

# Middle School Parent Handbook

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Dear Parents,

The middle school years are some of the most exciting, challenging, and interesting for parents. For students, these years are some of the most important in terms of growth and development.

As parents, there are lots of things that you can do to help your child not only succeed academically, but to also grow and thrive during their middle school years.

“It is not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings.”

# The Transition to Middle School

*Middle school is a very big step and a very big change, both for students and parents.*

Middle school students are faced with lots of new opportunities and challenges. They have lockers, change classes, and have more teachers to deal with. Middle schools are generally larger in size, the coursework is more difficult, and students have more homework. Middle school students also find that they're expected to be more independent, more focused, and more responsible than they were in elementary school.

Most students feel excited and a little apprehensive as they start middle school. Students wonder if they'll fit in, whether or not they'll like their teachers and if they'll be able to succeed in the courses they're taking.

During this transition period, it's important to keep the lines of communication open. Talk to your children, and let them know that you're there to make the transition to middle school as smooth as possible.

This is not only a transition period for students, it's also a time of transition for parents. Your children are growing and changing, and you can see their focus shifting from their families to their friends. As middle school students become more independent and socially active, being a parent becomes more complicated, and often times more difficult.

During these middle school years, it's very important that you be involved in your children's lives. You need to make sure that your children are doing well in school, and that they're making good choices and decisions. More not than ever, your children need guidance, encouragement, love, and understanding.

# Middle School Basics

*Most middle schools give students a handbook that explains their code of conduct, policies, procedures, rules, and regulations. Read through this handbook carefully, and keep it for reference. If you have any questions, call the school office.*

## **School Calendar**

All school districts have a calendar that shows when their schools will be closed for holidays and vacations, and when each grading period begins and ends. Many school calendars also include dates for testing, parent meetings, and exams. Write all of these dates on your calendar at home.

## **Attendance Policies**

Schools have attendance policies that encourage regular attendance, while allowing students to be absent if they're ill. If your child is going to be absent for more than a couple days, try to get some school work for him/her to do at home. (Check with your school to see if they have a procedure for getting assignments.) If your child has an extended illness or health problem, get documentation from your child's physician and give it to the principal.

## **Code of Conduct / School Rules**

In order to provide students with a safe environment that encourages learning, schools need to have rules regarding student conduct and behavior. Students who don't follow the rules must face the consequences. Consequences, or punishment, can range anywhere from detention to expulsion. The severity of the

punishment generally depends on the seriousness of the offense and the past history of the student(s) involved.

## **School Counselors**

School counselors help students choose courses, they monitor academic progress, and they talk to students about their career and educational options. Counselors are also available to answer questions, to listen, and to help students figure out how to deal with difficult situations. *Know who your child's counselor is, and make sure that your child knows how to go about seeing his/her counselor.*

If you ever have a question or need information, contact your child's counselor. Counselors are not only excellent resources for students, they're also great resources for parents.

## **Courses**

Middle school students have a lot of courses that they have to generally take (e.g., English, Math, Science, Social Studies). While students generally find their schedules are mostly filled with required courses, middle school students usually do get to choose a few electives (e.g., band, chorus). Schools sometimes also offer different levels of a specific subject or course. They may, for example, be an advanced math course for the students who excel in math.

To ensure that students are making satisfactory academic progress, most middle schools have course requirements that students must meet in order to advance to the next grade level. If you have questions about your child's courses, or concerns regarding your child's academic progress, talk to your child's counselor.

## **Scheduling**

Most schools ask students to choose their courses for the following year in late winter or early spring. Make sure that your child signs up for all the required courses, and that he/she is also choosing the most appropriate electives. If you ever have any questions regarding scheduling, call your child's counselor.

Students who are in the right courses are happier, and they are more successful!

## **Extracurricular Activities**

Middle schools generally have a variety of clubs, teams, and organizations that students can join. In many schools, students can also work as an office aide or a teacher's assistant.

Most middle schools have athletic eligibility requirements for the students who want to play a sport. Athletes may, for example, be required to maintain a certain grade average. Often these eligibility requirements also apply to students who participate in other activities (e.g., cheerleading, student government).

## **Standardized Tests**

In order to measure student achievement, all middle school students are required to take standardized tests. While the tests vary from state to state and school to school, all standardized tests compare a student's achievement with state and national norms. Many schools also use student test scores to help determine proper course placement.

Student test results are given to parents; however, it's sometimes difficult to understand exactly what these test scores mean. If you have questions about test results, talk to your child's counselor.

## **Bullying**

Bullying can be a real problem at the middle school level. Talk to your children about what they should do if they ever witness or hear about a student being bullied. If your child complains that a student is bullying or harassing him/her in any way, find out exactly what's happened, and then talk to the counselor or principal.

