Middle School Transition Tips for Parents

Addressing Logistical Anxieties

- Accompany your child on campus tours and orientations offered to parents and incoming students. The better you understand the school layout and rules, the more you can help your child.

- Get a map of the campus and take your child to explore. Pick a time after school in the spring or in the days just before school starts in the fall. Be sure to check in with the school office to get an OK for your explorations.

- Include a couple of your child’s friends on campus treks. They can boost each others’ memory about where things are when school starts.

- Take advantage of summer programs—academic or recreational—offered at the new school for incoming students. Your child will get the feel for the campus in a much more relaxed atmosphere.

- Get a copy of your child’s class schedule and mark the location of her locker and each classroom and bathroom on the school map. Tape both of these inside her binder. If your child has trouble reading maps, walk the route between classes with her—more than once, if necessary—and note “landmarks” that the student can use to navigate.

- Find out the length of the passing period between classes. Time it out for your child. Demonstrate how far she can walk in that amount of time.

- Get a copy of the student handbook. Review rules and requirements—especially the school’s code of conduct, which describes consequences for “violations” of the most important rules. Ask the school staff questions about anything that’s unclear.

- Sit with your child and explore the school website.

- Buy your child a lock for her locker several weeks before school starts to give her plenty of time to practice opening and closing it. (Note: Consider whether a combination or keyed lock is best for your child.)

- Provide your child with an easy-to-read wristwatch so that she can quickly see if she needs to hurry to be on time to class.

Easing Social Fears

- Encourage your child to join sports teams, clubs, or other extra-curricular activities.

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- Encourage your child to join group conversations. Discuss how to join in without interrupting, to add something relevant to conversation in progress, etc.

- Talk about traits that make a good friend (such as being a good listener).

- Talk about social skills. Discuss how words and actions can affect other people.

- Practice skills needed for difficult social situations.

- Remind your child to make eye contact when speaking or listening.

Managing Academic Concerns

- If your child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), meet with the middle school staff no later than the spring before your child enters the new school. Discuss the qualities of the “ideal” teacher for your child to help ensure the best placements.

- Meet with teachers early in the year. Give them a profile of your child’s strengths and where she needs help.

- Encourage teachers to continue using strategies that have worked for your child in the past, such as writing homework assignments on the board, or assigning your child a “homework buddy” she can contact if she forgets what her assignments are.

- Help your student with time management skills. Work together on a schedule for study time, break time, chores, etc.

- Work out an organizational system with your student. Acknowledge and make allowances for her anxiety; at first, she may need to carry everything for all classes all the time in order to feel prepared.

- Avoid overreacting to grades. Making sure your child gets a handle on how to meet the demands of the new school is the critical factor in the early weeks.

- Stay connected to your child’s school work. Try to teach your student to work more independently while supporting her enough to give her confidence.

- Go to parent-teacher nights, open houses, and other events where you can connect with your child’s teachers.

- Help your child be her own advocate. Encourage her to discuss problems and solutions with teachers on her own, but be ready to step in and help as needed.

This tip sheet is a companion piece to the article: “Smoothing Your Child’s Transition to Middle School,” available at: http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=1106.