



Supporting Your Child Through the Transition to Middle School

Jennifer McMillan, a licensed therapist and Camas parent, recently joined our district staff as the new Social-Emotional Support Liaison. As new transitions can be challenging for both students and adults, she offers the following tips to families who are about to embark on the transition to high school.

- **Adolescence is a necessary developmental stage** – Just like toddlerhood, in adolescence neurological changes create unique opportunities and challenges. Anticipate missteps, mistakes, and the need to pivot and adjust. (Brains continue to change and grow until around age 26!)
- **Encourage self-advocacy** – Middle school is the perfect time to practice communication skills. For example, if your child has a homework question, encourage reaching out to the teacher. This is a great opportunity to “coach” your child vs. manage their communication.
- **Allow for discomfort and struggle** – Some of the greatest lessons come from learning from mistakes and managing the discomfort that comes with them. Before jumping in to help, allow your child the chance to find their own way. Ask yourself, “Is this an opportunity to learn an important life lesson (like remembering to put a lunchbox in the backpack)?”
- **Focus on growth instead of grades** – Your child’s work ethic, time management, organization, and willingness to try new things (like joining a club or group) are all indicators that they are growing necessary life skills. Acknowledge all the great strides being made!
- **Connect and communicate** – Even with newfound independence and changing family relationships, your child still needs a strong connection to family. Taking the time to ask about their interests and really listening to their answers creates chances for continued influence.
- **Coach vs. manage** – Middle school focuses on developing adolescents’ organizational skills, which are still maturing (and will be for quite some time). Resist the urge to micromanage; instead, use “coaching” to help them learn how to manage their time, homework, and more.
- **Don’t hesitate to reach out for support/help** – If you feel your child is struggling beyond your ability to help, reach out for support. Contact your child’s school counselor and teachers for more information.

For more ideas on supporting your child during adolescence, check out these resources:

- [Age of Opportunity](#), by Laurence Steinberg
- [Brainstorm](#), by Daniel Siegel
- [How to Raise An Adult](#), by Julie Lythcott-Haims
- [Untangled: Guiding Teenage Girls Through the Seven Transitions Into Adulthood](#), by Lisa Damour