

Middle School Survival Guide for Parents

Middle School is tough. Socially, academically, emotionally, physically, you name it. Sure, it's tough for the kids, but parents - this one's for you! When your child steps into the halls of a middle school, so do you.

This guide is a collection of best practices for parents of middle-schoolers - wisdom distilled from years of experience of both parents and teachers. These are the tried-and-true habits and routines that can help take the guesswork, stress, anxiety, and pressure out of middle school academics.

Part 1 – Five Steps to Building a Successful Homework Routine

1. Establish the “Hour of Focus”

- a. Set aside a 60-minute block of time every night as the “hour of focus”
- b. Try to make this the same time every night. This time is non-negotiable and untouchable.
- c. Be available during this time to keep your child on track and answer questions as they arise.
- d. If they finish their assigned homework before the 60 minutes is up (and you have seen it), set the expectation that they use the remaining time on something school/learning related**

2. Establish a “Study Space” – This place needs to be:

- a. Quiet
- b. Free from distractions (see #3)
- c. In plain sight. This should be a location that you can easily and casually observe.

3. Create a “Distraction-Free Zone”

- a. Monitor that they only have access to the technology they need to complete their assignments. If they don't need their computer/phone/tablet for that night's assignment, remove it from the study space.

4. The “Show Me” Rule – Establish the expectation that you must see their homework before they put it away. Check for completion and quality.

- a. Note: Unless they specifically ask you to, it is **not** recommended that you check their homework for accuracy/mistakes. This is a recipe for arguments and power-struggles. Let the teachers take care of this at school.
- b. “How do I know what assignments they should have completed?” Most teachers, teams, or grade-levels, maintain an online homework calendar so you can make sure your child has completed the assignments listed on the calendar.
- c. Exception: If your child demonstrates perfect homework completion for an extended period of time (say, a month or a quarter), feel free to suspend this rule. If homework completion drops, bringing back the “show me” rule is your first line of defense.

5. Schedule a “Reload Day” - This is a time (5-10 minutes) set aside every week for regular maintenance such as:

- a. Refilling Supplies such as paper, pencils, dry erase markers, highlighters, etc.
- b. Binder Organization
 - i. This will be an uphill battle for disorganized children and/or disorganized parents, but every middle school teacher has seen countless examples of the harm of a disorganized binder. At the very least, make sure that any loose papers are three-hole punched and put into the rings of the subject area section.
 - ii. Spending 5 minutes a week on this will save hours of clean-up down the road.
- c. Checking Grades – These days, most schools provide online access to grades. During your “Reload Day”, sit down together with your child to look at them. If you are doing this weekly, this should not be a stressful event. The grade check should be informative, not punitive. A bad grade during the 4th week of school is not the end of the world, maybe just a sign that your child needs to make an adjustment.

****There are loads of worthwhile ways to spend this time. Here are a few ideas:**

- *Reading (most Language Arts/English teachers require 30 minutes of reading per night. They usually specify what kinds of books are appropriate for this time.)*
- *Studying (even if there isn't a test tomorrow, look ahead and determine if there's anything on the horizon that you could prepare for.)*
- *Practice Something*
 - *Jump online and practice math (Suggested app: Dreambox)*
 - *Practice an instrument (Most band/orchestra teachers expect 30 minutes of practice per night)*
 - *Practice a foreign language (Suggested app: Duolingo)*
- *Extra Credit Assignments*
- *Listen to a podcast (This is an amazing resource for getting a world-class education on almost anything in the world that interests you)*
- *Learn to Code (Suggested site: code.org)*

Part 2 – Put Them On The Path, But Allow Them To Stumble

Middle school parents notice a delicate balance when trying to raise a successful middle school scholar. Too much parental support can be harmful, but so can too little support. On one hand, they need you to help establish and enforce the structures and routines that will put them on the right path, while, on the other hand, letting them stumble and grow as they walk that path.

Here are a few common middle school parental dilemmas and suggestions on how to navigate them without providing too much (or too little) support.

Situation	Instead of...	Try...
Trouble with a homework problem	Showing them how to do it or finding the answer for them	Helping them to find a resource that will help them answer their own question. Maybe there's a similar example in their textbook, notes, classwork, or (if all else fails) on the internet.
A bad grade on a report card	Emailing/talking to the teacher immediately	Looking at the online grade book to determine which individual assignment(s) lowered the grade.
A bad grade on an assignment	Emailing/talking to the teacher immediately	1. Asking your child about it 2. Encouraging your child schedule a time to talk with the teacher (help them be a self-advocate).
Absent from class/school	Emailing/talking to the teachers immediately	Asking your student about absent work routines for each class. Most teachers have a place for students to pick up missed work and turn in assignments that are due. If your child doesn't remember the routine, try checking the syllabus.
Upcoming test/quiz	Assuming they know how to study	Studying with them. Most middle-schoolers don't realize that studying is a skill that you need to learn, practice, and experiment with. If one method isn't working, encourage them to research different study strategies (on YouTube, for example).

Other Quick Tips:

- **Establish a "Tech-Free Bedtime"** - Imagine you're a middle-schooler making the decision, "should I stay up another hour texting with my friends, or should I go to sleep?" Texting with friends wins every time. That is WAY more fun than sleeping. Yet, we all understand the benefits of a good night's sleep. They're never going to ask for it, but your child wants you to take away that decision. They NEED you to take away that decision. That means establishing a place and time to sleep every night that is completely free from technology (phones, computers, video games, TVs).
- **"Be the change you wish to see"** - Perhaps you've heard the maxim, "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." In short, if you want your child to be curious, engaged, and interested in their learning, then be curious, engaged, and interested in learning yourself.

Middle School Survival Guide Checklist

Complete this checklist together with your parent(s).

ESTABLISH AN "HOUR OF FOCUS"

I will do my homework every school night starting at _____ and ending at _____
Time Time

EXTRA-TIME TASKS: *There will be many times during your "hour of focus" when you finish your assigned work with time remaining. Brainstorm a list of school/learning-related things you can do during this time. Be specific.*

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

ESTABLISH A "STUDY SPACE"

My study space will be _____
Location

It is (check all that apply): Quiet Distraction-Free In plain sight

ESTABLISH A "DISTRACTION-FREE ZONE" EVERY NIGHT

I understand that any distractions that are not being used for that night's assignments should be cleared from the study space (phones, tablets, laptops, books, etc.).

THE "SHOW ME" RULE

I will show my completed homework to a parent every night before I put it away.

ESTABLISH A "RELOAD DAY": *this is a time for ① reloading supplies ② binder organization ③ checking grades*

Our "Reload Day" will be every _____ at _____
Day of the Week Time

****I agree to follow the routines laid out in this Middle School Survival Guide****

Student Signature

Parent Signature

Parent Signature

Post this checklist in a prominent location in your house