



HOW TO THRIVE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL

A PARENT'S GUIDE

Preparing today's student to impact tomorrow's world

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the TCS Middle School! We are excited to have your family join our community, and we look forward to serving you and your child during these formative years.

The middle school years can be an exciting time of growth and development. The transition is certainly a big step - both for students and parents. Middle school is a crucial time for the shaping and teaching of a child's heart due to the many changes undergone during this phase of life. At Trinity, our faculty works hard to nurture, encourage and equip each student as we prepare them for the transition to high school. We also work tirelessly to communicate with parents as we know there are many questions and concerns about this new phase of life. We are excited to partner with you in helping your child navigate through middle school, and it is our confident hope that our environment will help each student not only survive middle school, but **THRIVE**, during these life-shaping years.

This manual is meant to provide strategies and tips for understanding middle school and the road ahead. We want to help you feel empowered to provide the support and guidance your child will certainly need. Keep in mind that each student is unique, and therefore, the generalizations used at times may not fully apply to your child. Our desire is to help equip you to understand the needs that arise during middle school so that you can better guide your child.

Thank you for the opportunity to partner with you in your child's education. We are here to help so do not hesitate to contact us as needs arise. We look forward to serving your family.

Adam Vinson

Middle School Principal

WELCOME TO MIDDLE SCHOOL!

The transition from elementary school to middle school can be challenging as students experience many changes, not only academically but personally as well. While expectations and responsibilities begin to increase, you can also count on an increase in hormones and emotions that lead to changes in thoughts, interests, and behavior. Understanding this dynamic is crucial to helping your student navigate through these years, and we are here to help inform and equip you to face these challenges with grace, understanding, and action.

Most students are excited about the new freedoms and experiences that come with middle school, while others experience feelings of apprehension due to all of the changes. Listed below are some common concerns that middle schoolers often have.

Examples: Tardiness to class, getting lost, making new friends, having someone to sit with at lunch, bringing the right items to class, dressing out for PE, remembering their locker combination, bullying, etc.

We encourage you to spend some time talking with your child about concerns he or she might have about the transition to middle school. Discussing these topics together will help alleviate these concerns while also showing your child that you understand and care about the challenges being faced.

GETTING OFF TO A GREAT START:

Keep the lines of communication open between you and your child, especially during those first few weeks of middle school.

- **PRAY, PRAY, PRAY** - While middle school brings plenty of natural challenges, the Bible says our warfare is primarily a spiritual battle. (Eph. 6:12) Spend time regularly praying over your child and with your child, asking the LORD to regularly give both you and your child guidance, direction, and wisdom in handling this new stage of life.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions** - Questions like “Will you tell me about your day?” or “What are you studying in science?” or “Who did you sit with at lunch?” will help get your student talking so you can avoid the typical one-word responses.
- **Be Available to Listen** - Allow your child to share when he or she desires (try not to force it) and be ready to help guide him or her through any issues or concerns that are shared. If your child seems unwilling to talk, enlist the help of your youth pastor or a youth leader who may be able to assist.
- **Stay Informed** - Help your child adjust by paying close attention to school emails. Middle schoolers often forget important information their teachers and administration share with them. Remind your student about upcoming events and important information so he or she feels prepared each day.

Middle School: A Time to Learn

Middle school students will experience a greater set of expectations both in the areas of academics and behavior. They will be expected to transition from class to class and to behave properly in the hallway, lunchroom and chapel settings with less supervision than they were accustomed to in elementary school (no more single file lines). Focusing on the concepts listed below will help your student learn valuable lessons during this transition.

1. RESPONSIBILITY

Middle school is a time when students should be encouraged to explore, experiment and solve problems on their own. One of the best ways they can learn is to experience the freedom to “fail”. While this might sound strange, allowing your student to fail during their middle school years is a great way to set them up for success in anticipation of the transition to high school, college and beyond. Now is the time to learn the importance of good grades, keeping up with assignments, remembering due dates, feeling the consequences of making a wrong decision, etc. Allowing your student to fail (and even earn the minor consequences that accompany that failure) helps them adjust in order to avoid similar and even greater failures down the road. We would encourage you to be cautious and slow when coming to “rescue” your child from every little mistake. Allow him or her to develop in the area of responsibility now when the mistakes can be fixed rather than later when the consequences may be life-altering.

To help maintain balance, strive to emphasize effort over results. Help protect your student from the stress that may come from making certain grades or achieving certain performance marks. Instead, focus on encouraging maximum effort in everything he or she attempts to do. Middle school is a breeding ground for laziness which leads to minimal effort if left unchecked. This can lead students to attempt short cuts if they are focused on results, but fail to connect the importance of effort with those results. We have found that students who work hard often reap the desired results in time (Gal. 6:7).

