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**South Brunswick Public Schools
EPIC Program**



Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

One of a series of Parent Guides from



Parent Guide

Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

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Introduction

The years of middle school are marked by change. One day your child is loving and respectful. The next day, she* acts as though she is a creature from the dark. If you are noticing these changes, you can be sure that your child is noticing them, too. The changes might be stirring up emotions of insecurity about her outward appearance and her academic, social or athletic abilities. This Parent Guide will help you smooth out this very difficult transition. You'll find tips on how to stay connected with your child so she knows that you are a passenger with her on this very turbulent ride.

Helping your adolescent make a successful transition to middle school requires preparation. Give your child the tools to succeed by arming yourself with information. Middle school students are expected to adapt to an atmosphere that requires organizational skills and higher-level thinking.

They are not given much time to make this transition. In fact, children need to have these skills in place the first day just to make it off the bus to homeroom!



**Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*

Suggestions to Ease the Transition

Whether or not your child has told you that he is feeling stressed-out about entering middle school, he most likely is. The following suggestions will help you calm his fears and help him get excited about this next step toward adulthood:

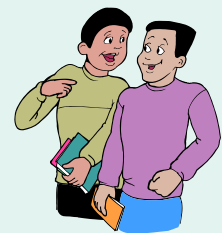


- **Read the school rules** or handbook together. Pay particular attention to the dress code, attendance requirements, and behavioral expectations. Discuss the differences in expectations from elementary school to middle school.
- **Find a school map** in the handbook (or ask the school for one) and together visually “walk” through his schedule. Let him know that everyone gets lost, and it is okay to ask for directions.
- **Attend the school’s orientation** for new students. This will give your child an opportunity to see the building and meet some of the faculty members.
- **Foster a sense of his belonging** to the school. Find newspaper articles about the school’s sports teams or clubs. Help your child feel as though he is on the inside track to understanding how the school works. This will empower him to be successful before he steps foot on campus.
- **Give your child a combination lock** to practice opening so he can get a feel for opening his locker.

- **Establish a regular place for doing homework** and plan a routine, including the time homework will start. Offer suggestions on how he can organize his materials.
- **Help him practice getting up for school** by having him set his alarm clock for the time he will actually have to get up. Make it easy for him to get up by having a good breakfast waiting for him. The smell of pancakes wafting from the kitchen might be all the encouragement he needs to get out of bed. But if you don’t have time to make breakfast every morning, provide something healthy for him to eat before school. A healthy breakfast will give him energy to get his day off to a great start.



- **Teach your child conversation starters** to help him make new friends in the crowded cafeteria or hallway. Encourage him to share a school experience, give a compliment or ask about personal interests.
- **Talk to your child about how being comfortable** on the first day is more important than showing off a new outfit. It will be easier for him to maneuver through his schedule without the pinch of new shoes slowing him down.
- **Discuss with your child how to get along** with his teachers. Let him know that each teacher will have different priorities. One teacher might demand complete silence while another teacher encourages class participation.



Coping With the Many Changes

The age of adolescence brings about a need to gripe. Following is a list of common gripes, the reason for each, and how you can cope.

Adolescent Gripe

“Why won’t adults listen to me and try to understand what I mean?”

Reason for the Gripe

Your middle schooler is letting you know that he has opinions and that he wants to be heard. He wants a voice in decisions that affect him. He feels he’s old enough to debate topics such as curfew and household chores. But he may not yet recognize that he still must also listen to others.

How You Can Cope

Welcome your son’s request to listen to him.

When he has an opinion, ask him to tell you more. Engage him in conversation, but don’t let him draw you into a debate.

Remember, he still needs to be told

where the bound-

aries are. Explain that you expect the same courtesy from him—

respectful listening. If he expresses dislike of his chores (perhaps in a loud or rude voice), remain calm. Tell him you will be ready to listen when he is ready to talk politely.

Then try to give him some say about his chores. If he must put out the trash, perhaps he can decide when he will do it.



Adolescent Gripe

“Why won’t you treat me like the grown-up that I am?”

Reason for the Gripe

Middle school is about establishing independence and one’s own identity. Your child wants the privileges that come with adulthood, but she may not be ready to accept adult responsibilities, too. Her idea of what’s “grown-up” may clash with yours.

How You Can Cope

Recognize your daughter’s growing independence. As long as she is not pursuing life-threatening activities, give her the opportunity to try out her ideas. If her new haircut doesn’t turn out to make her look just like the celebrity she was copying and it has to go through an awkward stage of growing back out, she will learn that her choices have consequences. If she wants to wear a tube top to school,

remember, you are still the adult. It’s up to you to set limits and it’s okay to say

no. When you can, allow her to do “grown-up” things. For example, let her try the espresso coffee, but tell her drugs and alcohol are definitely off limits.

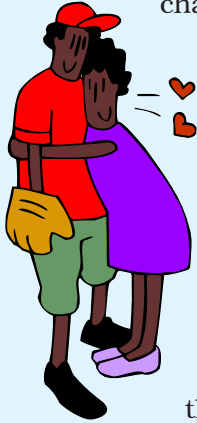


Adolescent Gripe

“Why can’t you accept me, faults and all?”

