



Elementary to Middle School Transition Toolkit

This toolkit has been created for educators and parents as they prepare their learners to transition from **elementary to middle school**. The toolkit includes unique activities for this transition.

The transition activities have also been divided into three sections: 1) the spring **Before** the transition year, 2) the **Beginning** of the transition year, and finally 3) transition activities **throughout** the transition year.

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Spring & Summer Before 6th Grade

**For Learners
For Learners and Families
For Parents**

Transition Tools for Middle School Learners



Write-On: Pen Pals with Middle Schoolers

Audience: 5th Graders

When: 5th Grade (Spring)

Overview:

Providing upcoming middle grade school learners an opportunity to participate in a pen-pal program with current middle grade learners will help connect new learners to the middle level environment and answer some of their questions about the transition. Also, it will help teach and review letter writing for all involved.

Procedures/Guidelines:

- Assign each upcoming middle grade learner to a learner who is completing their transition year. Have learners correspond 2-4 times during the last few months of the school year. Letters should address the questions and concerns of the younger student through the eyes of the older learner.
- The first letter should come from the current middle grades learner with basic information about the school, and with questions designed to build a relationship with the younger learner. For example:
 - Do you play an instrument or a sport?
 - What is your favorite subject?
 - Do you have a pet?
 - Who is your favorite performer or athlete?
- The younger learner would respond to the first letter and have an opportunity to ask questions and express concerns.
- Future letters could include advice for secrets to success in the middle grades.
- If possible, host a get-together for those learners who wish to meet their pen-pal in person. Organize ice-breaker activities and provide refreshments. Secure parent permission from all learners attending the get-together.

Things to Consider:

If possible, use first names only in correspondence between learners.

Always read correspondence (for appropriateness of content and language) before it is sent to another learner.

Resources:

- Writing Assignments for Portfolio (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Building Relationships and Boosting Confidence (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)



Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

Audience: 5th Graders

When: 5th Grade (Spring)

Overview:

How young is too young to start thinking about careers? (Hint: It's never too early!) While in elementary school, your career choice is probably the furthest thing from your mind. Right now, you are probably more concerned about grades, friends, sports, and other interests. While you should be thinking about those things, career exploration is a critical part of your educational development.

While even older students are not yet ready to settle on a career choice, it benefits children to begin thinking about all of the options available and what goes into choosing a career. Knowing the correct way to do it, can help you avoid falling for all the career planning myths that could lead you into the wrong direction.

Often times, when elementary learners are asked to think of occupations, only a small number of occupations to which you are exposed, come to mind; doctor, dentist, teacher, firefighter, police officer, and whatever it is their parents and relatives do to make a living. Learning about other occupations broadens your choices and increases the odds that you will find careers that are suitable. As you get closer to having to prepare for them, you can narrow down your choices and even begin to take related courses, once you are in high school.

Things to Consider:

- Have learners choose a career that they are interested in and conduct research on the Career Cruising ILP site (see link in resources section).
- Learners could then dress as a person in their selected career and share information with other learners.

Resource:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Students-and-Families-Great-Schools/Educational-Programming/Counseling/ILP Framework Revised 2017.pdf>



Meeting them on their terms

Audience: 5th Graders

When: 5th Grade (Spring)

Procedures/Guidelines:

- The transition process should be taking place for the full school year prior to the move to the middle school. Middle school administrators/counselors/facilitators of learning/learners should plan regularly scheduled visits of feeder elementary schools. Consider visiting at least once each term of the school year. These visits provide opportunities for learners to ask pertinent questions and to become familiar with some people they will be encountering at the middle school.
- Prior to visiting, learners should be surveyed to determine the issues that most concern them. The results of the survey should be used to plan agendas for future visits thereby providing the information that is most relevant to learners.
- Rising middle school learners could also write specific questions to be shared with middle school visitors in advance. These questions, as well as the answers should be used to develop an “FAQ” for future visitors.

Things to Consider:

It is recommended that visits be conducted with class size groups rather than whole grades. This leads to more informal conversations and allows learners to more freely express any concerns they may have.

From the experiences of Woven Traditions practitioners, despite the dizzying pace of change in the world, fears of today’s 5th-graders are remarkably similar to those of their parents and older siblings.

Undressing in front of others for P.E. seems to be one of learners’ top concern followed by taking harder subjects, taking tests and using a locker.

