as possible for your child before they spend time on a screen. Think of screen time as the last thing on your middle schooler's to-do list. There are many more important and beneficial activities for your child to do. Screen time can be a form of relaxing after exercise and a little is okay.



Digital Citizenship

Digital citizenship is when users of technology have appropriate and responsible behavior when using technology. How do we teach appropriate and responsible behavior in a technological context? As with any new tool or topic, children need guidance to fully understand expectations. Having conversations about appropriate behavior while using digital tools will help your child take ownership of their actions while using those tools.

Even though children are not face-to-face with someone while using technology, they may still interact with people online or produce creative products that others may see. Digital citizens are mindful and sensitive of how people will respond to their digital footprint, or behavior with technology. While using technology, a digital citizen:

- Knows the rules and expectations.
- Respects themselves and others.
- Makes good choices.
- Balances the time they spend online and using media with other activities, like reading a book.
- Reports cyberbullying to parents and school officials.

Steps to Educate Your Child About Digital Citizenship

- Review the definition of digital citizenship and discuss examples and non-examples.
- Brainstorm words that can be kind and helpful online and talk about hurtful language that should not be used online.
- Discuss keeping private information private, like passwords, addresses, and phone numbers.
- Talk to your middle schooler about reliable and unreliable information they might see or read online.
- Set expectations for digital use in the home.
- Consider writing expectations down and have everyone in the house sign it as a visual reminder of their pledge to adhere to those expectations.
- Refer to written expectations when situations arise, such as the amount of time they spend on their devices.
- Remember to frequently review responsible and respectful behavior for technology use.

Parent's Guide to Middle School

Part 4: Time Management

An easy-to-use resource to prep parents and young learners for a new school year



- Setting Up Your Middle Schooler for Success
- Planning Calendar
- Weekly Planner
- Daily Planner



Setting Up Your Middle Schooler for Success

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stress, challenge, and adversity, and ultimately be strengthened by facing that challenge. As a result, resilient children become more adaptable to change and increasingly able to tackle bigger and bigger challenges. We all make mistakes and fail, but resilient people get back up again.

Resiliency starts from attitudes and beliefs kids hold of themselves, factors that are internal such as optimism, humor, and flexibility. These are all traits that we can continue to strengthen as kids grow and develop. Supporting resilience only needs a belief that all individuals have the ability to change. Parents have great power to make that change happen! Here are some ways to foster and encourage resilience in your kids:

Foster Optimism

Resilient people are also optimistic. Help your child to see the glass as half full whenever possible, while still accepting their feelings. Give validation and respect to their take on the world, and also gently show them a more optimistic one.

Keep Perspective

Things that seem little to adults can be internalized as much bigger by your child. When this happens, remember not to minimize their view of the problem. Let them talk and process, and then help your child problem solve solutions and ways to respond to challenges and stressful feelings in the future.

Praise Effort

When an adult praises a certain behavior in a child, it shows them what is most valued. When you praise your child, focus on effort. By doing this, it helps to guide your child to learn from their mistakes and feel good about working hard, even if the outcome did not happen as expected.

Don't Rescue (all the time)

As parents we all rescue sometimes, but it's important not to do it every single time. It's important to let kids learn how to manage challenges. If there are reasonable times where there are natural consequences (like forgetting homework at home), allow those to unfold. When challenges do arise, always remind your child, "I trust you because you got this!"

Support Responsibility

Encouraging the growth of responsibility by establishing consistent routines and systems helps build resilience also. Things like regular chores will help your child self-regulate their own behavior, develop self-management skills, as well as help them to feel accomplished.



Weekly Planner

PART 4: TIME MANAGEMENT

WEEKLY PLANNER

Name: _____

Month: _____ Days: _____ - _____ Year: _____

<input type="checkbox"/> MONDAY To do list: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Course activities: <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> TUESDAY To do list: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Course activities: <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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<input type="checkbox"/> WEDNESDAY To do list: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Course activities: <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	<input type="checkbox"/> THURSDAY To do list: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Course activities: <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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<input type="checkbox"/> FRIDAY To do list: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Course activities: <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____	WEEKEND ACTIVITIES: <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____
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Daily Planner

PART 4: TIME MANAGEMENT

DAILY PLANNER

Today's Date: _____

Things to do:

Subject: _____



Subject: _____



Notes:

Subject: _____



Subject: _____



Subject: _____



All Homework Completed!