Reason for the Gripe

Being accepted is paramount to a middle schooler. All adolescents have ups and downs. They think they’re ugly. They agonize about failing a test. They worry because they don’t measure up to a parent’s expectations. This gripe can be translated, “Do you still love me?” Middle schoolers are also coping with increased academic challenges. They have more difficult classes and more homework. This gripe can also be translated, “Do I really have to work so hard?”



How You Can Cope

Tell your child every day that you love him. Give him specific praise. For example, you can say, “I’m so proud of how hard you worked on your science project.” Make sure he knows that you don’t expect perfection in his looks, his schoolwork or other areas of his life, but that you do expect him to put forth his best effort. If he does have a “fault,” see how you can help him overcome it. For example, if he has received a low grade on his report card, help him decide how he can bring it up during the next grading period. Focus on what he can do in the future, not on how he failed.

Adolescent Gripe

“Why don’t you trust me?”

Reason for the Gripe

Middle schoolers think they’re mature. And they are—at least they’re more mature than they were when they were in elementary school. But they’re not ready for unlimited freedom and they know it. When they want to do something without giving the details that they know may curtail their wishes, they try to eliminate further conversation with “Why don’t you trust me?” In some cases, parents are so protective that they don’t allow their children the gradual freedom that should come during the middle school years. These children also ask, “Why don’t you trust me?”

How You Can Cope

Trust is essential in your relationship with your middle schooler. Establish it now, and you have laid a great foundation for the years ahead. But trusting your child doesn’t mean relinquishing your responsibility. During her middle school years, gradually relax some of the control you have had over your child. For example, trust your child to complete her assigned chores. If she has to clean her room, set a deadline for getting the job done and then leave her alone. Don’t nag. Don’t ask, “Have you cleaned your room yet?” Talk over areas where you aren’t ready to let go yet. For example, if she wants to hang out at the mall with a friend or ride in a car with a high school driver, explain your concerns and rules.



Adolescent Gripe

“Why can’t you be nice to my friends?”

Reason for the Gripe

During the middle school years, friendships are extremely important. In fact, it may seem that friends are more important than parents. Your child may feel that her friends will judge her on how you treat them.

How You Can Cope

Open your house to your child’s friends. Make them welcome. Provide snacks. Know what’s going on, but don’t try to be one of the gang. When opportunities arise, ask them about school, their activities and their families. Research shows that this goes a long way in helping your child resist peer pressure to smoke, drink alcohol, or take drugs.

If you feel one of your child’s friends (or her group of friends) is a bad influence, talk with your child. Instead of saying, “I don’t like Jessica,” say, “Jessica uses language that we don’t allow in our family. She is often disrespectful to me when she is here. I am glad to welcome her to our home, but I expect her to abide by the house rules.” Limit your child’s contact with friends who have a negative influence. Provide ways for her to make friends who share your values: scouts, sports, or volunteer activities.



Adolescent Gripe

“Why can’t you and the other adults in my life just love me and offer me guidance when I want it?”

Reason for the Gripe

Your child may experience rejection and failure in middle school. Sometimes he may feel like a loser. He doesn’t want a lecture. He doesn’t want to be nagged. He just wants someone to say, “I love you.”

How You Can Cope

Middle schoolers need constant affirmation. They need the security of parents who say—and show—their love every day. And while they need guidance, they don’t need parents who try to solve every problem. This communicates that the parents don’t trust the child.

Watch for opportunities to have quiet talks with your child—in the car as you drive to team practice, at bedtime, on a walk, or during a special one-on-one meal out together. Allow your child to open up to you without offering a suggestion or solution for every concern. Share your memories of middle school. Say, “Sometimes it was hard for me, too. I know you are trying to work this out. If you need my help, remember, I’m always available.”



Understanding Your Adolescent

Awareness of some common adolescent characteristics will help you understand and assist your child. Talking to him about these facts might be met with a dull stare or the ever popular “Nuh-uh.” So you might want to just be aware of these facts instead of feeling compelled to discuss them with your child. Middle schoolers:

- **Have high levels of physical and emotional energy**, which may contrast with long periods of idleness. Let your child sleep an hour or two extra on the weekends, but do wake him after that amount of time.
- **Take risks, are curious and love danger and adventure**, yet their feelings can be hurt easily. This is the time when they feel immortal, but they worry a lot about what their friends think about them. They are physically strong and emotionally weak. Be careful with your words. Even the biggest adolescent is still tender inside; tread softly.
- **Want to be independent** from their families, and at the same time, they need to be pampered and protected.
- **Withdraw and want a private life**, and at the same time, they worry about being accepted by their peers.



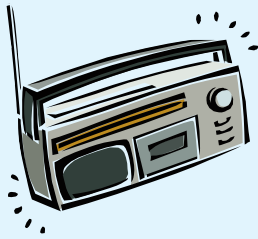
- **Demand privileges but avoid responsibilities.** At the same time, they are developing an awareness of social problems and the welfare of others.
- **Need to be taught organizational skills.** Provide your child with manageable tasks that will help him develop organizational skills.
- **Need encouragement to try new things** and to regard failure as a necessary part of learning and growing. Make sure that tasks are challenging, but still realistic.
- **Can easily become depressed** or overly anxious. Be alert to signs of depression or anxiety in your child and seek help if necessary.