The transition from elementary school to middle school is an exciting and intimidating step every generation of children takes toward growing independence. How do the fears of today's learners compare to the fears of children 10 years ago and 5 years ago? Do concerns differ based on gender, race or school type (suburban/urban)?

“Difficulty opening lockers is a typical concern of middle grades students and a factor that may contribute to lost instructional time at the beginning of the school year. Our past experiences, based on racial background, show both African American and students of ‘other’ races were more concerned with using a locker in middle school than white students.

In general, girls are more apprehensive than boys about their transition to sixth grade. Female students were significantly more concerned than male students about getting lost, being pressured by peers to drink and smoke, being bullied, and meeting academic challenges, African-American students tend to be more concerned than white students about having enough time to eat lunch and inner-city students are more concerned than students at the urban, suburban and rural schools about having enough time for lunch.

The inner-city students may have shown a higher level of worry regarding sufficient time to complete their meals at lunch because of a lack of access to sufficient meals outside of school. Also, lunch lines tend to be longer at schools with high numbers of students receiving free or reduced lunch, so students toward the end of the line have less time to eat.

Restroom use tends to be a greater concern to students of other races than to white and African American students and it was also a greater concern to students attending inner-city schools than students at suburban schools. Students attending inner-city schools are usually more concerned about making new friends and belonging to the right clubs or groups than their peers at suburban and rural schools. One possible explanation for this difference could be that suburban students tend to have more opportunities for socializing with peers through extracurricular activities. Rural students tend to express concern about getting lost in their new school than suburban students.



Transition Camp

Audience: Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

Transition camps provide an opportunity for learners to acclimate to a new school environment. Camps aid in meeting the social and emotional as well as academic needs of upcoming middle grade learners by offering experiences that create a sense of belonging before the school year begins.

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Choose a theme for the camp (i.e., Put Your Best Foot Forward, Yes I Can, Bridge to Success, Success in the Middle)
- Ask facilitators of learning to recommend current middle grade learners to serve as camp guides.
- Meet with learner guides and their parents to discuss responsibilities and secure writer permission
- Meet with camp guides to develop agenda and select activities
- Visit feeder elementary schools to explain the camp and hand-out permission slips or when upcoming learners visit the school, discuss the camp and hand-out permission slips
- Use a survey at the end of the camp for gathering learners' feedback to use in planning for future camps
- Include sessions for learners that will assist them in making a smooth transition to the middle grades and achieving academic success:
 - Study skills
 - Getting organized
 - What to expect in the middle grades

- Bullying prevention
- Getting to know the school staff
- Touring of the building
- Locker relays
- What's an ILP?
- Dealing with peer pressure

Things to Consider:

- Solicit donations of school supplies to be given to learners in need.
- Ask Middle School Counselors to help with the Transition Camp. Perhaps offering extended days?
- Investigate ways to provide transportation for learners (i.e., public transit, donations from civic groups).
- Place puzzle pieces at different locations in the school. As the learners tour the school, have them collect the puzzle pieces fitting them together to form a shape that aligns with the theme for the camp.

Resources:

- Leadership Skills for Youth Development (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- 6th Grade Parents Guide to Learner Success Literacy & Math (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- 7th Grade Parents Guide to Learner Success Literacy & Math (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- 8th Grade Parents Guide to Learner Success Literacy & Math (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Solving the Relational Puzzle (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Resolving Conflict with a Peer Mediation Process (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Student Character Handbook (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Cultural Competency Character Education Portfolio (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)

Transition Tools for Middle School Learners & Families



Pep Rally

Audience: 5th Graders & Families

When: 5th Grade (Spring)

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Invite rising learners/families from feeder elementary schools to a pep rally to be held during out of school time (evening or weekend).
- Arrange for middle school groups (band, chorus, clubs, teams, etc.) to perform and/or set-up information tables for learners/families to visit.
- Counselors and administrators could staff one table where several computers provide access to the ILP website. Use this time to facilitate exploration of the tool and discuss postsecondary/career goals.
- Provide forms where learners can take notes about the clubs, teams, etc. they are interested in (What should I join?)
- Encourage new learners to get to know each other as well as getting to know upper classman and staff at the pep rally by completing a "Who did I meet?" scavenger hunt.
- Finally, if time permits have learners vote on a mascot and short cheer that can represent this class during their entire middle school experience. Perhaps provide a short list of options for mascots and "class name" that learners can vote on. At the end of the pep rally have upper class cheerleaders guide them through a short cheer.

