

How Do You Know When a Student Is Struggling with This Transition?

Here are some signs and symptoms of transition distress:

- a decrease in school grades from elementary to middle school and a general lack of success in school
- a decline in school interest
- diminished self-concept, self-belief, and confidence in one's abilities
- an increase in school absences/tardiness
- an increase in behavior problems at school resulting in frequent discipline
- expression of feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- use of avoidance strategies to problem-solve rather than facing the problem head-on

If you recognize these symptoms in a student, be sure to seek opportunities to provide more support, perhaps involving the school counselor, parents/guardians, and other appropriate adults.

Conclusion

The journey into middle school is one that is exciting, yet scary; challenging, but potentially very rewarding. For most students, this transition leads to greater self-understanding and positive growth—social, academic, and emotional. It is our hope that this video provides you with some essential tools to inspire this positive change in young people's lives.

Moving On to Middle School

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

To the Facilitator

Before showing the video, take time to review this guide, which provides general information about the transition to middle school and a suggested session outline. Also included is a transition planner to help students prepare for middle school and a newsletter that encourages parental support during this transition time.

Purpose of This Video

This video helps students deal with the issues of growing up and moving from elementary school to middle school. It is designed to stimulate a conversation that goes well beyond the video content, to encourage students and adults to work together to ease the stress of this important transition, and to enhance school success.

How Can This Video Be Used?

This video can be used in a variety of settings, including

- student/parent orientation meetings
- school open houses
- homeroom or general class discussions
- a “moving on” session in elementary school
- a “welcoming” session in middle school

In addition, this video can be used with young people in after-school or community youth programs.

Learning Objectives for the Video

After viewing this video, students will be able to

- identify the rewards and challenges of moving on to middle school
- apply a variety of strategies to successfully cope with the stress of moving on to middle school
- motivate themselves to seek out adult and peer support if they are struggling with this transition

Introduction

Research shows that of all the transitions students face during their school years, the transition from elementary to middle school, for many, is the most difficult. During this time, young people face a variety of academic and personal challenges—larger schools, more and harder

classes, new and changing friends, changing bodies, and growing peer pressure, to name just a few.

Most children progress through this turbulent time without great stress or serious struggle. For a small percentage, however, this transition is a difficult one that may lead them down a path toward academic failure and a variety of negative, risky behaviors including the use of alcohol and other drugs. These students need additional information, support, and encouragement provided by significant adults in their lives as well as peer support offered by positive friendships and other relationships.

What Can Your School Do to Ease This Transition?

Schools can do a number of things to ease this transition to middle school. Here are just a few ideas:

- create smaller “schools” or learning centers within the school, allowing students to receive more attention and feel more connected
- foster more opportunities for students to build supportive relationships with teachers
- have older students mentor younger students
- develop an orientation to middle school that involves teachers, students, and families
- provide welcoming activities that include a school visit, building tour, and an introduction to the school’s curriculum and after-school programs
- encourage parents to have continued interest in their child’s education (a parent newsletter is included in this guide to aid this effort)
- publicize who the adult helpers are in the building and how they can be contacted

Moving On to Middle School

Suggested Session Outline

Here is a suggested outline for a 50-minute student session, which includes the viewing of the *Moving On to Middle School* video. Adapt this outline to fit your group's needs and time frame.

Materials Needed:

- *Moving On to Middle School* video
- VCR/monitor
- "My Transition Planner" handout (included in this guide)
- parent newsletter (included in this guide)
- pens or pencils

Preparation Needed:

- Be sure to preview the video and write down some of its key messages to review with students. Think through possible answers to the discussion questions before the session.
- Photocopy "My Transition Planner," one per student.
- Photocopy the parent newsletter, one per student.

Getting Started (3 minutes):

Ask students: **What do you think it will be like in middle school? How might it be different from your experience in elementary school?**

Allow several students to respond.

Explain: **Today, we're going to talk about moving on to middle school and what that transition will be like. We're going to start by showing a video.**

Playing the Video (17 minutes):

Play the video. Make sure every student can easily see and hear the video.

Discussing the Video (10 minutes):

Ask students the following questions:

1. **What were some of the rewarding or positive aspects of moving on to middle school that were mentioned in the video?**

(Possible answers: greater variety of classes; more or new friends; more freedom and independence; more activities a person can be involved in)

2. **What are YOU looking forward to in moving on to middle school?**

Allow several students to respond.

3. **What were some of the challenges students faced in moving on to middle school that were mentioned in the video?**

(Possible answers: changing friends; bigger school; getting lost; more homework; harder classes; being the youngest in the school; changing bodies; peer pressure)

4. **What are some of the concerns YOU have about moving on to middle school?**

Be sure to spend extra time on this question. Allow several students to express their concerns.

5. **What are some things YOU can do to make this transition easier for yourself?**

Have students share ideas from the video, but also their own ideas.

(Possible answers: get involved in school activities; be open to new friends; allow old friends to change; find a teacher or adult who can support you; ask for help if you get lost or have questions; resist the pressure from friends to use alcohol or drugs; get organized; set personal goals; find a strong interest and develop it)

6. **Optional:** If there is time, allow students to briefly share any other ideas or concerns that were raised by the video.