We will go to great lengths to guide and instruct your student in understanding the specific expectations that are set at TCS. We encourage you to follow up at home regarding behavioral notifications, academic reports, etc. and use those failures as teachable moments for future situations.

2. COMMUNICATION

Helping your child learn the importance of self-advocacy is an important skill for middle school. Classroom transition brings exposure to multiple teachers with various classroom procedures and teaching styles. Encourage your student to ask questions and seek help from our teachers when needed. This can be accomplished through face-to-face conversations or email.

In addition to students learning to communicate, parental communication is just as crucial to a positive middle school experience. Believe it or not, there are two sides to every story, and the one you receive from your student may not always include the full context or details. Be open to hearing from the teacher or principal regarding possible clarifications to events that occur during the school day. Whenever you have concerns regarding classroom performance, teacher instruction, or student conflict, be quick to communicate to those who can help shed any additional light to a situation. Our faculty and staff want your student to succeed while having a great experience at TCS. From the principal to our staff and teachers, we welcome the opportunity to serve your family.

As a general rule, matters concerning the classroom should begin with communication to the teacher. Problems related to student conflict (bullying, inappropriate behavior, etc.) should be directed to the Principal, Director of Student Life or Dean of Students.

Listed below are some helpful questions to ask when conferencing with your student’s teachers about social or academic concerns.

- Does my child show up to class on time and prepared?
- Does my child participate in class by asking questions, paying attention and remaining engaged in classroom discussion?

- Does my child turn in completed homework in a timely manner?
- Does my child seem to be performing up to their potential?
- Does my child get along with other students? Does my child seem to have a core group of friends?

3. ORGANIZATION AND PREPARATION

We cannot stress to you enough how important organizational skills are to middle school success. Learning tools and tips now for keeping personal items organized will help ensure success later in life. One of the first things we seek to do for our middle school students is to teach them the skill of organization. An organized person is often a prepared person. You can help as a parent by reinforcing the concepts listed below.

- **CHARGE THE CHROMEBOOK:** Chromebooks are an important part of our school day. Textbooks, assignments and notes are needed for each class and are accessible primarily on the Chromebook. A fully charged Chromebook at the beginning of the day will help reduce stress and ensure your student has access to what they need.
- **MAINTAIN SCHOOL SUPPLIES:** While we provide you with a supply list at the beginning of the year, those supplies will oftentimes deplete without your knowledge as a parent. Students need items like pens, paper and other materials each day for class. Help your student do an inventory of what they have and what they need at the end of each week so they do not fall behind.
- **DECLUTTER WHEN POSSIBLE:** Lockers, backpacks and binders can become storage bins for trash and unneeded items. Encourage your child to store and save important items while discarding material that is no longer needed.
- **PLAN (CALENDAR + Blackbaud):** While we do not require agendas at the middle school level, students are highly encouraged to reference Blackbaud for upcoming assignments and assessments. Do not let homework due dates or major tests and quizzes catch your child off guard. Each student has access to Google calendar along with Blackbaud, which contains weekly lesson plans where important due dates can be found. Encourage your student to record important, future items on the provided calendar and remind them to reference it regularly.

4. HOMEWORK AND STUDYING

Homework should be done as soon as possible and studying should be done each night. Procrastination can lead to additional stress; therefore, encourage your student to think ahead by acting in the present. It can be hard to anticipate what family events may spring up during a given week. By using optional study hall periods and dismissal time, many of our students can complete their homework before ever leaving campus. This is extremely helpful for last minute scheduling changes at home. In addition, a test on Friday does not mean studying should begin on Thursday. Help your student master the material conceptually by studying a little each night. This will not only reduce anxiety and help ensure proper preparation for assessments, it will also guard against a tendency to regurgitate material that does not lead to long-term remembrance.

Here are some steps you can take to help reinforce good study habits at home.

- Assess whether your student is using time during dismissal to work on homework.
- Create a study/homework space at home that is suitable for your student's needs.

