



HOW TO THRIVE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL
A PARENT'S GUIDE

Preparing Students for Life: Natural, Spiritual and Eternal

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 anyway that we can.

The middle school years can be an exciting time of growth and development. At Trinity, our faculty works hard to nurture, encourage and equip each student as we prepare them for the transition to high school. The middle school years are a crucial time for the shaping and teaching of a child's heart due to the many changes undergone during this phase of life. We are excited to partner with you in helping your child navigate through the middle school years, and it is our confident hope that our environment will help each student not only enjoy, but thrive, during these life shaping years.

This manual is meant to provide strategies and tips for understanding middle school and the road ahead. 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 the education of your child. We are here to help so do not hesitate to contact us as needs arise. We look forward to serving your family.

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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 child navigate through these years, and we are here to help inform and equip you to face these challenges with grace, understanding and action.

Middle School: A Time to Learn

Middle school students will experience a greater set of expectations both in the area 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 where 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 child 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 child to fail (and even earn the minor consequences that accompany that failure) helps them adjust 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 mistake. Allow them 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 they attempt 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 child 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 child 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 child 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, student conflict, etc. be quick to communicate to those who can help shed any additional light to a situation. Our faculty and staff want your child to succeed while having a great experience at TCS. From the principal to our teachers, we welcome the opportunity to serve your family any way that we can.

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 guidance counselor or principal.

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 often times run out 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, book bags 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 + RENWEB):** While we do not use agendas at the middle school level, students are highly encouraged to reference RenWeb 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 RenWeb, 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 push 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 child 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 the study hall period during the school day, many of our students can accomplish 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 child is using the provided study hall at school to work on homework.
- Create a study/homework space at home that is suitable for your child's needs.
- Provide study breaks at home. If you determine that your child has procrastinated, send them to bed and allow them to experience the minor consequence of a poor grade if needed. Remember, help them learn those lessons now!
- Email the teacher if you have questions. Don't let your child stress for hours because they are 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 child's lack of understanding regarding the assignment.
- Keep in mind that all of your child'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.
- Review your child's homework and preparation for assessments. Have your child 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 child that maximum effort will lead to desired results. If your child forgets to do an assignment, help them connect that integrity and ownership of one's mistake is 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 child is sick, be sure to let teachers know so that missing work can be gathered. If possible, have your child 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 child needs to learn that the responsibility to obtain missing notes or completing 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. Be sure to encourage your child to keep items locked at all times. 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 which can often be seen in mood swings. Middle school is hard at times because everything feels like it is changing to your child. Understanding and anticipating some of these challenges will help you better prepare to address them as they arise.

1. BEHAVIOR

Keep in mind that major changes begin to occur in your child'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 child realize the fleeting value they place on events is important but often times may feel futile. Perspective will be key in helping your child navigate these years. Being patient as you help them grasp that 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 often times 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 them during these crucial years. Who do they spend time with at school? Who do they consider to be their closest friends? Who do they follow on social media (if allowed access)? Make sure you are informed about who is helping to shape your child by inviting his or her friends to frequently do things with your family.

2. 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 child works through their 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 guidance counselor 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.

- Treat others the way you want to be treated by showing love, respect and kindness (I John 4:7-8)
- Teach your child 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. Often times middle school joking can be taken too far without the person who initiated the joking being aware. Make sure your child 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.
- Administration wants to be an advocate for you. We want all of our students to see both the guidance counselor and principal 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 child 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 child will increasingly desire to be in charge of his or her life. This should not be handed to them at once. Instead, develop gradual increases in responsibility and freedom at home as your child demonstrates the capability to handle it with maturity.

Embracing Change: Common Questions about Middle School

Communication in middle school is often quite different than elementary school. No longer will you receive a purple folder or direct communication from one classroom teacher. To help compensate, you will receive regular communication from the principal, including a weekly newsletter. Please make sure we have your correct email address on file in RenWeb.

Keep in mind too that we are here to help. Your child 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.

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 begins to get 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 or Skills Development Director for assistance.

Q. Should my child engage in extra-curricular 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, fine 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, Honors Science and Honors History

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 in any way that we can.