Sometimes middle school students are afraid to tell their parents that they're being bullied. If your child suddenly doesn't want to go to school, ask your child if he/she is being bullied or harassed in any way.

*“There are two great things that you can give your children: one is roots, the other is wings.”*

# Help Your Child Succeed

*Middle school students need lots of direction, guidance, and support. To help your child succeed, follow these suggestions.*

## **Provide school supplies and a place to study.**

If your school has a list of recommended supplies, be sure to get everything on the list. You may also want to purchase the following: combination lock, locker shelf and/or mirror, calculator, reliable alarm clock, watch, backpack, assignment notebook (if your school doesn't provide agendas or planners), and a USB flash drive (for storing and transportation computer files). Make sure that your child has a place at home to study that's quiet, well-lit, and comfortable. This area should have a surface for writing and be equipped with paper, calculator, dictionary, etc.

## **Help set academic goals.**

At the beginning of each grading period, sit down with your child and figure out what grade he/she should realistically be able to earn each course. Setting goals will give your child something specific to work towards.

## **Insist on daily attendance.**

When students miss school, they miss lectures, notes, class discussions, assignments, quizzes, and tests. It doesn't matter how conscientious students are about making up their work, they can never make up all of what they miss, even when they're absent for only a day or two.

Parents who allow their children to miss school when they aren't ill, not only hurt their children's education, they also send a message that school isn't really that important. If your child doesn't want to go to school, or if you're seeing a pattern of excuses to miss school, talk to your child or to your child's counselor.

### **Attend all parent programs.**

Many middle schools have orientations or "open houses" for parents. These programs give parents an opportunity to see the school, to meet their teachers, and to learn something about the courses their children are taking.

When you attend one of these parent programs, you learn valuable information about your child's school. You also show your child that education is important to you, and that you're very interested in his/her academic progress.

### **See all midterm reports and report cards.**

In addition to report cards, many middle schools also provide students with progress reports, interim reports, or mid-term grades. Make sure that your child knows that you expect to see *every* mid-term report and *every* report card as soon as it comes out.

Expect to see a report card within 7-10 days after the grading period ends. If you don't see a report card, call the school and ask for a copy. *Do not just assume that someone will call you if there's a problem.*

### **Use rewards and consequences to encourage change.**

Rewards are most effective when you want to encourage a change in attendance, effort, or behavior. (Eventually, doing well will be its own reward.) A reward for improved effort or for a specific achievement can be very motivating. Of course, for most students, a parent's approval is still the best reward. Make it a

point to recognize effort and to acknowledge each academic success, even if it's just a good grade on a quiz.

Students need to learn that there are consequences for poor school performance. Consequences, of course, are most effective when they are reasonable and logical. For example, the consequence for routinely being late to school might be revised nighttime schedule (e.g., no computer, or phone after 9:30).

### **Encourage a healthy lifestyle.**

With all of the changes that middle school students are going through, it's very important that they eat right, exercise, and get enough sleep. Have nutritious food at home, make sure that your children do something physical on a regular basis, and insist that they go to bed at a reasonable hour each night.

### **Help improve organizational skills.**

With more teachers, more classes, more homework, and activities, middle school student need to develop good organizational skills. When students are organized, they get better grades, they're less frustrated, and they have more time for family and friends.

Organization is an area in which parents can really help their children. Use these suggestions to help your middle school student become better organized.

- Make sure that your children have a folder, binder, or notebook that's clearly labeled for each class. Also, set up files at home for returned papers, quizzes, and tests.
- Have them use an assignment notebook, agenda, or planner to keep track of their assignments. Check it periodically to make sure that they're using it consistently.
- Remind your children to put all of their papers in the appropriate folder or binder. Loose papers shouldn't be stuck inside books or stuffed into backpacks.

- Have them clean out their backpack at least once a week. Encourage them to also keep their lockers neat and clean.
- Help your children learn how to organize and prioritize their homework.
- Show your children how to break large assignments and projects down into smaller, more manageable tasks. Large assignments often seem overwhelming, and sometimes students need help figuring out where to begin.
- Have them get everything ready for the following day before they got to bed each night.

### **Help with time management.**

Most middle school students have a significant amount of homework. In order for students to keep up with all of their school work and all of their after school activities, they need to have good time-management skills.

Talk to your children about time management, and encourage them to use any “free time” during the school day to get started on homework. Also, help your children decide when the best time for them to do their homework is. Some students want to get their homework done right after school; others want a break and would rather do it later. The important thing is that you help your middle school student establish a study routine that works.