Things to Consider:

- Though there will be rising 6th graders who already have extensive experience as a member of a team or club, for some this will be a new venture.
- Instruct older learners who sit at information tables to ask about a learner's prior experience. It may be necessary to provide some background information and go over the expectations for participation in each club or team. Consider providing a short hand-out that learners can take with them.



School Expo

Audience: 5th Graders & Families

When: 5th Grade (Spring)

Overview:

In the middle grades, learners often have more opportunities to become part of school teams, clubs, and other types of student organizations than they had in the elementary grades. Participating in these types of school groups can help make a learner feel more connected to the school. Use a school expo as a means for sharing information about school groups and extracurricular activities and for the beginning to connect upcoming learners to the middle grades.

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Arrange for school groups (i.e., band, chorus, cheerleaders, dance team, chess team) to perform. Display learner artwork and class projects from other enrichment/exploratory classes.
- Have clubs, teams, and organizations set-up information tables for learners/families to visit. At the tables have older learners provide access to the Career Cruising website. Use this time to facilitate exploration of the ILP.
- Distribute forms on which learners can take notes about the clubs, teams or organizations in which they are interested.
- Encourage new learners to get to know each other, as well as getting to know older learners and staff, by completing a “Who did I meet” scavenger hunt form.
- Have learners prepare an ongoing slide show or video for playing during the expo that shows learners engaged in various activities both during and after school.
- Create invitations for this event and send to feeder schools for upcoming students to take home to their parents/families.

Things to Consider:

- This event could be combined with a visit for upcoming learners to the middle level school or it could be held after school.
- Though many upcoming middle grade learners may already have experience as a member of a team, club or other type of organization, for some this will be a new venture.
- Instruct older learners who sit at information tables to ask about a learner's prior experience. It may be necessary to provide some background information and go over the expectations for participation in the club, organization, or team.
- Check to see if local businesses will post the date and time of this event on their marquees.



Jump Start

Audience: Incoming 6th Graders & Families

When: Summer before 6th Grade

Overview:

Invite upcoming middle grade learners and their families to attend an informational meeting regarding their transition to the middle level. Separate parents and learners for the first part of the meeting and then bring them back together for the concluding activities.

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Possible topics for the first part of the meeting:

Learners	Parents/Families
<p><u>What will I need?</u></p> <p>Supplies Attitude Books Lockers Agenda books</p>	<p><u>School and involvement in school</u></p> <p>PTO/PTA Volunteering Two-way communication Completing forms Turn in medical forms</p>
<p><u>Where will I go?</u></p> <p>Discuss schedule Tour of the building Team organization Arrival and dismissal Lunch</p>	<p><u>Communication</u></p> <p>Website Text Newsletter Homework hotline ILP E-mail</p>
<p><u>What can I do?</u></p> <p>Attendance Appropriate dress/dress code Behavior expectations</p>	<p><u>The Middle Grades</u></p> <p>The middle school concept Schedule Grading Team organization</p>

At the conclusion of the sessions, reconvene parents and learners together. If time, have learners and parents walk through a mini schedule together. Conclude the Jump Start program by playing Jeopardy based on the information shared during the informational meetings. Divide the group by last names (i.e., A-M and N-Z) or by teams.

Things to Consider:

- If possible, schedule two date options, perhaps a Saturday morning and an evening to better accommodate family schedules.
- Secure staff members or volunteers to assist with transition for non-English speaking families, if applicable.
- Solicit donations from community vendors to provide refreshments and prizes for the Jeopardy game.
- Invite the director of transportation to be present to answer questions about bus schedules and routes.



Success Journeys

Audience: Incoming 6th Graders & Families

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

An effective transition strategy for schools to consider and implement is conducting home visits. This strategy can have a very positive impact on learner success and parent engagement as it helps bridge the gap between home and school and helps facilitate parent and teacher relationships. These visits can provide the teacher with much needed insights that can enhance the child's in-school education. Home visits provide an opportunity to develop a level of trust and rapport between home and school.

