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Supporting Your Child Through the Transition to Middle School

As new transitions can be challenging for both students and adults, consider the following tips as your child transitions 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

Your Child Is Moving Up to Middle School. Here's What to Do When Worry Takes Over (Your & Theirs!)

- Stay calm and project a sense of confidence in your child's ability to succeed. Listen to their concerns, VALIDATE their fears, and let them know that those concerns and fears are totally normal. And don't forget: Your own modeling of brave behavior and positive coping strategies is a powerful tool for encouraging your child's self-confidence and resilience.
- Practice deep breathing. Focusing your attention on your breath calms your system down and allows you to take a break from worried thoughts. Even a few breaths can be very helpful.
- Highlight past successes. Be specific. Focus on the strategies that your child used before and point out their ability to use those strategies now.
- Establish and maintain a consistent routine. Consider setting a specific time for getting up, doing homework, and going to bed. Sleep is extremely important.
- Focus on logistics. Attend your child's school's transition events to help your child locate lockers, classrooms, bathrooms, and other important locations.
- Get organized. Have your child keep a copy of their class schedule in a place that's easy to access, use different colored binders for each class, designate a special homework spot, use a planner to track assignments.
- Praise your child's effort. Transitions are difficult for most people. Verbally praise the small successes. Sometimes getting up on time, talking to someone new, and participating in a project are reasons enough to celebrate. Growth is made in small increments, so be on the lookout and praise the baby steps.