	3:00 – 5:00 Soccer practice
Reggie’s Schedule	5:30 – 7:00 Dinner and dishes
	7:00 - 9:00 Homework / studying
	9:00 – 10:30 Free time / bed

## **Make homework your child's responsibility.**

Middle school students must be responsible for keeping track of their assignments, completing their assignments accurately, and turning their assignments in on time. Unfortunately, not all students take this responsibility as seriously as they should.

When students routinely do not do their homework, parents sometimes become frustrated and upset. Of course, middle school students are likely to view any parental concern or questioning as nagging. While parents dislike arguing about homework, most parents don't feel that they can just stand by and do nothing. In these situations, it's possible for parents to unintentionally turn the completion of homework into *their* problem.

If your child is not doing his/her homework, first talk to your child and to your child's teacher to make sure that the homework isn't too difficult, or that there isn't some problem with the class. You then need to come up with a plan in which the completion of homework becomes your child's responsibility, and if it's not completed, your child's problem. Of course, the trick is to figure out how to get individual students to take responsibility for the completion of their homework assignments.

Below are examples of how two parents made the completion of homework their child's responsibility.

*“At our house, it's simple. My daughter knows what kind of grades we expect to see on her report card. I show a lot of interest in her schoolwork. Kylee know what's expected, and she knows that if her grades drop, she'll lose privileges.” Mrs. A. Lee*

*“Alex became very social in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and his grades began to slip. I wanted to ‘nip this in the bud’ so I told Alex that if he wanted to be with his friends on the weekends, he'd have to first prove to me that he was doing what he needed to do in school.*

*I made up a form that listed the three classes I was most concerned about, and beside each class I put a box for the teacher's initials. The form asked each teacher to verify that Alex*

*had turned in all of his assignments, and that he had no grade below a C that week. (I checked with these teachers first to make sure my plan was okay with them.)*

*I then explained to Alex that it was his responsibility to have his teachers initial this form each Friday. If I didn't see a form signed by these three teachers, he couldn't see his friends that weekend." Mr. J. Lopez*

In these scenarios, the responsibility for doing homework has been given to the student, where it belongs. Of course, for these approaches to work, the parents must follow through and, if necessary, impose the consequences.

Students and situations are different, and parents must find their own way to deal with the issue of homework. Parents, however, must make homework their child's responsibility.

### **Encourage involvement in school activities.**

Studies have shown that students who are involved in extracurricular activities enjoy school more, and they do better academically. Encourage your children to participate in at least one or two activities at school. They'll make new friends, gain new skills, and have fun. Also encourage them to be a part of the school community and to support their classmates by attending games, dances, plays, etc.

### **Encourage independent problem solving.**

Parents need to know what's going on at school, and they need to monitor their children's academic progress. It is, however, important for students to learn how to solve their own problems and how to take care of their own affairs.

Being able to get their questions answered and their problems resolved helps students gain confidence and become more independent. It also gives them a sense of empowerment. In middle school, most problems can be resolved and most questions answered by just going to the right office or by talking to the right

person. Whenever your children have a question or problem, try to help them figure out how to take care of it on their own.

You want to help your children become more independent; however, you also want them to know that you are always available to intervene if they need your help.

*“Stay involved! Don’t assume that once students get to middle school that they don’t need your involvement. They do!”*

### **Provide academic support.**

Be available to help your children organize their homework. Also be available to help them when they get stuck, need someone to listen to a speech, read an essay, or quiz them on material for a test. But don’t give your children more help than they want, and don’t do their work for them. If they don’t get something done, don’t come to their rescue. If you do, they won’t see the need to be responsible for themselves in the future.

If you see your child struggling in a subject, call the teacher and ask what you can do to help. It’s very important for middle school students to be successful in their classes, and for them to feel competent and capable.

## **HELP YOUR CHILD SUCCEED**

- Provide school supplies and a place to study.
- Help set academic goals.
- Insist on daily attendance.
- Attend all parent programs.
- See all midterm reports and report cards.
- Use rewards and consequences to encourage change.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- Help improve organizational skills.

- Help with time management.
- Make homework your child's responsibility.
- Encourage involvement in school activities.
- Encourage independent problem solving.
- Provide academic support.

## **Work with Your School**

### **Support the school and the teachers.**

Children's attitudes about education and school are, to a great extent, determined by what their parents say and do. Your child needs to know that you support the teachers and administrators at your school, and that you consider education to be a top priority.