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Contact other districts that have implemented home visits either as a voluntary option or as a requirement for all teachers to discuss implementation and monitoring of home visits.
- Choose for the visits, learners at-risk or failure of not performing at grade level, or learners who are academically capable but have other family or personal issues that present a barrier to academic success.
- Provide administrative guidance and support for facilitators of learning that may be reluctant to go on home visits at first.
- Facilitate a professional development opportunity for facilitators of learning to explore the communities from which their learners live. [Home Community Camera Escapade]
- Review with teachers recommended practices for home visits by viewing a home visit "How to" video, such as https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOCVeGt_YDY
- Provide a checklist of best practices that facilitators of learning can use to ensure that the home visit is a positive experience for all involved.

- Distribute a log that facilitators of learning can use to log visits conducted and record anecdotal notes.
- Meet with facilitators of learning as a group after the visits to share experiences.

Things to Consider:

- Facilitators of learning should select learners with whom they would like to develop a closer relationship in order to assist them in reaching their full potential.
- Assign facilitators of learning a partner to work with in conducting the visits.

Resources:

- Home Camera Community Escapade Project Guide (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Home Visit “How To” Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOCVeGt_YDY



Summer Picnic

Audience: Incoming 6th Graders & Families

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

Casual gatherings, such as a summer picnic, are a great way to foster a sense of community for new families before the school year begins.

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Publicize the picnic through a variety of methods:
 - Mail letters announcing the picnic to the learners that will be entering the middle grades for the first time when school begins.
 - Announce in local newspaper and/or on local cable channel and radio stations.
 - Send announcement to local churches to include in their bulletins.
- Offer incentives for attendance (i.e., gas cards, gift certificates, school supplies, tickets for school sponsored events)
- Ask the superintendent and/or other community leaders to be guest chefs that grill hamburgers, hot dogs, and/or chicken breasts for attendees
- Have informational tables (i.e., transportation director to answer bus schedule questions, teachers to hand out supply list, counselor with forms needed to be completed) set up for parents and guardians to visit
- Organize fun activities (i.e. face painting, relay races, arts and crafts, videos) for upcoming learners and their younger siblings that might attend. Ask high school service clubs to help with the activities.
- Provide opportunities for interaction among families by placing tent cards on tables with “conversation starters.” At planned intervals ask families to read the card and discuss the topic at their tables.

Things to Consider:

- Ask local civic clubs to help with the cost and serving food.
- Check with the counseling office for help with contacting families and making arrangements for the picnic.
- Work with ELL and/or migrant programs to ensure that those populations are notified and have transportation.
- Ask the school cafeteria manager to help plan the menu and to help with the preparation of the food.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences in diet, etiquette and dining practice. Offer food selections that accommodate cultural and medical diet restrictions of the population you serve.
- Either hold the picnic inside or if outside, have an alternative plan in case the weather is not cooperative.

Resources:

- Conversation Starters (see following page)

Middle School Age Conversation Starters

1. What new fact did you learn today?
2. What challenged you today?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your day? Why?
4. Who would you like to befriend and why?
5. If you could be the teacher tomorrow, which class would you teach, and what would you do?
6. Did anyone frustrate you today?
7. What would you change about today?
8. Did you learn anything about another country?
9. If you could add anything as an elective class, what would you pick?
10. What is your favorite game or exercise to do in PE?
11. Are there any new children at school? Have you spoken to them?
12. What advice would you give elementary school students about to move to middle school?
13. Who do you think needs a friend at school?
14. What is your favorite and least favorite class?
15. What emoji describes your day?
16. What do people do between classes?
17. Who has the best locker decorations?
18. What's on your mind right now?
19. How do you deal with drama at school?
20. If someone gave you \$20, what would you do with it?
21. If someone hurts your feelings at school, how do you deal with it?
22. If you could swap places with one of your parents for a day, what would you do for the day?

23. Do you prefer to take pictures or be in the picture?
24. If you could pick your own team for X sport or club, who would be on it?
25. What do you love about your teachers?
26. Who could you be nicer to?
27. Is there a teacher that needs a note of encouragement?
28. What is something you wish adults understood about middle school kids?



What can I do about school bullying?

Audience: Incoming 6th Graders & Families

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

During the transition from childhood to adolescence, middle school learners often place more importance on friendships and belonging to a group. They are more aware of how other children act and look. Some children may seem to be searching for a reason to tease or torment another learner. Parents need to understand what to look for and how they can help their child deal with potential bullying at school.

