

# Succeeding in Middle School

The leap to middle school is a big one. But it doesn't have to be one that your child makes alone. With your guidance and the tips below, your youngster can stay organized, manage her time, and learn to study effectively. After all, doing well in middle school forms the basis for success in high school and beyond.



## Routines

A new school year always brings new routines. And moving to middle school means even more changes to your youngster's daily habits. Help him get set with these suggestions.



**Tame morning madness.** Gym uniform, calculator, musical instrument... your child will have more things to remember each day. Suggest that he put everything in one spot (in his room or by the front door) and hang a checklist nearby to glance at before he leaves for school. *Tip:* To save time in the morning, he might eat breakfast in the cafeteria.

**Switch classes smoothly.** Middle school usually means a bigger building and different classrooms for each subject. To make it to every class on time, your youngster will need a routine. If he's struggling to be punctual, talk about how he can reduce trips to his locker. For example, he can take everything he needs for the first half of the day and then switch at lunchtime to what he needs for the afternoon.

**Plan for homework.** Encourage your child to use a student planner to keep track of his increased homework load. At the beginning of each class, he can open the planner to that day's page. He should leave it on his desk until he has written down the homework assignment and due date. At the

end of the day, he can scan the page and put everything he needs for homework (books, handouts, notebooks) in his backpack. Then, have him check off each assignment as he completes it.

## Organization

Your child will need to be organized to stay on top of all the extras that middle school brings. Try these strategies.

**Color-code subjects.** Suggest that your middle grader come up with a system to keep track of multiple classes. One idea is to assign a different color to each subject. For instance, she could use a blue folder, notebook, and book cover for history, and green supplies for math.

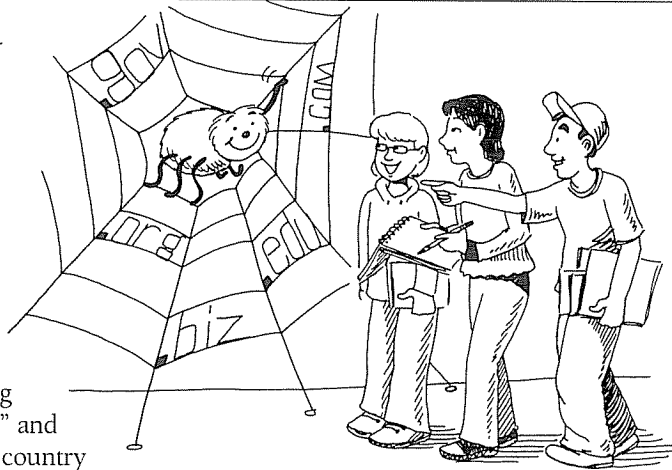
**Get locker ready.** A well-organized locker will help your youngster quickly find what she needs. She might use a low-cost locker shelf or a sturdy box turned on its end. Or she could hang a basket on the inside of the door for holding pencils and a calculator.

**Choose a homework spot.** Work with your child to create a place where she can do homework and keep school supplies. She might study at a desk in her room or at the dining room table. Remind her to let you know when supplies (pencils, pens, highlighters, batteries) are running low instead of waiting until she's completely out.



continued

■ Explore other search features. For example, there's usually an "advanced search" or "options" link that will let your middle grader request sites from a particular country or source (news story, journal article, blog). She can also specify sites that don't include particular words. If she's searching for "Madagascar volcanoes" and wants sites only about the country and not about a movie, she would type "Madagascar volcanoes -movie" (attach a minus sign to the word you want left out).



■ Many children begin their research on Wikipedia ([www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)). It's a collaborative Web site, or "wiki," that is written and edited by users. Since anyone in the world can add to Wikipedia, remind your youngster to always check the facts she finds there. She can also use the references and links at the bottom of each Wikipedia entry to do more research.

■ If your child isn't sure what her topic will be, a Web directory might be a smart place to start. This is a collection of sites organized into categories. For example, KidsClick! ([www.kidsclick.org](http://www.kidsclick.org)) has headings such as "Weird & Mysterious" and "Machines & Transportation." After reading through the list, your middle schooler might decide to research UFOs or robots. Other directories to try include <http://lii.org>, [www.awesomelibrary.org](http://www.awesomelibrary.org), and [www.ipl.org](http://www.ipl.org).

## Evaluating information

The Internet contains so much information that it can be difficult to know which sites are reliable. These tips can help your child find trustworthy information:

■ Look at the URL. Educational organizations (.edu) and government agencies (.gov) are usually reliable Web sources. Commercial Web sites (.com), nonprofit organizations (.org), and small business sites (.biz) can also have legitimate information. But your youngster will need to evaluate them more carefully. He can search just for URLs ending in .gov or .edu by using an engine's "advanced search" feature. Or he can add "site:.gov" (no space between the colon and the period) before the search terms. For instance, typing "site:.gov recycling" will pull up government agency sites about recycling.

## Citing Internet Sources

Online information should be treated just like material in books. Remind your child that it is plagiarism to copy word-for-word. Also, he must list sources for information other than common knowledge (example: Washington, DC, is the capital of the United States). He should ask his teacher how she wants Web pages to be cited.

■ Learn about the person or organization behind a Web site. A link at the bottom of the page may give credentials (books a person has published, organizations a group is affiliated with). Urge your child to avoid "sponsored links" on search engines. These paid advertisements usually appear in a shaded box at the top of the page or in their own column.

■ Check the date. Scan the page to find out when it was last updated. There may be a dateline at the top of an article or a copyright date at the bottom of the site.

