

# Tips on How to Survive Middle School

by Karen Frazier

Entering middle school is a big change in the life of a student. With increased academic requirements and a growing social life, middle school presents challenges students likely have not faced in earlier grades.

## **Making Friends**

In middle school, social concerns are very important to many students. You may be worried that you won't fit in, or you won't make many friends. While it's normal to worry about social situations and friendships, the following tips can help you find loyal and fun friends who share your interests and attitudes.

## **Introduce Yourself**

You'll probably know some of the kids entering middle school with you, but you may be meeting new students from other schools, as well. While it's always comfortable to hang out with people you already know, being open and friendly to students you have not met before can help you make new friends. Smile and introduce yourself to new people. Show an interest in them. Ask them about their interests and background, and discuss interests you share in common. Then, when you've met new people, introduce your old friends to them, as well.

## **Maintain Existing Friendships**

Don't get so caught up in new friendships that you let your old friends fall by the wayside. These are the friends who have known you for a long time, and you are friends for a reason. Instead, introduce new friends to old friends and maintain both types of friendship. In that way, you'll expand your group of friends, which benefits everyone.

## **Join Clubs and Activities**

Middle schools often have lots of activities for students based on their interests. Joining a club or participating in an after school activity or sport can help you find other students who have common interests. They are also a lot of fun. Having fun with other students via clubs, activities, and sports can help you build friendships and make your time in middle school more enjoyable.

## **Be Approachable**

Other students are more likely to approach someone who is smiling and seems friendly. Greet other students with a smile and a friendly hello. If someone you don't know approaches you to start a conversation, then be nice to them and engage in the conversation. Be open to new friendships. Invite someone having lunch alone to join you, or ask someone with a common interest to join a club you like.

## **Be Yourself**

The best way to make friends is to be yourself. If you act like somebody you're not, chances are you'll attract people you don't like very much or have to engage in activities you don't really enjoy. You want friends who like you for who you genuinely are, and

being yourself is the best way to attract these people to you. Behave in ways that are natural to who you are. Instead of trying to impress a certain "group" or "type" of person in order to make friends by acting or dressing in a manner you think they'll like, choose to show everyone who you truly are by letting your personality shine through. Then you'll know the friends you make are those who like you for you, and not for any other reason.

## **Academics**

While social life is important, the purpose of school is academic growth. Middle school classes may be more difficult and require more homework than earlier grades. The following tips will help you thrive academically.

### **Participate in Class**

Even if it feels uncomfortable to talk in class, participating in classroom activities will help improve your understanding of the subject. Raise your hand and ask questions if you need clarification from the teacher, and participate in games and discussions. Likewise, it's important to pay attention when the teacher talks so you don't miss important concepts.

### **Take Notes**

Taking notes is a great way to remind yourself of what you learned at a later time. Note taking can also focus your attention during lectures so you don't drift off into a daydream. Notes also provide a good source of material for review when you are preparing for a test or some other class project.

### **Do Your Homework**

Even if you're busy with sports and other activities, it is very important to do your homework and turn it in on time. Set aside time every day for homework, and do it in a place where you don't have any distractions. When you're doing your homework, turn off your television, don't play video games, and don't engage in texting or snap chatting. All of these things will distract you, making your homework take longer to complete and possibly keeping the information you're trying to learn from sinking in.

### **Study for Tests**

Even if you do an in-class review before a test, studying on your own will help you be completely prepared. Don't wait until the night before to study for a test. Instead, study for 10 or 15 minutes each day in the days leading up to the test. You can also study with friends or in groups. This can be a terrific way to prepare. Quiz each other or have question and answer sessions. Just like when you do your homework, minimize distractions from cell phones, television, video games, and siblings when you study for a test.

### **Ask for Help if You Need It**

Don't wait until you're so far behind that catching up seems impossible. Instead, if you are struggling with a concept, ask for help. There are many places you can go for help. Ask questions in class, talk to your teacher after class, or ask other students. Tell your parents you are struggling and ask if they can help, or if they can help you find a tutor. Likewise,

you can find homework help from reliable online sources that can get you quickly back on track.