Procedure/Guidelines:

- Begin by having parents complete the Teaching Tolerance Bullying Quiz. Review answers and include the following parenting strategies recommended by the National School Safety Center in Fighting the Bully Battle:
 - Talk often with your child and listen carefully
 - Ask about your child's school day, activities and friends
 - Ask if your child feels safe and comfortable at school
 - Talk about what bullying means
 - Encourage your child to tell you when bullying happens at school
 - Teach that bullying is unacceptable and can be dangerous
 - Stop bullying when it happens at home
 - Be clear about your expectations and consistently discipline when hurtful teasing and bullying occurs among siblings and peers
 - Help your child understand the meaning and positive roles of friendship
 - Help your child choose positive and respectful friends
 - Teach that people can be different in many ways
 - Teach and practice basic manners
 - Help your child find and develop his/her personal talents

- Help your child choose positive and respectful friends
- Help your child choose TV, music and video programs that promote respect, kindness and understanding
- Talk with your child about their school experiences and peers

Resource:

<https://greatlakesequity.org/resource/anti-bullying-quiz>

- Character Education – Middle School Curriculum – *Self-Control*
(Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)

Transition Tools for Middle School

Parents



Understanding my child's growing intellect

Audience: Parents of Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

In order to aid parents in supporting their children's academic growth, share and explain the implications of the intellectual developmental characteristics of young adolescents listed below.

Procedure/Guidelines:

1. Observation Is Key

One of the simplest, yet most effective, ways to learn about child psychology is observation. Show interest in what your children are doing or saying. Observe their actions, expressions, and temperament when they eat, sleep, and play. Keep in mind that your child is unique and may have a personality that stands out, even as he grows. So, avoid comparing your child with other children, as that not only adds stress to parenting, but also makes the child feel inferior.

Do ask yourself a few questions that can help you understand the child's psychology.

- What does the child like to do the most?
- How does he react when he has to do something he does not like, such as eating vegetables, sleeping early or doing homework?
- How social is he? Is he willing to share or try new things?
- How long is the child taking to familiarize himself with his surroundings? Is he able to adjust to the changes in the environment?

While you answer these questions, remember not to judge the child. Just observe to be aware.

2. Spend 'Quality' Time With Your Children

Parents today are busy juggling work and home. Multi-tasking, as they call it, allows them to take care of many things at a time, one of the 'things' being the child. If you have been spending time with your child in this fashion, it is time for a change. If you want to understand your children, you need to make time for them.

- The time you spend with your children at the dinner table or driving them to school and back is not enough. You may have to dedicate time to talk and play with them and spend quality hours that allow you to understand their psychology.
- Conversations with your children let you know what's happening in their life at school and home, what their favorite music or TV show is, and what gets them excited and what doesn't.
- Quality time needn't always mean talking or doing something together. Sometimes you can just sit together and silently observe them to gather some insights about their personality.

3. Children Need Your Undivided Attention

When you plan to spend time with your children, plan to do only that and nothing else. Your children deserve your undivided attention. If you try to talk to your child while you are using electronic devices, cooking, driving or doing something else, chances are you'll miss on the most important insights your child might give you about himself.

Plan at least one activity that allows you to spend time exclusively with your child. When you pay undivided attention to your child, he or she feels safe and validated and is likely to open up to you more.

4. Pay Attention To Your Child's Environment

Research has proven that a child's behavior and attitudes are shaped largely by the environment that he is brought up in. To know the child better, you should pay attention to the environment he is in.

Research also proves that the environment can affect the child's brain development, which in turn affects the development of his language and cognitive skills. The link specifically talks about home environment in comparison to any other.

Your child's behavior is largely dependent on the kind of people that are around him and how they interact with him. Take time to gauge the kind of ambiance that has been created at home and his school. For example, if your child is being aggressive or is withdrawing from socialization, you may want to know what or who has influenced the child to behave in such a manner.

5. Understand How A Child's Brain Functions

Parents may often know their child's physiology, but they don't know how the child's brain works. The brain is shaped by the experiences that the child has, and this in turn impacts how he responds to different situations.

Understanding how a child's brain functions can help you learn about the child's behavior, his decision-making, social, logical, and cognitive abilities.

The wrong experiences can result in imprinting negative responses into your child's mind, having an adverse effect on his overall development.

Knowing how his brain works will help you transform negative experiences or meltdowns into positive experiences or opportunities.