- Develop a homework agenda each night by making sure your student knows exactly what needs to be done. Be sure to reference Blackbaud for homework assignments and expectations. Help him or her prioritize to ensure the most difficult assignments are accomplished first while he or she is fresh and alert.
- Provide study breaks at home. If you determine that your student has procrastinated, send them to bed and allow them to experience the minor consequence of a poor grade if needed. Remember, help him or her learn those lessons now!
- Email the teacher if you have questions. Do not let your student stress for hours because he or she is confused. Reach out to a teacher to let them know of the struggle. Even if the teacher is unable to respond before the next day, it will at least allow the teacher to understand and sympathize with your student's lack of understanding regarding the assignment.
- **Keep in mind that all of your student's "stuff" can be accessed from any device. Textbooks, notes, and documents are not tied to the Chromebook. If you experience any problems with the Chromebook, please keep in mind that other computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones will allow you to access the same information.**
- Monitor your student's progress and be available to help, but do not do the work for them. If you see your student is regularly struggling or spending an excessive amount of time on homework, contact the Principal or Academic Coordinator to discuss your concerns.
- Review your student's homework and preparation for assessments. Have your student show you completed work to ensure the assignment is finished and accurate in relation to the instructions that have been given by the teacher. Study with your child to ensure the mastery of concepts being taught in the classroom.
- Discuss plagiarism and the dangers of turning in someone else's work. We take cheating seriously at TCS. Remind your student that maximum effort will lead to desired results. If your student forgets to do an assignment, help him or her connect the fact that integrity and ownership of one's mistakes are far better than cheating.

5. LIMIT ABSENCES (WHEN POSSIBLE)

Missed class time can increase stress and anxiety for many students with the amount of make-up work that might be created. Doctor's appointments are best scheduled at the end of the day during elective periods so that academic classes are not missed. When your student is sick, be sure to let teachers know so that missing work can be gathered. If possible, have your student begin making work up at home to reduce the workload upon his or her return. In addition, when you know of an upcoming absence, communicate in advance with teachers so that make-up work can be started as soon as possible.

Your student needs to learn that the responsibility to obtain missing notes or to complete make-up assignments falls upon the student. Do not expect the teacher to always track down your child. Remember to encourage self-advocacy and responsibility when class time has been missed.

6. LOCKERS

Every middle school student receives a locker with adequate space for all of their items. Be sure to encourage your student to keep items locked at all times in their locker and remind him or her to keep the locker combination private.

Middle School: A Time to Grow

The middle school years are often marked by significant physical, emotional and relational changes as children grow in their level of independence. This can often lead to struggles in the area of self-esteem, identity, and peer interaction, sometimes leading to mood swings. Middle school is hard at times because everything feels like it is changing for your child. Understanding and anticipating some of these challenges will help you better prepare to address them as they arise.

1. FRIENDSHIPS

Friendship is very important for thriving in middle school. Your student will need positive peer pressure to help encourage them. Extra-curricular activities are a great way to build friendships with students who share common interests. Being a part of a team or club helps give students a sense of belonging. Expect friendships to shift as your student continues to develop, and realize that it is okay. Encourage your student to keep “old friends” while striving to make new friends as well.

2. BEHAVIOR

Keep in mind that major changes begin to occur in your student’s life physically, socially and emotionally during the middle school years. Things that were once important are now given low priority. Desires for praise and encouragement from parents and teachers are now replaced with a desire for acceptance amongst their peers. This can be both positive and negative. You will often find that “middle school drama” will focus on issues we would consider minor as adults. Helping your student realize the fleeting value he or she places on events is important, but oftentimes may feel futile. Perspective will be key in helping your student navigate these years. Being patient as you help them grasp this long-term perspective will be key as well.

Relationships will become increasingly important. Helping your child choose the right types of friends who share the same values will help ensure they are influenced in ways you desire. While we oftentimes encourage students to embrace their individuality, modeling the habits and choices of others is an important biblical concept as well (I Cor. 11:1). Be mindful of who is influencing him or her during these crucial years. Who does he or she spend time with at school? Who does he or she consider to be their closest friends? Who does he or she follow on social media (if allowed access)? Make sure you are informed about who is helping to shape your student by inviting his or her friends to frequently do things with your family.

3. BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND MEAN-SPIRITEDNESS

We often see the exact challenges you would expect when bringing hundreds of children together who are struggling to understand their identity. As your student works through his or her own struggles with self-esteem, identity and peer-interaction, keep in mind every other middle school student is doing the same. While it does not excuse the behavior we often see, it does help give context and explanation for why middle school kids are often so mean to each other. Each student is different, meaning each one will handle the changes they are experiencing differently. While some students withdraw over concerns and perceived deficiencies about their body image, social status and acceptance, others seek to draw attention to the deficiencies they notice in others in order to mask their own insecurities. This is unfortunately true for both boys and girls. At school, we utilize our Director of Student Life, Director of Student Development, Dean of Students, FLEX Teacher and Form Group Leaders to help students navigate through peer struggles and undesired behavior they may be subjected to. At home, we encourage you to reinforce the same concepts we are seeking to instill as well.