- **Need you to be involved** in their education. Research shows that your involvement will help your child perform better in school, earn better grades and score higher on tests.
- **Need opportunities for you to teach them** how to set goals and plan for the long and short term.
- **Need new responsibilities.** Let your child accept a paid job. He could babysit, mow grass or pet sit.
- **Need explicit instruction, coaching and support** with regard to organizing time and resources for homework. Teach him how to study, take notes and take tests.



Conclusion

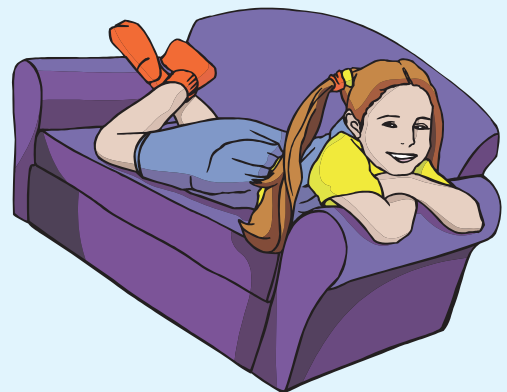


Chips on the couch, socks on the floor, and crazy music blaring might not be endearing to you, but for your child it is a way to push the boundaries in her growing need for a sense of self. Calmly insist that she pick up after herself and turn down the volume all the while maintaining an even tone that doesn't judge. Matter-of-factly telling her will communicate the importance of your words without reducing her emotionally. She will know that you love her, warts and all.

Even though adolescents may look like adults, they don't feel like adults. They vary in size a great deal. One child will be barely five feet tall, weighing under one hundred pounds. Another will look like a member of the defensive line for the Packers. No matter where on the spectrum your child falls, remember that emotionally, she can still be that small child. She may not have built up her skin thickness to accept criticism, no matter how constructive.

As nervous as you might think you are about your adolescent entering middle school, she is feeling even more so. You thought you needed to be consistent when she was a toddler, but she needs it even more now.

The payoffs for staying in tune and encouraging your adolescent are big. She will enjoy the positive energy, passion, assertion and enthusiasm that comes with adolescence while leaving behind the feelings of awkwardness and insecurity. She will happily dance her dance, sing her song and kick her heels toward a successful adulthood.



For More Information

“Knowledge is the key to understanding adolescents: providing guidelines for parents”

by Jeanie Burnett
www.udel.edu/bateman/acei/mlsknowl.vol.13.4.htm

Middle School: the real deal

by Juliana Farrell and Beth Mayall
17th Street Productions
www.alloy.com/mediakit/publishing/17thstreet

“Middle School Transition: It's Harder Than You Think”

by Maurice J. Elias
National Association of Elementary School Principals
www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=519&action=print

“Parent Involvement at the Middle School Level”

compiled by the U.S. Department of Education
www.middleweb.com/ParntInvl.html.

“Preparing Parents: Middle School Years Time of Tumult and Change For Tweens, Teens, and Their Families”

by Carol A. Forster, MD
www.kidsource.com/education/middle.years.html.

“Supporting Students in Their Transition to Middle School”

A position paper adopted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and The National Middle School Association
www.nmsa.org/news/transition.html.

The Everything Tween Book: A Parent's Guide to Surviving the Turbulent Pre-teen Years

by Linda Sonna, Ph.D.
Adams Media Corporation
1-800-872-5627
www.adamsmedia.com

The Tween Years: A Parent's Guide for Surviving Those Terrific, Turbulent, and Trying Times Between Childhood and Adolescence

by Donna G. Corwin
McGraw-Hill/Contemporary Books
1-877-833-5524
<http://books.mcgraw-hill.com>

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Family & Home Set

10 Great Ways to Teach Children Responsibility
25 Ways You Can Put the Power of Routines to Work for You and Your Child
52 Great Ways Families Can Spend Time Together

School Readiness—Set 1

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Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five
How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child

School Readiness—Set 2

Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them
37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School
Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten

School Success—Set 1

The Road to Reading Success—Elementary School Years
Common Discipline Problems of Elementary School Children and How to Solve Them
31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child

School Success—Set 2

Give Your Child the Edge: Teachers' Top 10 Learning Secrets Parents Can Use
How to Help Children Do Their Best on Tests
Helping Children Get Organized for Homework and Schoolwork

School Success—Set 3

Help Your Child Develop Good Learning Styles
How to Instill the Character Traits of Success in Your Child
Seven Proven Ways to Motivate Children to Do Better in School

When There is a Problem—Set 1

Help Your Child Deal With Bullies and Bullying
Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure
How to Help Your Struggling Student

Other Important Titles

Common Discipline Problems of Teenagers and How to Solve Them
What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD
Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them
Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

*For more information about these and other materials for
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

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