

MAKING A Successful Transition TO MIDDLE SCHOOL

**Will the big kids be mean to me?
Can I keep up with the homework?
Will we get recess?**

These are just a few of the questions kids have when they start middle school. Don't be surprised if your child is nervous about making the move from elementary school. It's a big change.

Children sometimes worry that they won't have time to play anymore or that they'll get lost in their big new school. And they wonder whether the classes will be too hard or if the older students will pick on them. Who wouldn't feel nervous?

As a parent, you can make the change easier for your child. By taking a few simple steps before and after school starts, you can lay the foundation for a successful school year.

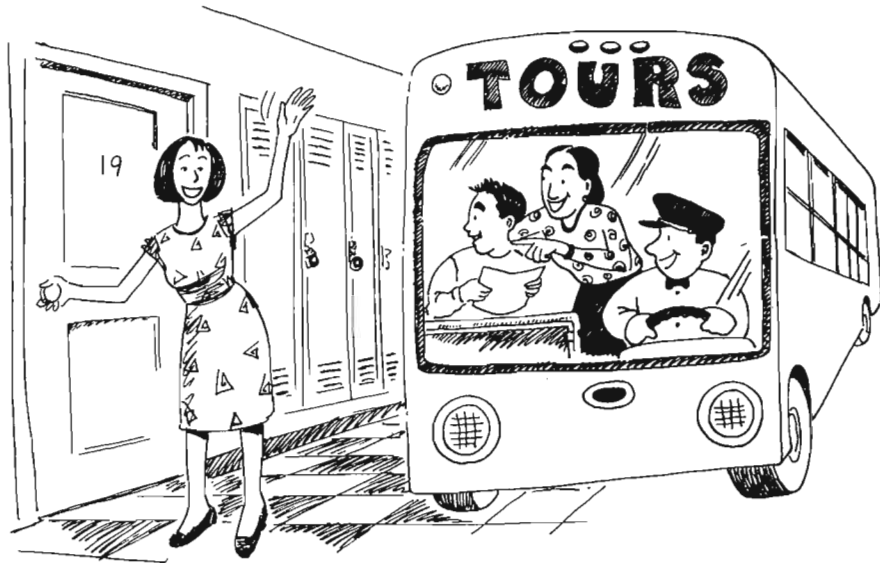
BEFORE SCHOOL BEGINS

■ **Tour the building.** Your child will probably feel more confident in his new school if he knows where everything is. Try to visit the building together before school starts. If this isn't possible, orientation night is probably a good time to take a tour. If your child's school doesn't have an orientation, you could call the school's main office and arrange a visit.

Check out the cafeteria, library, gym, bathrooms, and main office. Point out to your child how the classrooms are numbered. If you have your youngster's class schedule, take it with you and find each of his classrooms together.

■ **Meet the key people.**

Have your child meet each of her new teachers before classes start. Then, introduce her to the principal, assistant principal, school secretary, counselor, and nurse. Let her know that she can go to any of these adults if she has questions or needs help.



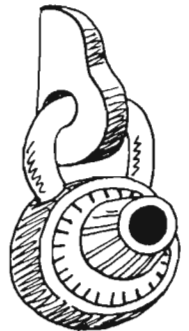
■ **Know the schedule.** In middle school, kids have to take more responsibility for themselves. They have to know their schedules and get to class and the school bus on time.

You can help by taping a copy of your child's class schedule inside his locker, where he can check it whenever he needs to. *Tip:* Keep a copy at home, too, so you'll know where to find him during the school day.

Together, find out when and where he has to catch the bus, and make a plan in case he misses it. Consider giving him a wristwatch to help him arrive on time.

■ **Check out the locker.**

Lockers can be a major source of anxiety for new middle schoolers. Have your child practice opening and closing hers until it feels easy. Suggest writing the combination to the lock somewhere handy, like inside her book bag, in case she forgets it.



■ **Mark the calendar.**

Get a copy of the school's student handbook. It should have important dates in it, like holidays, grading periods, major school events, and parent-teacher conference days. Mark these on the calendar at home so you and your child can see what's coming up.

continued

DURING THE YEAR

■ **Talk about academics.** Middle school is a great time for kids to learn good study habits. Let your child know how important it is to keep up with homework. Talk about how doing well in school now can help him reach his goals later in life.

Find a quiet, well-lit place for him to study at home. Then, figure out together what kind of study routine will work best for him. *Hint:* Teachers usually have good study tips to share.



■ **Be organized.** Your child will probably have more homework now that she's in middle school. You can help her keep track of it by getting her a small planner or notebook to take to each class. Show her how to write down homework and other information, like test dates or class trips. She can check the planner before leaving school to make sure she brings home everything she needs.

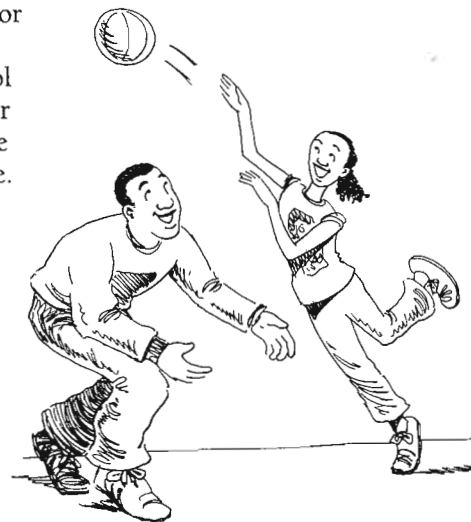
■ **Discuss behavior.** Let your child know what behavior you expect from him in school. *Examples:* Be in class on time; be polite to teachers; pay attention. Be clear about consequences for unacceptable behavior. Is your child constantly late to class? Consider asking a teacher or hall monitor to escort him between classes for a day or two.

■ **Get involved.** Volunteering at your child's school is a great idea. You'll help the school, but just as important, your child will benefit. You'll get to know her teachers and coaches and better understand what middle school is like for her.

Here are some ways to get involved: Join the PTA or PTO; chaperone a field trip; attend school conferences; do paperwork for teachers; talk to a class about your job; or lend a hand with after-school programs.

■ **Stay active.** Growing kids need regular physical activity. But some middle schools no longer offer gym classes or even outdoor recess. If your middle schooler doesn't have daily gym or recess, try to find other ways for him to get exercise. Look for after-school teams he can join or a nearby park where he can bike or skate.

Bonus: Regular activity can help kids concentrate better in school.



WARNING SIGNS: Stomach aches and skip days

Not all kids adjust well to middle school. For some kids, starting a new school is really scary. If your child is struggling, your first clue may be stomach aches. If he has frequent stomach aches and you can't find a medical reason, it might be because he's anxious about school. Trying to cope with a new building, new teachers, and new expectations can leave some kids feeling panicked, lost, and helpless. The stress and anxiety can make them feel sick to their stomachs. Eating or sleeping poorly can sometimes also be a sign of stress.

Another warning sign is absenteeism. Kids who have problems with a new



school often find ways to skip classes or miss whole days of school. If your child racks up an unusual number of absences, ask her if something is wrong. She might feel overwhelmed by certain classes, or even certain teachers. Or she might think she doesn't fit in with the other kids.

If your child shows these trouble signs, try talking with the school counselor. The counselor should be able to help your middle grader figure out what's bothering him and brainstorm solutions. Also, his teachers may be able to help. They can give your child extra academic assistance if needed, or just understanding and support while he adjusts.

Middle Years