



## HELP...My Child is in Middle School! Newport Mill Middle School



### A big transition

It's your child's biggest transition since kindergarten: he or she is leaving the cozy nest of elementary school for the wide-open spaces of middle school. It can be intimidating for both your student and YOU!

### Academics

Middle school is a crucial point in a lifetime of learning. While elementary school focuses on the student, and high school solidifies his or her skills, middle school is when your child will decide how important education is to him or her. Middle school lessons will not simply teach facts — they will also teach how these facts carry over into real life.

### The stuff that scares your children

What concerns your kids most, and how can parents help them work through their fears?

- Combination locks
- Being late for class
- Not having friends
- Being different
- Tough classes

1. **Combination locks.** Many pre-teens are terrified that he or she won't be able to get his or her locker open. As a result, he or she will be stuck with no place to put her books, or she won't be able to retrieve needed materials for the next class or at the end of the day.

***What you can do:*** First, understand that this fear isn't completely unfounded. Students do have limited time at their lockers. It can be helpful to have your child practice on a lock at home, to gain familiarity with how it works. Also, talk to your child about this fear and explain that lockers are new to ALL 6<sup>th</sup> graders... NOBODY is a pro yet!

2. **Being late for class.** Yes, preteens have loads of energy, but even they find it challenging to move from class to class in the 5 minutes allotted.

***What you can do:*** Reassure your child that practice will make perfect. Nobody expects perfection at the beginning of the school year. Teachers will be forgiving for tardiness the first couple of weeks. You can also brainstorm ways to streamline the process. What will they do if they are not sure where a particular class is located? Whom will they ask for directions? Is he or she good at keeping his books and papers organized? If not, help him or her clean up the mess so precious minutes aren't wasted between classes getting organized.

3. **Not having friends.** Middle school is a time for the shifting and changing of friends. At least 3 different elementary schools come together to form the 6<sup>th</sup> grade class. Some kids see this opportunity and become excited, others become fearful or anxious.

***What you can do:*** Support and encouragement will be the key here. Just being a good listener can be enough. Verbalizing these feelings to a compassionate listener can do much in alleviating such fears and anxieties. As a parent, you can also offer some suggestions that may promote the making of friends, such as participating in clubs or activities, introducing yourself in class to new faces, or finding familiar faces from elementary school. Practicing or role-playing these situations in the home may make your child more comfortable and confident in executing them in the school setting. Making friends and self-esteem is intertwined. A child with a strong sense of self will take risks socially and expand their network of friends. Foster your child's self-esteem by encouraging, listening, and providing unconditional love and support.

4. **Being different.** Preadolescence and adolescence is a time of the "imaginary audience", meaning your child constantly thinks others are judging them, even when they are not.

***What you can do:*** First, understand that adolescence marks the beginning of a search for an identity. The search for a personal identity begins by looking at peers. What is everyone else doing? So how, then, do you cope with a child so focused on fitting in? Listen...understand your child's perspective, but don't

dismiss these feelings. Minimizing his or her feelings (even with the best of intentions) will only make your child feel more alone.

Preteens' self-esteem drops during this time, due to a combination of hormonal activity and brain development. Emphasizing the positive is one way of boosting an insecure preteen's confidence.

Expect and understand this need for peer approval, while encouraging your child's unique qualities. Listen to your child's concerns. Self-esteem is key here. A child with a stronger sense of self-esteem will find the delicate balance between their peer's identity and their personal and unique identity.

5. **Tough classes.** Some kids worry that they won't be able to keep up academically.

***What you can do:*** There is certainly nothing wrong with acknowledging that the work will be harder in middle school (it will be!), but assure your child that it won't be more than he or she can handle. As they are growing bigger so are their brains. Remind your child that while being a good student is important, they have other strengths as well — perhaps he or she loves to draw, or plays soccer — so that his or her entire sense of self is not wrapped up in grades. Encourage your child to let his or her teacher —and you — know if he or she thinks they need extra help, or if he or she is falling behind. That way you can take steps to address problems early on, perhaps by having him or her meet with a teacher after school, or working with a tutor.