According to Daniel J. Siegel, author of *The Whole-Brainchild: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, you can help your children build a solid foundation for a healthy social and emotional life, and enable them to handle difficult situations with ease, by understanding the brain's functions.

6. Listen – Let Your Children Tell You Their Stories

Talking is good, but listening is important when you have a conversation with your child. Initiate a conversation to get your child talking and then listen to what they are trying to say. Children may not be able to express themselves clearly, which is why you should pay attention to the words that they use and their non-verbal cues as well.

Focus on:

- **Tone:** the way they stress a word or phrase.
- **Expressions:** which tell you how they feel. Try to gauge their emotions when they speak about something to understand if they like it, if they are afraid of it, or if they are stressed about it.
- **Body language:** watch out for eye-contact, how they use their hands and the posture.

Not only should you listen, but also let your child know that they are being heard and taken seriously. Acknowledge what they say and respond to let them know that you understand what they say. If you don't understand, ask questions for clarity. But be careful not to talk too much or ask too many questions, as that can shut your child off completely.

7. Children Express In Different Ways

Your children can express themselves in more than one way. Besides talking, children express their feelings through activities.

- If your children love to draw, write, or act, encourage them to do that more often. Get them to attend art or painting classes and help them express themselves better. You can also give them different themes for drawing, without restricting their imagination.
- Likewise, you can ask your child to maintain a journal in which they can write about what they did on a given day and how they felt about it. The more your child writes or draws, the better he gets at expressing himself.
- Take time to go through their artwork to get an idea of what goes on in their minds. Don't read too much into it, or you may end up displacing your emotions as theirs and misjudge their feelings.
- Let them explain what they are writing or drawing and how they feel about it.

8. Ask The Right Questions

If you want your child to speak, it is important to ask the right kind of questions. Initiate conversations by asking open-ended questions, which would encourage the child to share details.

- Instead of asking “Do you like this song?”, which warrants either a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’, ask “What do you think about this song?”, which will allow the child to say more.
- Instead of asking who they played with, ask them what games they played. Let them explain it to you in details, and don’t cut them off.
- Also, never dodge the questions your child asks. If you do not have an answer to your child’s question, park it and come back to your child with a response later. Brushing away a child’s question as silly can discourage them from asking any questions in future.

9. Educate Yourself About Child Development

Be proactive in understanding the different stages of child development to know how well your child is faring. Take time to read books, online journals, and speak to a specialist who can give you some insight into child psychology and development. When you don’t know what to expect, anything and everything may seem alright or vice-versa. Don’t make wild guesses.

10. Observe Other Children

Sometimes, observing other children who are of the same age as yours can also help you understand your child better. This can let you understand how your child behaves in a social setting and identify his strengths and weaknesses that determine his personality. This does not mean you compare your child with every child his age and pass judgment on who is better.

Parents tend to ascertain their children’s performance abilities by comparing them to other children. However, this can have a negative impact on the child, in the long-term. While comparison is not always bad, it can be dangerous when you overdo it.

11. Empathize – Step Into Your Child’s Shoes

Sometimes you have to think like a child, and even act like one to reach out to them. Empathy is an important quality that parents should develop if they want to understand their children better. You may be aware of what your children are going through when they tell you about it.

But you may not even come close to understanding what they are experiencing if you cannot empathize. Below are some simple ways to empathize:

- Listen to their feelings; try to gauge what they are going through.
- Use their language to help them understand you better. Ask yourself this – if you were a child, would you understand adult-like talk, with complicated words and expressions?
- When you don't understand your child's behavior, ask yourself – how would you have behaved or reacted if you were in your child's place?

12. What's Your Child's Emotional Quotient?

“What a distressing contrast there is between the radiant intelligence of the child and the feeble mentality of the average adult.” – Sigmund Freud

For a long time, children were not considered as important as adults. Their feelings and emotions were taken for granted, for it was assumed that they'd forget all of it when they grow up.

Now, we know it is not true – what a child goes through in his childhood has a significant impact on the kind of person he grows up to be. As a parent, you should never underestimate your child's emotions, or his capacity to manage them.

Emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ) is a person's ability to identify, express, and control their emotions. Children are born with a unique temperament. Some may be outspoken and proactive while others may be shy or slow-to-warm-up.

As a parent, it is your responsibility to understand your children's EQ and do what is needed to help them grow into healthy, emotionally intelligent adults.

