

Moving Right Along

Middle-school survival book list

If you're like most parents, you probably wish the middle-school years came with a map. Dealing with a new school, new teachers and a new child (well, a new version of your child, anyway) can drive anyone crazy. The trick to surviving is this: Remember you are not alone! Call the school if you have any questions or concerns about your new middle schooler—the teachers and staff have seen and heard it *all* before. Or check out some of these books.

For parents:

- ***Parents' Guide to the Middle School Years*** by Joe Bruzzese (Ten Speed Press).
- ***Help! My Child is Starting Middle School! A Survival Handbook for Parents*** by Jerry L. Parks (iUniverse Inc.).
- ***Too Old for This, Too Young for That! Your Survival Guide for the Middle-School Years*** by Harriet S. Mosatche and Karen Unger (Free Spirit Publishing).
- ***Middle School and the Age of Adjustment: A Guide for Parents*** by Eileen Bernstein (ed.) (Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.).
- ***Managing Middle School Madness: Helping Parents and Teachers Understand the Wonder Years*** by Glen Gilderman (Rowman & Littlefield Education).
- ***Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others*** by Anthony W. Jackson (Teacher's College Press).
- ***The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*** by Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese (Broadway Books).



- ***The Everything Tween Book: A Parent's Guide to Surviving the Turbulent Pre-Teen Years*** by Linda Sonna (Adams Media).
- ***How to Hug a Porcupine: Negotiating the Prickly Points of the Tween Years*** by Julie Ross (McGraw-Hill).
- ***Not Much Just Chillin': The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers*** by Linda Perlstein (Ballantine Books).
- ***Our Last Best Shot: Guiding Our Children Through Early Adolescence*** by Laura Sessions Stepp (Riverhead Trade).
- ***My Life as a Middle School Mom: My Kids May Be Deductible, but They're Still Taxing*** by Angela Elwell Hunt (Vine Books).
- ***The Middle School Years: Achieving the Best Education for Your Child, Grades 5–8*** by Michele A. Hernández (Grand Central Publishing).

For middle schoolers:

- ***Middle School: How to Deal*** by Sara Borden and others (Chronicle Books).
- ***Help! I'm in Middle School ... How Will I Survive?*** by Merry L. Gumm (NSR Publications).

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Help your child build strong study skills

Homework gets tougher and requires stronger study skills in the middle grades. If your child doesn't have effective study skills already, now is the time to help her develop them. You can lay the groundwork for your child's academic success by sharing the following tips.

At home

- **Have your child study in the same spot** every day. Be sure it's quiet, well lit and stocked with all of the supplies he needs.
- **Limit distractions** while your child is studying. Keep the TV off. Try not to interrupt your child's study time unless it's absolutely necessary.
- **Help your child stay organized.** If your child can't find her homework, she can't complete it. Create a system for keeping track of important assignments. It might be file folders, a color-coded binder or a large calendar. Whichever she chooses, help your child figure out the best way to organize her papers.
- **Boost self-awareness.** Ask your middle schooler to figure out when he's at her best. Then encourage your child to do most of his studying during those times. If your child needs to let off some steam after school, he may want to take a jog or a brisk walk before sitting down to study.
- **Remind her to break down large projects.** Don't let your middle schooler get rattled by huge assignments. Instead, show her how to break big projects into smaller, more manageable parts.



- **Encourage him to read ahead.** By skimming over the next day's lesson or chapter ahead of time, he'll be better prepared for class. This may help him ask better questions or participate more.
- **Have your child review her notes.** Even if she doesn't have homework in a certain class, she should still look over the day's notes at night. It's a quick, easy way to remind her of what's being taught.

At school

Here are things that will help your child do his best:

- **Show up for class** unless there is a valid excuse. Children can't learn the day's lesson if they aren't in class.
- **Come to class prepared** with the right books and other tools—like notebooks, pens, pencils and any special items, like a calculator for math.
- **Pay attention in class.** Save social time for between classes and before or after school.
- **Take good notes.** Whatever a teacher writes on the board while talking is probably something your child should write down, too.
- **Write down all assignments.** Your child shouldn't rely on just her memory.

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Understanding your changing child

Your child is growing up—and you’re doing your best to keep up. One day your child is respectful and loving; the next day (or hour), you’re not even sure that’s your child! As you and your child face the challenges of adolescence, here are some behaviors to expect.

