

Tips for Elevators: Preparing Your Student for Middle School

Students entering middle school often experience a variety of fears, from how to find their classrooms to worrying about bullies. Here are some strategies for helping your student work through those fears.

Give your student opportunities to express his feelings about middle school. If your student isn't bringing up the topic but you notice that he is more distracted or stressed out than usual, initiate a conversation. Acknowledge the change that is coming and ask open-ended questions to see if anything is worrying him.

Don't minimize his fears and concerns. It's tempting to try to downplay them or respond with a blanket statement like "You'll be fine." Sometimes just listening and empathizing is enough. Listen to what he has to say and offer practical suggestions if it appears he wants your advice.

Help your student overcome fears of the unknown. If she's worried about opening a combination lock, bring one for her to practice on. If getting between classes sounds impossible, get a stopwatch and create a course so she can see how long it takes to get from one place to another. If homework sounds scary, ask her teacher or counselor to provide some guidance. Make sure she knows where the bus stop is.

Talk about your own transitions, during middle school or any time in your life. Strategic self-disclosure may be a useful tool to help your student see that his worries are normal and expected. You may even get a laugh or two as you describe your own experiences and how you handled them.

Help your student get organized. Middle school means more homework and a greater need to stay organized to keep up with assignments from multiple teachers. You can relieve your mentee's worries about schoolwork by helping him develop his organizational skills. Look at how his work is currently organized and offer tips for improvements, and talk about how he can organize his free time to get homework done.

Help your student set goals for getting involved in new things. Look at elective class offerings together and check out extracurricular activities. Talk about how an after-school activity can help her make new friends, and how elective classes allow her to follow her own interests with students who share them.

Point out your student's strengths and abilities. Early adolescence is a time of plummeting self-esteem and self-confidence. Find ways to remind your mentee about her abilities and how they will help her be successful in her new school. Be specific in your praise. For example, "You've really gotten organized with your schoolwork this year. That will help a lot when you start middle school."

Talk about friendships. Changing schools doesn't have to mean losing friendships. See if your student can name some other students he wants to get to know better who are going to the new school. Talk about how he has made new friends in the past. Remind him he has friends in other settings, too—in the neighborhood, place of

worship, or sports activities.