Character traits to encourage in your student:

- Treat others the way you want to be treated by showing love, respect and kindness even if it isn't always returned. (Matt. 7:12, I John 4:7-8)
- Teach your student how to handle hurtful statements, and practice how to respond to hurtful words. Protect your child from resenting hurtful students by guiding them to pray for those who may cause them harm. (Matt. 5:44)
- Be sure to communicate displeasure for behavior that is undesired to the guilty party. Oftentimes middle school joking can be taken too far without the person who initiated the joking being aware. Make sure your student clearly expresses his or her displeasure with joking, teasing, etc. by stating the displeasure to the other individual. If the undesired behavior does not stop, seek assistance from the Principal, Director of Student Life, Director of Student Development, Dean of Students, FLEX Teacher or Form Group Leader.

Administration wants to be an advocate for your student. We want all of our students to see the Principal, Director of Student Life, Director of Student Development, Dean of Students, FLEX Teacher and Form Group Leader as resources in times of need. The Principal's office is not a place of discipline only. Students are encouraged to stop by and share any struggles they encounter with the Principal so that a plan can be developed with the student for how to address the struggle.

Middle School: A Time to Expect

1. EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING GRADES

Historically, grades of middle school students will dip, especially during the third quarter of the school year. This is not only true of TCS students, but middle school students in general. Academics are important, and this can obviously be upsetting to both parent and student alike. Keep in mind that middle school grades do not appear on permanent transcripts. This is not to minimize the importance of grades in middle school, but instead helps maintain perspective regarding their overall value. Again, effort over results needs to be the focus. We encourage you to develop realistic expectations in the area of academics with your student prior to the start of the year, and allow for adjustments to those expectations as needed. Work together on how frequently grades will be monitored to help reduce anxiety and stress over every assignment given.

2. EXPECTATIONS CONCERNING RESPONSIBILITY

Middle school brings increased expectations and responsibilities at school and should at home as well. Your student will increasingly desire to be in charge of his or her life. This should not be handed to him or her all at once. Instead, develop gradual increases in responsibility and freedom at home as your student demonstrates the capability to handle it with maturity.

Embracing Change: Common Questions about Middle School

Communication in middle school is often quite different from elementary school. No longer will you receive a purple folder or direct communication from one classroom or homeroom teacher. To help compensate, you will receive regular communication from the Principal, including a school-wide weekly newsletter called *Inside the Pride* (typically emailed on Sunday evenings). Please make sure we have your

correct email address on file. You may also reach out to your child's FLEX teacher for further information related to school-wide activities.

Keep in mind too that we are here to help. Your student may feel nervous or anxious about starting middle school. This is completely normal and expected. Help them embrace this new adventure. Middle school does not have to be the miserable experience that so many adults remember. With the right preparation, middle school can be a fun and memorable experience in the midst of so much change. Remember our goal is for your child to not only survive but to **THRIVE** these next three years.

Q. My child has always earned good grades, why are they struggling?

Middle school brings new challenges and previous effort may have to increase to achieve the same results. As the work becomes more difficult, help your child adjust his or her study habits to make sure efficient and adequate time is being spent on homework and studying.

Q. If my child is struggling academically, what support or help is available?

If you feel that additional support may be needed for your child, please reach out to the Principal, Academic Coordinator or Director of Student Development for assistance.

Q. Should my child engage in extracurricular activities if the homework load and required study time is greater than in elementary school?

Yes! We cannot express to you enough how important it is to allow your child to engage in activity outside of school. Studies show that students need to express themselves through athletics, performing arts and other hobbies/interests in order to achieve maximum academic success. We strive to help support your child's involvement in extracurricular activities, including church/youth group, by eliminating written homework on Wednesday nights and the weekends.

Q. What honors classes are offered for middle schoolers? How is a student placed in honors classes?

6th Grade - Honors English and Honors Math

7th Grade - Honors English, Honors Math, and Honors Science

8th Grade - Honors English, Honors Math, and Honors Science

We use a combination of assessments, standardized scores and teacher recommendations when considering honors placement. Each honors class includes the top 25 students in that particular subject for that particular grade level.

Q. My child wants to take as many honors classes as possible, is that wise?

It is helpful to keep in mind that honors classes in middle school are not required for those wanting to take honors classes in high school. All 8th grade students are assessed at the end of the year prior to entering high school. The assessment is used for high school honors placement. Honors classes in middle school are primarily for those students who love and excel at a particular subject. Your expectation for excellence as a parent does not mean your child is a good fit for a particular honors class. Honors classes bring additional work and assignments because the expectation is that the honors students love the subject and desire to be challenged. Before making decisions about honors classes for middle school, we encourage you to talk with your child about his or her interest level for each subject.

Our hope and desire is that every student who attends middle school at TCS will learn to thrive during this time of growth and development. If you have any questions or concerns that arise, please reach out to our middle school faculty as we are always more than willing to help support you and your child.