13. Don't Assume

Do not assume that you know what your child wants or how she feels at any given point of time. If your child is not complaining, you may assume that she is happy. You assume that you are a great parent because your child behaves well in public and does not throw tantrums.

When you assume, you are closing yourself to understanding your children accurately, thereby making poor choices for your children. Asking them should help clear any air of doubt and you will know for sure what the matter is.

Things to Consider:

- Different students have different levels of intellect. As the parent, please keep in mind that each child will develop at their own pace.
- Check local agencies for summer or extracurricular enrichment activities that build upon each child's specific abilities and interests.
- All children are capable of learning at high levels. Be aware of middle school learners' growing sense of gender roles and gender bias concerning subject preference or perceived ability level.



Physical Development

Audience: Parents of Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

Children entering middle school display a wide array of developmental stages. Physical development at this age is particularly varied. Each child is developing at his/her own pace however there are some general characteristics that all children will exhibit during early adolescence.

Procedure/Guidelines:

The following characteristics and suggestions for families can be used in speaking with parents and assisting them in understanding their children's needs.

Most young people aged nine to 12 will:

- Have an emerging sense of self as a young adult
- Feel conscious of their physical development and how they choose to express it
- Understand jokes with adult content
- Feel concerns about being normal
- Feel anxious about puberty, when it will happen, how it will occur, how to be prepared, etc.
- Feel shy about asking questions of caregivers, and may act like they already know all the answers
- Value privacy highly
- Help young people understand that, while they are maturing physically, they still have lots of emotional and cognitive growth ahead.

Things to Consider:

- This subject matter may make some parents uncomfortable for various reasons (upbringing, religious beliefs, etc.) however, it is important that they have a basic understanding of the changes which may affect the child's academic and emotional progress.
- Check with local agencies about physical activities within your community.
- YMCAs or YWCAs, 4-H/Youth Development, local parks & recreation departments and summer enrichment programs may want to provide informational materials for families.
- The American Girl Doll company publishes a great series of books for adolescent girls that may help more shy girls gain answers to questions they would otherwise be unwilling to ask.



Parent Academy: Social/Emotional Development

Audience: Parents of Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

The transition to middle grades occurs at the same time when learners are making the transition from childhood to adolescence. This sometimes-tumultuous period of transition can negatively impact academic achievement, performance motivation, and self-perception.

Procedure/Guidelines:

They are:

- experiencing profound physical maturation and change
- beginning to think of themselves as individuals with an identity that extends beyond their families
- exerting independence and focusing primarily on relationships with peers
- experiencing challenges at home as both parents and children struggle with changing roles

What can parents do:

Self-Awareness: Assessing one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths maintaining a well-grounded sense of self-confidence.

Before you can begin to lead others, you must first know how to lead yourself. This has been the key to becoming a leader since the days of Socrates and Aristotle. "Know thyself" was the inscription over the Oracle at Delphi the Greek mecca of wisdom. It is by this principle that the great leaders of the past, present, and future gain an effective followership and achieve their goals. Leadership guru, Warren Bennis, states, "Know thyself means separating who you are and who you want to be from what the world thinks you are and wants you to be."

Parents should be encouraged to remain steadfast in their involvement in their child's education, even though they may be met with resistance from their child. The following strategies provide clear direction for parents.

- Respect Their Privacy, But Don't Close Them Off
- Be Patient with Their Mood Swings
- Set Limits, But Give Them Some Choices
- Understand Their Need to Be Involved
- Respect Their Developing Intellect
- Show Them Why Nutrition Matters
- Let Them Know You Care

Things to Consider:

- It may be beneficial to include your school's guidance counselor or local services or health department in this event
- Contact your local cooperative extension office for nutritional guidance

Resources:

- Module 1 Parent Retreat – Self-Awareness (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)



Parent Academy: Sexuality

Audience: Parents of Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

Children entering middle school display a wide array of developmental stages. Physical and sexual development at this age is particularly varied. Each child is developing at his/her own pace however there are some general characteristics that all children will exhibit during early adolescence. The following characteristics and suggestions for families can be used in speaking with parents and assisting them in understanding their children's needs.