### **Tips for promoting your middle schooler's success**

During elementary school, most parents are very involved in their child's schooling. They know and meet with teachers and administrators, are aware of their child's progress and behavior, help solve problems, and see to it that kids spend enough time on homework.

Unfortunately, when children enter middle school, some parents stop being as actively involved, as if their help and support are no longer needed. Nothing could be further from the truth!

Although your middle-schooler is becoming more independent and is increasingly involved in activities outside the family, you should and must remain the most influential person in his life. Through your involvement in school and extracurriculars, you can do much to help your child believe in the value and importance of education, be enthusiastic about learning, and achieve academic success.

1. **Help your child manage homework time.** Encourage your child to aim high and always do his or her best work. See what your school offers to help you help your child, such as a planner or some other homework reminder system, and/or a Web site with helpful links. After your child has completed his or her homework, go over it with them, and discuss what he or she has learned from the assignments. If he or she has difficulties with studying or homework, encourage him or her to ask her teachers for help as soon as possible. Sometimes you may need to discuss difficulties with the teachers too.
2. **Show interest in his or her studies** by talking with him or her daily about what he or she is learning and doing in school (don't take "nothing" for an answer!).
3. **Know your child and his or her abilities.** Be realistic about what your child can and should be able to do. Don't expect great grades or high test scores if he or she isn't capable. That expectation will only cause unnecessary frustration. If necessary, find out about programs the school offers to provide additional support.
4. **With your child, read and review the information that the school provides.** Be familiar with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum, courses your child can choose from, and academic and social standards within the school. All these will help you and your child successfully weave your way through the maze called middle school. It is never too early to work closely with school officials. It is better to start early and build a strong foundation of support than to wait until it is too late!
5. **Contact counselors, administrators, and teachers.** Find out what your child should be learning, how he or she is progressing, and how you can help. Be a full partner in your child's education.

6. **Be sure that he or she attends school EVERYDAY!** If your child is not in school, he or she is missing important information. Even if he or she is absent for illness, your child needs to keep up with his or her studies. Call the school if your child will be missing a day, and find out what he needs to do to make up for it. Remember it is harder to make up work in middle school than elementary school.
7. **Encourage your child to pursue interests and make friends through extracurricular activities.** Be certain, however, that your child selects no more than a few activities so they have adequate time for schoolwork. You must help your child find a balance; this will take compromise and patience.
8. **Know their friends.** Who does your child hang out with? Follow up on any suspicions that you may have. It is better to be safe than sorry at this time of his life. Know where your child is at all times. Be clear and consistent with discipline. Understand that you and peers will easily influence your middle schooler. This a wonderful time of their lives, but you must be the parent and adult and lead them through it.
9. **Encourage your child to get to know his counselor** and to maintain contact throughout his middle school years. Not only will the counselor be invaluable in supporting your child's academic path, but the counselor also will be one of many potential adult role models in your child's life.
10. **Volunteer at school.** Both your child and the school will benefit from your involvement and help. Middle school will solicit volunteers to help in a variety of ways: tutoring, assisting in the media center, helping at after school activities, chaperoning, etc.
11. **Have regular family meetings.** These help kids become disciplined and responsible. They also help you all enjoy your family life more, by reducing conflict among siblings as well as between you and your children. Use the meetings to talk over any concerns or problems that family members have. A regular meeting provides the opportunity to discuss matters openly and calmly in an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Communication between school and parents is important — but so is communication between parents and kids!
12. **Consistently acknowledge and reward efforts at school.** Many parents expect the school to provide the incentives for their child's accomplishments. While schools do have many motivation programs, parents need to recognize their child's successes too. When your child works hard, your acknowledgment motivates him or her to persist. Your recognition helps your child develop a sense of competency and self-worth, a willingness to try new tasks, and a feeling of satisfaction in doing a job well. When you use this technique consistently, over time, your child eventually begins to reward him or herself by feeling good about what he or she has done. This ability to reward ourselves serves as a powerful motivation throughout life.

No one is perfect and we sometimes make mistakes in raising our children. But, your child needs your love and respect. Your understanding, common sense, adult judgment, and good sense of humor can make these middle school years a joy for both you and your child!