You can best convey your interest in education and your support of your child's school by doing the following:

- Insist that your child be in school, on time, every day.
- Expect your child to work up to his/her potential.
- Show an interest in what your child is studying.
- Talk about the importance of getting a good education.
- Expect your child to follow the school rules.
- Attend all parent programs and parent-teacher conferences.
- Expect your child to continue with school after graduation.
- Show consistent interest in your child's academic progress.

### **Make the most of parent-teacher conferences.**

Parent-teacher conferences provide an excellent opportunity for parents to both give and receive information. Teachers are able to provide information on how a student is performing, and parents

can share information that will help teachers better understand their child (e.g., how their child learns best).

In some middle schools, parents meet with only one of their child's teachers during conferences. That teacher will represent the team or group of teachers that works with their child. Other middle schools have conferences that are student led. Regardless of the format, conferences are important, and parents need to attend.

Before you go to a parent-teacher conference, make a list of the information that you want to share, along with any questions or concerns that you may have. Also, ask your child if there's anything that he/she would like you to discuss with the teacher.

Sometimes it's helpful to take your child to the conference with you, so that you can meet the teacher together. This gives your child an opportunity to be a part of the discussion.

On the following page, you will find ten parent-teacher conference discussion topics, along with questions to ask. Focusing on these discussion topics and questions will help ensure that your parent-teacher conferences are meaningful and productive.

### **Communicate with your school.**

It's so much easier today for parents to stay informed and to communicate with school personnel. Most schools now have their own Web site, and parents can often communicate with teachers and counselors via e-mail.

It's important that you feel connected to what's happening at your child's school, and that you're able to get information and help when you need it. If there's ever a situation (e.g., health problem, death in the family, divorce that might affect your child's attitude or performance, be sure to contact the school and let them know what's going on.

### **Work with the school to resolve problems.**

If your child complains about a class or teacher, listen closely, and try to determine what's going on. While doing so, please remember that part of your child's education is to learn how to succeed in subjects that he/she may find difficult or just uninteresting. Also, remember that it's important for students to learn how to adapt to different teachers, expectations, and teaching styles.

If there is a problem with a class, teacher, or another student, first try to help your child figure out how to deal with the situation on his/her own. If you feel that you need to intervene, contact the teacher, and share your concerns. If there continues to be a problem, talk to your child's counselor.

### **Parent-Teacher Conference Discussion Topics and Questions**

- **Homework** – Is my child's homework completed thoroughly, accurately, and on time?
- **Class Participation** – Does my child ask questions, volunteer answers, and participate in discussions?
- **Organization** – Does my child seem organized? Does he/she come to class prepared?
- **Academic Success** – How is my child doing in this class? Is my child working up to his/her potential? Is this class appropriate for my child's ability level?
- **Classroom Time Management** – Does my child use class time wisely?
- **Attendance and Punctuality** – Is my child in class every day? Does he/she come to class on time?
- **Focus** – Does my child pay attention in class?

- **Social Adjustment** – Is my child respectful and courteous to teachers and classmates? Does my child appear to get along with the other students?
- **Strengths and Weaknesses** – What are my child's strengths? Which skills need more work?
- **Additional Comments** – Do you have any advice or suggestions for me or for my child?

## **Facts & Tips for Parents**

*These facts & tips will help you guide and support your children through their middle school years.*

### **Understand the changes.**

Middle school students can challenge and frustrate even the most patient and caring parents. But when parents take a look at all the changes that middle school students are dealing with, it's much easier to understand why they act the way they do.

### **Physical Changes**

Because students usually go through puberty during middle school, most students go through a lot of physical changes during these years. Because some students mature earlier than others, middle school students come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes.

When students go through puberty, they often feel self-conscious and embarrassed by the things their bodies are now doing. Middle school students also find that different parts of their bodies sometimes change and grow at different rates. A young person's arms, legs, or nose, for example, may all of a sudden seem out of proportion. Of course, this all happens at a time when students are the most concerned about their appearance. With their

growing bodies and emerging hormones, middle school students sometimes feel tired, achy, and just plain cranky.

The best way for parents to help their children is to talk to them, and to reassure them that all these changes are normal. So that middle school students can feel good about how they look, parents may want to discuss personal hygiene and grooming. Parents should also help their children choose clothes that are in style and flattering, but that also adhere to the school's dress code.

Most importantly, parents should assure their middle school student that they look great.

### **Emotional Changes**

Middle school students are often moody. They're up, they're down, they're happy, they're sad, they're confused. These mood changes are normal result of the changes in their bodies and of their need to figure out who they are, and how they fit into this complicated middle school world.

The best way for parents to help their children is to provide support, encouragement, love, and a stable home environment.

### **Intellectual Changes**

Middle school students are ready to explore and learn about life and the "outside" world. They have a strong sense of what's fair, and they like to think that they can make a difference. Middle school students are able to think more abstractly, and they're able to handle more complex intellectual tasks.