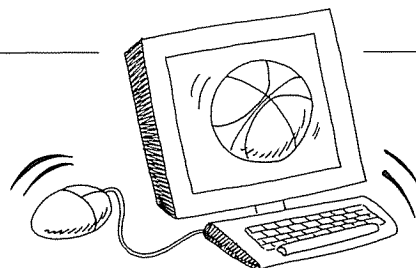
*Tip:* Remind your child to double-check all information. He should always verify facts by looking them up on more than one site.



## Web fun

Your child can practice searching the Web and reading critically with these activities for the whole family:

■ Play the Trivial Pursuit board game with a twist. Instead of competing to see how much contestants know, test your research skills. For each question she's asked, a player gets three to five minutes to look up the answer online.



■ Make a Web quest. Choose a topic that interests everyone (basketball,

camping). Ask each person to find a good Web site about the subject and make up three questions that can be answered with information from the site. Put all the questions in a word-processing document, and work together to find the answers. *Variation:* Look for pre-made Web quests online at sites like [www.webquest.org](http://www.webquest.org).

## Middle Years

### Time management

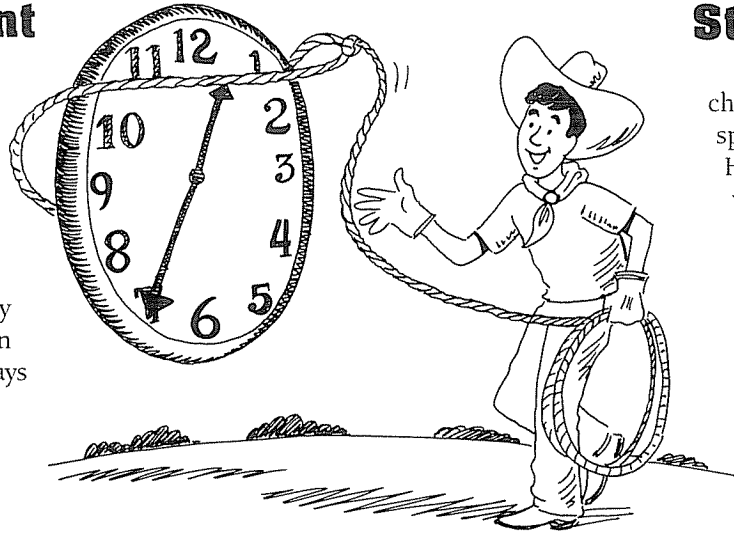
Everyone has the same amount of time—it’s how we use it that makes the difference. Share these ideas to help your middle grader set priorities.

**Make time for activities.**

Middle schools usually offer more after-school activities than elementary schools do. If your child wants to run track or play chess, help him find ways to make time. Suggest that he get a head start on his homework if he has time between his last class and his activity. Also, have him add his activities to his planner. That way, he’ll see which days he has more time to work on long-term projects or study.

**Avoid distractions.** When your child sits down to do homework, he should turn off his cell phone and stay off instant messenger, MySpace, or Facebook. Also, talk to him about polite ways to turn down invitations for times when he has work to do. For example, if friends want to go skating one afternoon, he might ask if they can go another day.

**Don’t procrastinate.** Postponing work on an assignment will make your youngster feel pressed for time and not allow him to do his best work. Show him how to break a big job into smaller chunks, and teach him to stick to a schedule. He can write each task on a separate page of his planner. For example, if he has a book report, he could set aside a certain number of nights for reading the book, creating the draft, writing the final report, and polishing it.



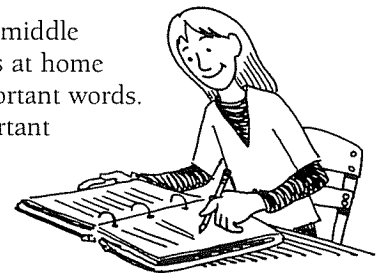
### Study skills

In middle school, your child will find that she has to spend more time studying. Here are several tips that will help her.

**Take good notes.** Let your youngster know that taking good notes in class will make studying much easier. Explain that note taking doesn’t mean copying down every word the teacher says. Instead, she should listen

carefully and write down the main points. If she didn’t catch something, or if she’s not sure she understood correctly, she should ask the teacher.

**Write and highlight.** Your middle grader can go over her notes at home and underline or circle important words. Suggest that she write important facts and formulas on index cards. Encourage her to answer end-of-chapter questions or to do practice math problems. She’ll remember more and be better prepared for tests.



**Find study buddies.** Studying with friends can motivate your child. Recommend that she find other students in her class who might be easy to work with. They can share ideas, discuss tough concepts, and quiz each other in study sessions at each other’s houses or at the library.

### Stay involved!

Did you know that it’s important to stay involved in your child’s education as he gets older? Here are three ways to show him you care about school:

- 1. Know the teachers.** Attend back-to-school nights, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences. Make sure you meet all of your middle schooler’s teachers, as well as his guidance counselor. It will be easier to discuss problems if you’ve established communication from the start.
- 2. Talk about school.** When your youngster gets home,



or at dinnertime, ask specific questions that invite discussion. *Examples:* “What did you do in science lab?” “What are you working on in math this week?” You’ll hear what your child is doing and let him know that you’re interested.

- 3. Track progress.** Look over your youngster’s graded tests and marked papers. If your school reports grades electronically, check them regularly. Also, watch for interim grade reports in the mail or in your child’s backpack. If you monitor his progress, you’ll be able to encourage him to get extra help—or to praise him for a job well done.

## Middle Years