

HOW TO BUILD STRONG HABITS

The two most critical skills that middle school students need to be successful are organizational/study skills and

communication/self-advocacy skills. Many parents assume that these skills can be mastered via classroom instruction. While teachers do what they can to teach these skills, classroom instruction cannot take the place of the time a parent spends with his/her child teaching these skills. Students at this age need consistent one-on-one instruction over a period of time if they are to master these skills that are so critical to academic success. The good news is that it only takes a few minutes each day for one or two months for middle school students to learn and master these skills.

ORGANIZATIONAL & STUDY SKILLS

For most students, middle school will be the first time they have had **six different teachers**--each with a different teaching style and set of expectations. Students may not be used to taking all their supplies and belongings with them to each class. This situation will undoubtedly require organizational skills that most students at this age have not yet acquired. Parent involvement is crucial at this point if a student is to make a successful transition.

Help your child learn to stay organized allowing him/her to feel his/her input is valued.

Help your child **create a system** for keeping backpack and binders organized starting the first day of school. Everything in the backpack should have a specific place it is kept. Decide on the number of binders needed: One binder for all six classes? One binder for odd classes and one for even? The use of dividers in binders will enable your child to find papers quickly and easily. Some teachers will have preferences on how students keep their materials organized. If not, it is suggested to use larger dividers for each class (math, English, etc.) and smaller dividers within each class labeled "assignments," "notes/handouts," and "tests/quizzes." It is critical that your child gets into the habit of putting every paper in its proper place right away. If your child knows you will check his/her binder(s) and backpack every night, this will train him/her to keep organized on a daily basis.



Have your child **write all assignments and due dates** in his/her agenda for every class every day (agendas are provided the first day of school). If your child has no homework, he/she should write "no HW." Check the agenda daily to make sure that homework for every class is filled in. For details on how students should use their agendas, go to the EW Counseling website and click on "Parent Information," then "How to Use the Student Agenda." You may also obtain a copy of the handout from the counseling center. If students are not using the agenda, you can also rely on teacher websites or google classroom for a calendar of assignments and copies of handouts given in class.

Set up a regular **weekly study schedule**. Set aside 7-10 hours per week, scheduling breaks if needed. Be specific (ex: Mondays 3:00-4:30 pm). When finished with homework, he/she should study for tests or work on projects. If there is still time remaining, your child should sit quietly and read until the end of study time. Knowing that study time is inflexible, no matter how much homework your child has, helps him/her keep from rushing through homework.



NIGHTLY PROCEDURE

1. Instruct your child to show you his/her agenda at the beginning of study time. You can also check teacher websites or Google classroom for a calendar of assignments and copies of handouts given in class.
2. Help your child prioritize the order in which every task should be accomplished.
3. Check-in periodically to ensure your child is on task and to see if he/she needs any help.
4. Instruct your child to show you all work completed at the end of study time. If your child studied for a test, take a few minutes to quiz him/her.
5. Check backpack and notebooks to make sure your child is organized and prepared for the next day. Decide on a certain place in the notebook where assignments should be kept that need to be turned in the next day.



FOLLOW UP

Once you feel comfortable that your child has learned the organization/study skills needed, it is critical that you develop a follow-up plan to ensure that these skills are mastered. It cannot be emphasized enough the importance of gradually reducing the time spent checking in with your child. Begin by checking the agenda and backpack every other day, then once a week, until you are confident your child is able to handle the academic demands on his/her own.

If this plan is implemented effectively, after a few weeks your child should develop a habit of good study skills that will bring success in middle school, and provide adequate preparation for the academic rigor of high school. If you encounter obstacles while following this plan, click on "Parent Information", then "Improving Your Child's Grades" on the counseling website for troubleshooting ideas. You may also obtain this handout from the counseling office.

COMMUNICATION AND SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

While starting middle school can be challenging and often intimidating, it is important for students at this age to begin feeling comfortable asking questions if they don't understand something or need help. This may include getting clarification on homework or asking a teacher why he/she received a certain grade on an assignment. Although it can be frightening for students at first, the more they ask, the more comfortable they will feel advocating for themselves.

Parents can help alleviate discomfort by role-playing with their child to help him/her decide on the best way to address the issue. The most common mistake students make is confronting the teacher at inappropriate times. Encourage your child to wait to address the issue at a time when his/her teacher is not distracted by other students. Typically, the best time to approach a teacher is before or after the class bell rings or before or after school. Follow up with your child to make sure the issue is taken care of.

After allowing your child to handle the situation, if you are not satisfied with the result, it may be time for you to email the teacher. If a teacher does not get back to you in a timely manner, please contact the counselor. It may be that the teacher's computer is down or he/she has been out sick and unable to contact you. For more information on how to communicate with teachers, please read "A Successful Experience with your Child's Teachers" on the counseling website.