Parents can help their children develop intellectually by discussing serious topics with them, by giving them opportunities to express their opinions, and by showing respect for their ideas.

### **Social Changes**

Friends are very important to middle school students, and they often spend a great deal of time talking to, instant messaging,

and text messaging each other. They are, of course, also beginning to take a much greater interest in the opposite sex.

Middle school students are trying to find their own identity, but yet they don't want to be different. They worry a lot about what other people think of them, and because they want to fit in, they're very susceptible to peer pressure. Middle school students are also influenced by the messages and images they get through the media (e.g., "girls have to be thin").

Parents need to help their children develop a strong sense of who they are. Students who are self-confident are less influenced by peer pressure and media messages. While friends are very important to middle school students, doing things with their parents and with other family members provides them with a much needed sense of security.

### **Be aware and be informed.**

Middle school is arguably the time when parents need to be the most involved and the most vigilant. A whole new world has opened up to the middle school student, and this is often the time when children "get off track." These tips will help ensure that your children stay on track.

- Know what's going on at the mall and at other gathering places.
- Invite your children's friends over and get to know them. Also, be available to drive your children and their friends around. You'll learn a lot listening to them talk.
- Talk to the parents of your children's friends. Find out how they handle curfews, sleep-overs, etc. Children are less likely to tell parents that "*Everyone else is allowed to ...*" if they know that their parents are talking to each other.
- Know what kinds of music your children are listening to. Be aware of the videos and TV shows your children are watching, and of the video games they are playing.

Also, know what they are doing and where they are going online. Middle school students want and need a certain amount of freedom, but they still need their parents to provide guidelines and limits.

- Alcohol, drugs, and smoking are issues that every parent had to deal with in some way. Be informed as to what is happening in your community and at your school. Talk to your children about the dangers of alcohol, drugs, and smoking, and make sure they know where you stand on these issues. Be a good role model.
- If you have a feeling that your child is involved in an activity that's wrong or harmful, listen to your instincts, and take the appropriate action.

### **Communicate with your child.**

Communicating with middle school students can be a real challenge. When parents ask "*How was school today?*" they often hear "*fine*" "*boring*" or "*okay.*" If parents ask any more questions, their children are likely to wonder why they're being interrogated. Communicating with middle school students can be difficult, but because it's so important, parents need to make the extra effort.

The tips below will help you better communicate and connect with your middle school student.

- Timing is important. Be available to listen when your children want to talk. Also, look for times when they are most likely to be open to conversation. This is often right after they get home from school or an activity, or right before they go to bed. Another great time to talk is when you're driving in the car. You're not facing each other, it's quiet, they can't leave, it feels safe, and you're spending the time together anyway.
- Tell your middle school students what you want them to do, instead of what you don't want them to do.

For example, instead of saying “*Don’t leave your backpack in the middle of the floor*” say “*Tell me about your day*” or “*What’s that book about?*”

- Ask open-ended questions that require more than one word answers. Instead of “*How was school?*” say “*tell me about your day*” or “*What’s that book about?*”
- It’s often a lot easier to talk to middle school students when you’re doing something you both enjoy. Make time for one-on-one activities, like cooking, shopping, taking a walk, watching a game, fishing, working on a car, or going out for ice cream. These are all great ways to spend quality time with your children, and they provide excellent opportunities for conversation. Your children may not always seem thrilled to hang out with you, but whether they admit it or not, they need and want to spend time alone with their parents.
- Be very specific in your communications. Instead of saying “*Be home early*” say “*Be home at 8:00.*” Don’t leave instructions open to interpretation.
- Middle school students often say things for shock value or to “test the waters” to see how their parents will react. With middle school students, it’s best to stay calm, listen, and to not overreact. “*So, you want to dye your hair green?*”
- Middle school students sometimes responds to commands or requests with a grunt or in a tone of voice that’s less than pleasant. Chalk this up to middle school moodiness or rebellion. The important thing is that your children do what you say. Expecting them to be happy about it is sometimes too much to ask.
- Middle school students may seem like they don’t hear a thing you say, but they are listening. They’re listening to your words, and they’re also listening to the tone of your voice. Your children need to hear

that you have faith and confidence in them and their abilities, and that you love them unconditionally.

- Don't be afraid to apologize or to admit that you were wrong. Children need to see that it's okay to be wrong and that it's okay to make mistakes. They also need to learn that when you make a mistake, it's best to admit that you were wrong, and to then do whatever you can to correct your mistake.
- Recognize the importance of nonverbal communication. Middle school students aren't always able to put into words the things they want or need you to know. It is, therefore, important to pay attention to body language, moods, eating habits, sleeping patterns, and school performance. These can be good indicators of how things are going at school and with friends.