Your adolescent will:

- **Have big bursts of energy—physical and emotional.** This may contrast with periods of physical and emotional idleness. You might let your child sleep an extra hour or two on the weekends. And when you talk to your child, use a matter-of-fact tone to communicate the importance of your words. Avoid emotional outbursts.
- **Take risks, love danger and adventure.** As your child moves into the larger community of the middle grades, he may test the limits by questioning authority, choosing different friends, clothing—and even risky behaviors. While your child may act fearless and think he’s immortal, keep in mind that he can also be emotionally fragile. Get to know his friends and their parents.
- **Have an increasing need to “belong.”** During the middle school years the pressure to look, act and dress like everyone else becomes most intense. Your child wants to be just like, and to be liked by, everyone. It’s important that you help her develop the confidence and values she needs to deal with any *negative* peer pressure.
- **Crave independence.** Your child is anxious to fit in, but at the same time, he is eager to become independent.

While it’s important to keep him safe and discourage dangerous behavior, you can also give your child opportunities to start developing independence. You might let him rearrange his room, take on a new responsibility or choose a new hairstyle. But don’t bend important family rules. And be there to support him as he makes choices and faces consequences.

- **Expect more privileges.** Explain to your child that privileges and responsibility go hand in hand. When your child demonstrates responsibility, she earns your trust. Explain that giving privileges is a way to express that trust.
- **Can become depressed or overly anxious.** With every thing that’s going on in your child’s life, some emotional highs and lows are perfectly normal. If you notice signs of extreme depression or anxiety in your child, seek help.
- **Need you to be involved.** Continue to connect with your child. Yes, your child is growing into his own person and his friends are very important to him. But you are, too. Your child still needs (and wants) your love, care and respect. Show you value his newfound maturity by asking his opinion. Remember to listen—*really* listen. Learn about your child’s changing identity.



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Get up and out the door

You were running late (again) this morning. You forgot your science homework (again). Your mom is mad because she has to bring it to school for you (again).

To avoid this morning hassle, take five minutes to pack your book bag before you go to bed at night. Make sure you have everything you need—math book, gym shoes, science homework. Get your lunch or lunch money ready, too. Put the bag by the door. Then grab it as you head for the bus. It's a fool-proof way to be sure you—and all of your stuff—will make it to school!

Attendance boosts grades

Attending school regularly is one of the best ways to get better grades. Learning builds day by day, and it can be difficult to catch up once you have missed something. Get into the habit of daily attendance and you're sure to see an improvement in your grades!

Alternatives to oatmeal

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Why? Because it fuels your body—and your brain—for the day ahead. Skip your morning meal and you may not do as well in school. Try these snacks:

- Smoothies or fruit and yogurt.
- A PB&J or grilled-cheese sandwich.
- Bagel with peanut butter.
- Trail mix.
- Warm tortillas filled with cheese and salsa.
- Leftovers from dinner.

Your attendance matters!

You've heard the famous quote, "eighty percent of success is just showing up," right? Well, that's also true in school. You can't learn everything you need to if you aren't in class.

Here are some of the most common excuses kids give for missing class—and the ways you can turn those excuses around:

- **"I'm tired.** I'll sleep in today and get up early tomorrow." The truth is that the later you sleep today, the later you'll fall asleep tonight. Get to bed earlier instead and it will be easier to wake up on time tomorrow.
- **"I didn't do my homework."** The easiest thing to do is just fess up. Tell your teacher right away. If you didn't understand what you were supposed to do, ask if



there's a time you can come in for extra help.

- **"No matter how hard I try, I just can't get it."** It won't help if you stay home! Ask for help. Your teacher will always be willing to try and help you.
- **"I don't know anyone."** Instead of dropping out, drop in—to clubs, teams or other after-school groups. Soon you'll meet kids who share your interests.

Did You Know? Attendance affect your grades—and your wallet! In one study, 75 percent of students who missed school often did not earn a high school diploma. And high school dropouts make, on average, about \$7,000 less per year than high school graduates.

Make sure you're getting enough sleep

No matter how busy you are, you need at least eight hours of sleep. And getting better sleep may translate into scoring better grades. Here's what to do:

- **Stick to a routine.** Go to bed at the same time each night, and wake up at the same time every morning. This gets your body

used to a regular sleeping schedule.

- **Give yourself an hour** to mellow out before bed. Don't do your homework, watch TV or use the computer right until bedtime.
- **Ban the caffeine.** Avoid coffee, tea, soda and chocolate at least 2 hours before bed.

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Keep reading all year long

Research shows that students who read year-round are better readers and writers. They also do better in school. So here are some ideas to keep you reading:

- **Use your library.** It's filled with books you can check out for free. Talk to a librarian if you don't know what to read. They're the greatest resource in the library.
- **Try something new.** If you usually read fiction, try a biography. If you mostly read history, try a murder mystery for a switch.
- **Don't forget audio books.** Some libraries let you download audio books to your MP3 player.