Spend a few minutes talking about the people who will be available to support the students in this transition. This may include their homeroom teacher, school counselor, other teachers, coaches, parents/guardians, and friends. If available, give specific names of school staff that students can go to for help.

Going Deeper (15 minutes):

Divide students into groups of two or three. Give each student one of the “My Transition Planner” handouts and a pen or pencil (if they don’t have one).

Explain: **I have given each of you a planner that will help you prepare for this transition to middle school. I would like each of you to fill in the first two statements by yourself.**

Allow students a minute or two to fill in these questions.

Explain: Now, working as a group, help each other fill in statements 3 through 9 on your planner. When you are done with this, fill in statement 10 on your own.

As students are filling in their planners, be sure to walk around the room offering ideas.

Optional: If there is time, have students share some of their answers on their planners.

Taking It Home (5 minutes):

Review some of the key concepts covered in the video. Then encourage students to take their “My Transition Planner” home and review it periodically as they make the transition to middle school.

Also hand out a copy of the parent newsletter to each student. Ask students to take this newsletter home and share it with their parent(s) or guardian(s).

(Optional: Mail the newsletter instead.)

(Optional: Have parents sign the newsletter and send it back with their child to confirm they read it.)

Extending the Learning (Optional):

Here are some additional ideas, if you would like to spend more time on this topic with your students:

Activity 1:

Invite middle school students to talk with your students about their experience in middle school. What was the transition like for them? What helped make the transition easier?

Activity 2:

Schedule a time when your students can tour the middle school. Ask the school’s principal, counselor, or other adult to give the tour and to spend time talking about the school and who is there to help students if needed.

Activity 3:

Ask students to describe some of the situations they are concerned about in moving on to middle school. Choose a few examples and have students role-play how they would handle these situations in positive ways. After each role-play, talk about the situation and how it was handled. Talk about any other positive ways to deal with the situation as well.

My Transition Planner

This transition planner is designed to help you better prepare for middle school.
Fill out each area as completely as you can.

<p>1. Three things about middle school that I am looking forward to are:</p>	<p>6. If I feel unsafe at my new school, I will:</p>
<p>2. Three things that concern me about moving on to middle school are:</p>	<p>7. Two things I will do to reduce the stress of this transition are:</p>
<p>3. To prepare myself to move on to middle school, I plan to:</p>	<p>8. A talent that I plan to further develop in middle school is:</p>
<p>4. Key people in my life who can help make this move easier are:</p>	<p>9. My family can help me meet the challenges of middle school by:</p>
<p>5. Activities that I plan to get involved with at my new school are:</p>	<p>10. Overall, my feelings about middle school can be summed up in these words:</p>

your School Connection

SCHOOL:

DATE:

Helping Your Child Move On to Middle School

Your son or daughter is moving on to middle school! This newsletter is designed to provide you with ideas of how you can support your child through this important transition in life.

Why Is the Transition to Middle School So Important?

Research shows that of all the transitions students face during their school years, the transition from elementary to middle school, for many, is the most difficult. During this time, young people face a variety of academic and personal challenges.

Most children move through this time without great stress. For some, however, this transition is a difficult one that may



lead them toward academic failure and risky behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use. These children need additional support from significant adults like you.

One of the greatest things you can do for your child during this time is to be there, to listen, to support, and to provide encouragement.

A Movin' On Moment

Talk to your child about your experiences in moving from elementary school to middle school or junior high school. What was it like for you? What did you like? What was hard? Then ask your child to share what she or he is excited or concerned about in this transition.

What More Can You Do to Help with This Transition?

Here are some more great ways to help your child through this challenging transition:

- Be an involved and engaged parent at home and school.
- Encourage your child to join at least one healthy activity each year and support his or her involvement.
- Establish and clearly communicate your family rules. Be consistent about consequences.
- Encourage your child to share his or her feelings. Take what your child says seriously.
- Help your child learn to make decisions regardless of peer pressure.
- Talk to your child about avoiding the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Know your child's friends and communicate with their parents.
- Help your child develop ways of coping with change, such as exercising.



How Can You Tell When Your Child Is Struggling with This Transition?

Be aware of the following signs and symptoms that your child may be struggling with the transition to middle school:

- a decrease in grades from elementary to middle school and a general lack of success or interest in school
- lowered self-concept and confidence in his or her abilities



- an increase in behavior problems at school resulting in frequent discipline
- expression of feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- an avoidance of problems rather than facing them head-on

Another Movin' On Moment

HERE IS AN IMPORTANT TOPIC TO DISCUSS WITH YOUR CHILD:

What should your child do if she or he gets into a situation where alcohol or other drugs are being used?

SUGGESTION:

Many parents encourage their child to call them, no matter where or what time, to come get them in this situation. If your child knows it is okay to call, he or she could avoid these potentially dangerous situations.

What Should You Do If Your Child Is Having Problems?

Intervene early. Try to address the issue with your child as soon as you can. School staff are here to support your efforts.

Feel free to contact:

Lastly, Enjoy Your Emerging Adolescent

- Know that you still play a key role in helping your child cope with change.
- Maintain a sense of humor. It will help you and your child.
- Appreciate the struggle. It's all about learning and growing and becoming a healthy young adult.