If middle school students seem down or upset oftentimes a hug or a few words of encouragement are all they need. If you sense that there are serious issues that need to be addressed, let your child know that you're concerned. If you feel you need help, talk to your child's counselor or physician.

- There are certain "unwritten communication rules" that middle school students hope their parents will respect. You don't, for example, show affection or correct them in front of their friends, and when you're driving a group of kids, you are to speak as little as possible. Actually, all of these rules boil down to one rule: *Don't say or do anything that will embarrass them.*

- Communicating with middle school students works best when you mostly listen, smile, and nod. Most of the time they're not interested in your opinion or advice; they just want you to listen to what they have to say.
- Last, but certainly not least, keep your sense of humor.

### **Teach responsibility.**

Middle school students need to understand that with increased independence comes increased responsibility. The tips below will help you teach your children how to act responsibly.

- Increase the amount of freedom you give your children. Smart parents give their middle school students a little more freedom each year.
- Base the amount of freedom your children are given on how responsibly they act.
- Teach your children how to problem solve.  
*Tara wanted to go to a friend's party, but her parents were reluctant to let her go. Their response to her request was, "Tara, we have reservations about this party. We don't know your friend's parents, we don't know who will be there, or what kind of supervision there will be. What can you do to help us feel that letting you go would be the right decision?" Tara called her friend's parents and asked them to tell her parents that the party would be supervised. Tara then promised that she would be home by 11:00. Tara's parents were reassured, Tara felt good about being part of the decision making process, and...she got to go to the party.*

- Talk to your children about the importance of making decisions and choices that reflect their values. Also, help them figure out what to do in specific situations. For example, students should have decided not to smoke, and they should know what they're going to do and say, before they're offered a cigarette.
- Tell your children that they can always use you as an excuse. For example, *“My parents always find out when I do something wrong, and they'd lock me away forever if ...”*
- Make sure that your children know basic social behavior (e.g., have a firm handshake, write thank you notes).
- Help teach your children financial responsibility by giving them an allowance and by setting up a savings account.
- Middle school is a time when children are trying to separate themselves from their parents, and at some point, most middle school students will exhibit some form of rebellion. So, pick your battles, and if you see your child needing to rebel, allow a little “safe rebellion.”

*“Even though I prefer a clean, neat bedroom and a son with short hair, I decided early on that I wasn't going to make an issue over John's room or his hair. He knows that I'm not happy about either; but he also knows that these are areas in which he can pretty much do what he wants. Grades, alcohol, drugs, smoking – those are non-negotiable issues.”*

- Be a good role model. More than anyone else, children learn their behaviors and attitudes from their parents.

### **Provide appropriate consequences.**

Good kids sometimes make bad choices, and all kids make mistakes. Children do, however, need to realize that their actions have consequences.

To help ensure that the consequences you provide are appropriate and effective, consider the guidelines below.

- Use logical consequences whenever possible.  
*“Since you were late getting home from T.J’s house, you’re not allowed to go to his house for the rest of the week.”*
- Never take away a positive activity (sports, school activities, music lessons, etc.) as a consequence.
- Never use physical punishment as a consequence.
- Consequences should be specific and for a definite period of time (e.g., no video games for two weeks).
- Don’t feel that you must provide immediate consequences. Take time, if necessary, to calm down and think it over.

### **Understand their technology.**

Middle school students have grown up with technology. They instant message, text message, and use cell phones to communicate with their friends. They use the Internet to not only locate information, but to also express themselves through personal profiles and blogs. While many parents don’t understand the technology their children are using, parents need to be aware of how and for what purposes, their children are using their computers, cell phones, etc.

In order to guide and protect your children, learn as much as you can about the Internet, My Space, chatrooms, etc. The

information below will hopefully help you better understand some of the lingo.

**Blog (Web log)** – an online journal that’s regularly updated and written for others to read. While some blogs center around a specific issue, many read more like a diary. Writers discuss activities, interests, thoughts, ideas, opinions, etc. Many students write blogs thinking that only those who are on their “friend’s list” will read them. Students need to realize that if it’s on the Internet, it can be available for anyone to read, and that once something’s posted, you can’t take it back. Students need to be very careful about what they write.

**Chat Room** – a place on the Internet where people go to discuss an agreed upon topic in real time. A middle school student, for example, may go to a chat room to discuss a favorite singer or video game. In chat rooms, students can read what other people are saying, and then type a message for everyone else to read. Students need to realize that the people who visit chat rooms aren’t always who they claim to be.