Read about your interests

If you don't read books you enjoy, you won't want to read at all. So be sure to read about things that interest you. Look for books about:

- Your favorite food.
- A hobby.
- Your favorite TV show or movie.

'Scan and skim' to start your reading assignments

You can get more out of what you read by using two tools: scanning and skimming.

Scan assignments by giving them a quick look. How long is the assignment? How hard will it be to read?

Next, **skim**—take a more careful look. Look at the chapter heads and words in bold type.

Now you have a good idea of what the chapter is about. Then go back to read it thoroughly.

Improve reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to fully understand what you have read. It includes more advanced skills such as being able to draw conclusions based on the reading material. It can also help boost your performance on tests. To improve your reading comprehension skills:

- **Form pictures in your head** of what you're reading. If you have trouble with this, keep a sheet of paper next to you while you read and actually draw the pictures.
- **Make connections.** Name at least one thing in the material that reminds you of something you already know. This will help you remember it later.
- **Think of the most important parts of the story or text.** What is the main idea? If you are reading a short story or a novel, who are the main characters? What conflicts do the characters face?
- **Practice critical thinking.** What was your opinion of the reading? Did the material make sense? Should the author have presented it in a different way? Did the characters in the novel make good choices?



Did You Know? You can learn to read faster! Start with something you like to read—like the sports page. Time yourself as you read it as quickly as you can. (Don't read so fast that you can't understand the story.) Keep trying! Soon you'll be reading faster.

Learn how to read your math textbook

Reading your math textbook can be tricky. It takes more time—and more concentration. Be sure to:

- **Look over** what you have to read. Have you learned anything like it before?
- **Put a sticky note** beside any words you don't know.
- **Read carefully.** Concentrate.

Look at the examples and work along with the book.

- **Jot down words** you still don't know. Look them up in the glossary.
- **Write yourself a note** if you are having problems understanding a word or idea. Ask your teacher about it in class.

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Write down key facts first

You've skimmed the test and written your name in the corner. Now, if your teacher allows you to, take a minute to jot down key facts while they're fresh in your mind.

Depending on the subject, you might list formulas, facts, dates, important people or terms. Write them in the margin or on the back of the paper. Then when you are answering questions, you'll feel more relaxed because help will be right at hand.

Daily studying = test success

When's the best time to study for a test? Every day. Here's how:

- **Review your notes.** The more reviewing you do each day, the less you'll have to do at test time.
- **Make flash cards** if you have dates, definitions or facts to learn. Spend a few minutes memorizing them each day.

Reduce stress with exercise

Research shows that regular exercise leads to a healthier body, more energy and less stress. This is linked to improved thinking and memory, which will definitely help you do better on tests.

But working out doesn't have to take up a lot of your time. If you do something challenging, like running or jumping rope, 15 minutes is enough. The key is to keep at it and make it part of your life at least five days a week. Make it more fun by inviting a friend to work out with you!

Ace tough tests with these tips

Even a student who is prepared for a test can do worse than expected if she has a poor attitude. You're more likely to do well if you show up with a confident attitude—and following these tips won't hurt:

- **Read instructions carefully.** Then read them again. Skipping over or skimming instructions increases your chances of messing up at least one test question.
- **Perk up your ears.** Sometimes instructions are given out loud. Don't let important instructions slip by while looking ahead at some of the test questions or fidgeting in your seat.
- **Keep cool.** Fear can do in even the brightest students. Take a deep breath before you begin.
- **Ask the teacher** if you have a question about the exam. It's better to ask and receive some help, than to just guess or leave the answer blank.
- **Check your work.** After you have finished the test, go over your answers one last time before turning it in.
- **It's not over when it's over.** Do you want a head start on the next test? Review recent test results. How could you do better next time?



Did You Know? It's easier to remember something if you study it just before you go to sleep. The minutes before you go to bed can be some of your best study time. While you sleep, your brain will "lock in" the learning.

Prepare for tests by taking good notes

It's the night before the test. You're trying to remember what was the most important cause of the Civil War. What's in your notebook? Nothing but the heading "Civil War" and a sketch of the kid who sits across the aisle. How can you keep this from happening again?

1. **Focus on the teacher.** Don't stare out the window.
2. **Listen for what's important.** Some clues: your teacher repeats a fact, says it louder or writes it on the board.
3. **Use abbreviations** (> for "larger than," b/c for "because").