Procedure/Guidelines:

Most young people aged nine to 12 will:

- Have an emerging sense of self as a young adult
- Feel conscious of their physical development and how they choose to express it
- Understand jokes with adult content
- Feel concerns about being normal
- Feel anxious about puberty, when it will happen, how it will occur, how to be prepared, etc.
- Feel shy about asking questions of caregivers, and may act like they already know all the answers
- Value privacy highly

To help nine- to 12-year-old youth develop a healthy sexuality, families should:

- Help young people understand puberty and the changes they are going through and that these changes, including menstruation and nocturnal emissions (ejaculation), are normal.
- Respect young people's privacy while encouraging open communication.

- Convey that growth and maturation rates differ from person to person.
- Help young people understand that, while they are maturing physically, they still have lots of emotional and cognitive growth ahead and that sexual intercourse is not healthy, appropriate, or wise at this time in their lives.
- Acknowledge that abstinence is normal and healthy, that sexual development is healthy and natural, and that, as they grow older, there will be many ways to express sexuality that do not include intercourse.
- Discuss the important relationship between sexual and emotional feelings.
- Be open to conversations about contraception and condoms and respond honestly and accurately when young people ask about them.

Things to Consider:

- The local health department can be a good source for workshops, speakers and materials.
- This subject matter may make some parents uncomfortable for various reasons (upbringing, religious beliefs, etc.) however, it is important that they have a basic understanding of the child's new awareness of their own sexuality and how this may affect academic and emotional progress.



Parent Academy: Cyber Bullying and Cyber Safety

Audience: Parents of Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

During the transition from childhood to adolescence, middle school learners often place more importance on friendships and belonging to a group. They are more aware of how other children act and look. Some children may seem to be searching for a reason to tease or torment another learner.

Warning Signs:

- Social withdrawal
- Excessive feelings of rejection
- Feeling of being picked on and persecuted
- Low interest in school and poor academic performance
- Expression of violence in writings and drawings
- Uncontrollable anger
- Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors
- History of discipline problems
- Prejudicial attitudes
- Drug and alcohol use
- Affiliation with gangs
- Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms
- Serious threats of violence

Share prevention/intervention strategies:

- Shared responsibility among child, school, home, and community
- Support learners in being responsible for their actions. Learners need to be actively involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating violence prevention/intervention programs.
- Teaching positive and socially acceptable skills, such as anger management and problem- solving skills.
- Encouraging families to keep firearms out the reach of children.

Things to Consider:

- Share a list of contacts within and outside of the school for learners who are experiencing thoughts of self-harm.
- Invite a local child psychologist or psychiatrist to speak about youth and social media.
- Invite local law enforcement to discuss illegal drug use and abuse among youth and teens.

Resources:

- Parent/Family Character Handbook (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Character Education – Middle School Curriculum – *Respect, Responsibility, Self-Control* (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)



Connecting to Content

Audience: Parents of Incoming 6th Graders

When: Summer before 6th grade

Overview:

Engaging parents with the curriculum their children will be following is an important step to insuring academic success. Sessions offered should include content specifics: what your child will be learning in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and elective courses.

Procedures/Guidelines:

- Sessions should be presented by content teachers and include
 - basic content specific vocabulary
 - syllabus for the academic year
 - course expectations
 - an abbreviated demonstration lesson
- This is a time to share contact information, homework hotlines or virtual homework listings.
- Discuss teacher specific grading practices, for example share your policy for late work or extra credit options.
- Share a rubric and explain its use. Display samples of proficient learner work with scoring guides so that parents understand what is expected of their learner.
- Provide parents with supply lists and any information regarding large or long-term projects, assignments and activities
- Discuss strategies parents can use to best assist their children with homework or projects
- Share options for parents to visit or volunteer in the school

Things to Consider:

- It may be helpful to create a simple explanation of Common Core and how parents might find information if interested in the subject.
- If supply lists are going to be presented, have a Family Resource Coordinator on hand to be able to direct families who may be in financial need to free or reduced prices for school supplies.
- Have a copy of the school's student handbook on hand for review by parents.
- Display a sample progress report or report card for parents to view.

Resources:

- 6th Grade Parents Guide to Learner Success Literacy & Math (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- 7th Grade Parents Guide to Learner Success Literacy & Math (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- 8th Grade Parents Guide to Learner Success Literacy & Math (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Newsletter – Engaging Daily Studying Time at Home (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)
- Middle School Character Education Curriculum – Service-Learning Projects Section (found within each Character Trait) (Did You Know Publishing, Inc.)