



## What To Expect in the Transition from Elementary to Middle School

Transitioning from elementary to middle school brings many questions and concerns for both parents and students. Making this move to a middle school can be both scary and exciting. Parents can help their preteens prepare for this monumental transition by gathering information and staying involved in their child's education. As with any stage and rite of passage in childhood, communication between parent and child is crucial. Staying connected to your child's school, his or her friends, and other parents, may be an important component to parenting during the middle school years. Being aware of what your child is experiencing is the first step in making your child's matriculation process from elementary school a success.

### **Be aware of the expected changes in this transition**

It is important to ask your student what their concerns might be about middle school. Some common concerns of preteens include: getting to class on time; finding their locker; keeping up with the pace of other classmates; finding the bathroom or lunchroom; getting on the right bus; walking through crowded hallways; and remembering their class schedule. Much of this apprehension may be alleviated after attending the middle school orientation program. Your child could also talk to an older student that currently attends middle school to gain a student's perspective on the school.

Parents can be a constructive sounding board for their kids before and after the middle school transition. Encourage your student to come to you if they are having a problem. Your student will have to make many adjustments in middle school so be prepared to aid him/her through this time period. Know that it is normal for students to feel anxious at first. After all, look at all of the changes that they may face:

- They will need to be a good listener more than ever before.
- Middle schoolers have more personal responsibilities than elementary school students.
- Students will learn to change classes several times a day and have as many as five different teachers.
- They will need to learn how to balance their workload, plan for long-range assignments, use a planner and create an organizational system that works for them.
- They will no longer have recess or as much free time.
- Students need to remember their class schedule, carry their own school supplies, and open a combination lock.
- Maintaining appropriate behavior is expected. Consequences for poor behavior of middle school students may be sterner than younger students experience in earlier grades.
- They will also start to notice developmental differences (especially physically and socially) between boys and girls.
- Often social issues become the priority and friendship groups or cliques form. It's not unusual for students to spend some time trying out different social groups until they find a peer group that fits.
- Middle school students need to balance a busy schedule with school and extracurricular activities. They also need to learn how to set limits and not overload their days with too many activities.
- Even though middle schools have only three grade levels, they are considerably larger than elementary schools, which house students of many grade levels. This means each grade may have hundreds of students from several different elementary schools. Sixth grade students may have classes with very few of the classmates they may have counted on seeing in years past.

As you can see, middle school students are faced with many academic, social, physical, and emotional challenges. It's important to keep this in mind and to make sure that your parental expectations are realistic. Being aware of this adjustment period is your first step in supporting your preteen in this change. Some students make this adjustment smoothly and others may take a while to get the hang of things. Depending on the student's level of maturity, it may be necessary for parents to provide additional support in helping their student gain his/her own independence. Remember, a little effort now will pay off in the future.