**Cyberbullying** – using technology to threaten, insult, intimidate, harass, or taunt another person. Cyberbullying can be devastating for the victims.

**Download** – to copy a file from another computer to your computer.

**E-mail (Electronic Mail)** – a message sent from one computer to another computer.

**Instant Messaging (IM)** – a way to communicate online with one or more people in real time. When students IM, they use their computer keyboards to type messages back and forth.

**MySpace** – a popular social networking site. Students use this site to post personal profiles and blogs, and to communicate with friends.

**Personal Profile** – a Web page that's posted by an individual on a site like MySpace or Facebook. People post personal profiles in order to share information about themselves. Personal profiles usually include information about a person's interests and/or activities. Many also include a picture, or even a video. Most of the social networking sites are free, and they make it easy to set up an account.

While students see personal profiles as a fun way to share information, young people need to realize that there are unsavory people who also check out these profiles. Students need to be sure that they never include personal information (address, phone number, school name, favorite hangout, etc.) as part of a personal profile or blog. Students should also limit access to their personal profiles if possible.

**Phishing** – a scam in which people are tricked into providing personal information online. For example, students may get an email directing them to a fraudulent Web site where they're asked to provide personal information.

**Pirating** – downloading music, movies, or software without permission. Pirating copyrighted material is illegal.

**Text Messaging** – a way to send a message to another person using a cell phone. Students use the keys on their phone to type their message, often using a form of shorthand (e.g., LOL means laugh out loud).

**YouTube** – a video-sharing Web site with a variety of amateur videos, movie/TV clips, and music videos.

Below are some suggestions for ways to keep your children safe while still allowing them to use technology in a positive way.

- Keep any computer with Internet access in a common space, like the family room or kitchen. Middle school students should not have Internet access in their bedrooms.
- Discuss the dangers of the Internet. Tell your children to never give out personal information, and to never agree to meet someone they've met online.
- For a wealth of information on Internet safety, go online and search "Internet parent guidelines."

## Tips for the Parents of Athletes

*Playing a sport in middle school is an excellent way for students to stay active. The following tips will help ensure that your children have a great season.*

Through athletics, students strengthen their bodies and perfect their skills. They learn how to win, how to lose, and how to be part of a team. Athletes develop new and lasting friendships, and they also have lots of fun.

### **Be involved.**

Many coaches have preseason meetings for the parents of their athletes. These meetings are usually very informative, and they give parents an opportunity to meet the coaches. They also give parents an opportunity to meet and talk with the other parents.

## **Show good sportsmanship.**

School sporting events can be very exciting, and it's easy for players and fans to get caught up in the action. As the parent of an athlete, you need to always set a good example. Avoid any kind of confrontation, and support the coaches and players at all times.

## **Support your athlete.**

The best way to help your athlete is to provide encouragement and to be positive, both at home and in the stands. If your child has a problem at any time during the season, encourage him/her to talk to the coach. If the problem is not resolved, or if it's a serious nature, talk to the coach yourself.

*You are the most important people in your children's lives and they want you to be proud of them. Support your children, and whenever possible, cheer loudly!*

# **Career & Educational Options**

*Middle school is not too early for students to start thinking about which careers they might want to consider for their future. Help your children begin to explore and evaluate their career and educational options.*

## **Identify abilities and interests.**

As parents, you know your children better than anyone. You can, therefore, be an invaluable resource in helping them identify their interests, talents, strengths, and values.

Try to help your children see how their personality traits and talents can be valuable assets in the right careers. Remember, there are many talents that aren't measured in school (e.g., working well with people, creativity, leadership).

## **Explore career options.**

Students can learn about various career fields by 1) reading, 2) talking to people, and 3) getting firsthand experience.

If you or your children are interested in reading about a specific career, go to [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco). This Web site provides information on over 250 careers. For each career it gives a description of the work, the educational requirements, advancement opportunities, wages, advantages, disadvantages, future outlooks, etc.

Encourage your children to talk to people who work in various career fields. If possible, see if you can arrange for your children to job shadow someone for a day.

The best way for students to learn about a career is to get some firsthand experience. Try to find some after-school activities to support and expand your children's interests. Students considering a career in health care, for example, might consider volunteering at a hospital. Students interested in art could take an art class at a recreation center.

For information to help your child plan and prepare for a career, go

to [www.mapping-your-future.org](http://www.mapping-your-future.org)

<http://online.onetcenter.org>

Students can take an interest test online at

[www.self-directed-search.com](http://www.self-directed-search.com)

## **Six Educational Options**

Approximately 80% of all careers require education and/or training beyond a general high school education. Some careers require four years of college, while others require just one year at a career school. In many cases, a student's career choice will determine which educational option is most appropriate.