### **Getting Organized**

Organization is really important to help you do well in school. Organizing your notebooks is helpful. Keep notes for each class separate from other classes. You can do this by having a spiral notebook for every class, or by having a large binder with dividers for each class. If you're using a binder, keep all of your homework assignments in dated order behind the class notes. If you're using spiral notebooks, have a folder for each class in which you keep all of your assignments. Keeping old assignments can help you when you study for a test.

### **Use Your Agenda Planner**

Carry your agenda planner with you to every class. Enter all homework assignments along with their due dates on the appropriate date. Enter tests and other important projects, as well. That way, you'll always know what is due and be able to plan your time accordingly.

### **Be Prepared**

Make sure you go to class with all the supplies you'll need for that class. Keep a supply of sharpened pencils and fresh pens in your locker, as well as extra notebook paper and any special supplies you might need such as calculators. You can designate one shelf of your locker or a compartment in your backpack for extra supplies. Then, transfer a few pens, pencils, and erasers to your binder as soon as you run out so you'll never be caught unprepared.

### **Keep Your Locker Clean**

A messy locker makes it very difficult to find what you need. Keep your locker tidy so you can quickly find the items, books, and notebooks you'll need for your next class.

### **Facing Challenges**

Every situation presents challenges, and middle school is no different. How you meet these challenges will affect your overall middle school experience.

### **Bullying**

Experiencing bullying can make school very difficult. If you experience bullying during middle school, there are things you can do. Use counselors, parents and teachers to help you strategize what to do if you are bullied. Don't be afraid to talk to an adult such as your parent or the school counselor, who can help you get through the situation. Know that if you are being bullied, you are not alone. There are people there who can help you.

### **Boys/Girls**

Chances are you've really started to notice members of the opposite sex. You may have a crush on someone or really want a boyfriend/girlfriend. These feelings are perfectly normal. Be yourself and be open to friendship. It's important to remember, however, that boyfriends and girlfriends come and go. If your crush doesn't like you back, or if your relationship doesn't work out, it may feel terrible in the moment, but it isn't the end of the world. Before long, you'll find someone else who catches your eye.

## **Peer Pressure**

Friends and acquaintances may be trying all sorts of different things in middle school. You may hear about other kids drinking, smoking, taking drugs, or engaging in other risky behaviors. Some of your friends may even ask you to participate. When friends and acquaintances push you to try these types of risky behaviors, it's called peer pressure. Giving in to peer pressure can have an effect on many areas of your life including academic, physical, emotional, and mental. If friends are pressuring you to engage in risky behaviors, it's important to take control of the situation. Know that kids who don't like you because you don't party or engage in risky behaviors are not true friends. Your true friends would never push you to do something unsafe or uncomfortable. If you're feeling a lot of peer pressure, talk to an adult you trust such as your parents, the school counselor, or an older relative. They can help you develop strategies for effectively dealing with peer pressure.

## **Changing Bodies**

Middle school is the time when most kids' bodies go through the greatest deal of change. These changes may make you feel self-conscious. Realize that everyone else around you is changing, as well. If someone teases you about the changes to your body, it may be because the person teasing you feels uncomfortable about the changes he or she is experiencing. Working with a trusted adult can help you manage some of these changes. Likewise, practicing proper hygiene such as regular showers, using deodorant, washing your face and hair daily, and using acne products if needed can minimize some of the embarrassment associated with bodily changes. Even if you do feel embarrassed about the changes to your body, project an air of self-confidence. Stand up straight and look others in the eye. Don't tease others about the changes to their bodies. Doing these things will help you go through this phase with grace.

## **Locker Room**

Many middle school students worry about gym class - particularly the showers and the locker room. Remember that everyone else in the locker room is feeling just as self-conscious as you are. Most of them probably aren't even paying attention to you because they're so worried about how they are feeling. You can bring cleaning wipes and deodorant in your gym bag. Use the wipes to clean any sweaty areas such as your armpits, and then reapply deodorant before getting dressed.

## **Surviving and Thriving in Middle School**

Whether the challenges of middle school and junior high school are academic or social, students can take control and make the experience productive and enjoyable. By using the above tips, you will not just survive middle school, you will thrive!