While there are many factors that determine the kinds of opportunities a student will have in life, the most significant determining factor is education. *Make sure that your child understands the importance of getting a good education, and*

*strongly encourage your child to continue his/her education after high school.*

Help your child think about and explore the following educational options: 1) High School Career and Technology Programs, 2) Four-Year Colleges, 3) Community and Technology Colleges, 4) Career and Trade Schools 5) The Military, and 6) Apprenticeships.

## **High School Career and Technology Programs**

Most high schools offer career and technology programs in a variety of career fields (business, cosmetology, plumbing, computer technology, etc.) These programs are particularly appropriate for students who prefer a more practical, “hands-on” approach to learning. While students in these programs generally have the skills they need to get a job as soon as they graduate, almost two-thirds continue their education beyond high school.

If you think that your child might do better in an educational program that focuses on “learning by doing,” ask your child’s counselor for information on the career and technology programs available at your high school.

## **Four-Year Colleges**

A four-year college education, or bachelor’s degree, can open doors, provide status, and prepare students for financially rewarding careers. Four-year colleges vary greatly in their size, costs, admission policies, and in the majors they offer. All colleges, however, want students who are ready for college-level work.

## **Community and Technical Colleges**

Community colleges provide affordable, career-oriented programs that enable students to begin their careers after two years of college or less. Students can also go to a community college for a year or two, and then transfer to a four-year college to earn a

bachelor's degree. Many states also have state-supported technical colleges that offer affordable, career-oriented programs.

## **Career and Trade Schools**

Career and trade schools offer short-term training programs in a wide variety of career fields (e.g., cosmetology, electronics, welding). While some programs last only a few weeks, others take up to two years to complete. Career and trade schools can be expensive, and because not all of them are reputable, it's very important to check out their credentials.

## **The Military**

The military trains young men and women so that they can serve and protect the interests of our country. The military offers qualified individuals a good salary and free job training. The military also provides discipline and structure, as well as opportunities for career advancement and travel.

## **Apprenticeships**

Students who prefer a hands-on approach to learning may want to consider applying for an apprenticeship program. Apprentices learn a skilled trade through a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job training.

# College Information

*If you want your children to consider going to college after high school, now is the time to start planning.*

## **Preparing for College**

While your children are in middle school, try to help them develop good study skills and encourage them to do as well as they can in their classes. If possible, take them to a college football game or for a walk on a college campus so they can see what a college is like.

In high school, make sure that your children take the recommended high school courses; sign up for the right tests, and complete the necessary forms.

## **College Recommended Courses**

Four-year colleges generally recommend that students take the following college preparatory courses in high school:

4 years of English

3 years of math (including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II)

2-3 years of the same foreign language

3 years of social sciences

1 year of fine or performing arts

College bound students should complete all of the above recommended courses, if possible. College bound students should, in fact, take as many college preparatory math, science, English, social studies, and foreign language courses as possible. Students who want to go to a competitive college or program should also take advanced, honors, and AP courses when possible.

*Education is an investment in the future!*

## Admissions Criteria

Colleges use some, if not all, of the information listed below when determining whether or not to accept an applicant. Individual colleges, however differ in how they evaluate information. One college may, for example, place a great deal of importance on test scores. Another college may focus more on other factors.

- Grade point average (GPA)
- Strength of subjects
- ACT/SAT scores
- Class Rank
- Recommendations
- Special Talents
- Personal Qualities
- Activities/ Awards
- Essays
- Interviews

## Paying for College

For the 2006-2007 school year, most college costs fell within the ranges listed below. These figures include tuition, fees, books, room and board, and a personal expense allowance for on year.

Public Four-Year College (In-state) - \$13,500 - \$17,000

Private Four-Year College - \$29,000 - \$35,000

Community College (room & board not included) - \$3,500 - \$6,500

Because of the tax advantages, parents who are saving for college should consider putting money into a Coverdell Education Savings Account. Parents can put in \$2,000 per year for each child under the age of eighteen.

Parents should also consider investing in a 529 plan. These state-operated college savings and prepaid tuition plans have become very popular. For information, go to [www.collegesavings.org](http://www.collegesavings.org).

There is, for course, a great deal of financial aid available. Financial aid (grants, work-study, scholarships, and loans) often makes it possible for students to attend colleges that would otherwise to be expensive.

## College Information Web Sites

[www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

[www.act.org](http://www.act.org)

[www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

[www.collegenet.com](http://www.collegenet.com)

[www.peterson.com](http://www.peterson.com)