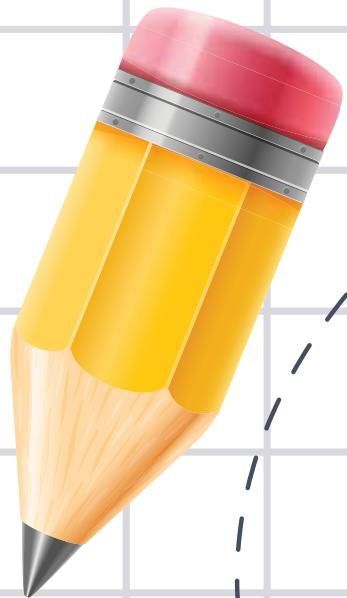


BACK TO SCHOOL



Tips for Starting Kindergarten

They're growing up fast, Mom and Dad!

The first day of kindergarten is a bittersweet day when our babies go off to big-kid school on their own.

It's going to be tough, but there are ways for everyone to get through it in one piece. Here are some tips from ReadingRockets.org and the Illinois Early Learning Project.

GET ACQUAINTED

As early as you can, visit the kindergarten classroom your child's going to be in. Many schools hold a kindergarten welcome day in the summer or even the late spring. Talk to the teacher and walk around the school to give your child a good idea of all the fun they have ahead of them. Locate important places like the playground, cafeteria and bathrooms. Next, as the big day approaches, talk it out. Ask your child what they think kindergarten will be like. Be prepared to answer questions about learning materials and schedules.

IT'S OK TO BE NOT OK

Let your student know it's OK to be anxious about the first day of kindergarten. They may be having some big feelings, and that's OK, too. Be there for them as they talk it out with you.



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Don't discount their fears and feelings, even though they may seem trivial to you. What kind of backpack they have and what it's like on the school

bus are big things to them.

TAKE IT SERIOUSLY

Show your student that you're interested in what they

do, even in kindergarten. Ask them who they played with, what books they read and what they learned that day. Read the teacher's notes and keep open

lines of communication so you can both send the message that school is important. Start instilling that now, and you won't regret it later.

Buying a Laptop

In 2020, most parents had the pleasure of experiencing digital school, where students learned entirely or mostly online.

It doesn't look like that's going away anytime soon, and computers are a more important part of learning than ever. Here's how to make sure your student has the best laptop to fit your budget.

ULTRAPORTABLE LAPTOPS

Time was when sleek, slim laptops had a definite trade-off: They were also slow. Not anymore, with advances in processing technology that allows these tiny machines to work just as well as the big boys. Also look for laptops with rotating screens that can do double duty as both a full computer and a giant tablet.

PAY ATTENTION TO THE SCREEN

It's not just because small screens are harder to read. Screen size dictates the size of the rest of the laptop, so, generally speaking, the larger the screen, the bigger and heavier your laptop is going to be. Screen also comes into play if you do a lot of gaming, streaming video or if you're taking a multimedia course.

MULTIMEDIA OPTIONS

If you'll be doing graphics-heavy work, such as editing



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music or video, or producing renderings, you should look at more of a workhorse than the ultraportables. Look for features like larger screens, bigger processors and multiple ports to plug in all your accessories.

CONSIDER ACCESSORIES

Whatever model you choose

— PC, Mac or Chromebook are a few — make sure you can get all the peripheral items you need. Mice, cases, screen protectors, laptop sleeves, printers and more all need some thought, and probably a few power cords, too. Look for accessories that can hold up to the wear and tear of student

life but are still reasonably priced so that they can be easily replaced.

HOW TO BUY A LAPTOP

Try, if you can, to get your hands on any machine you're considering. Actually use it to do a few things in the store or, even better, if someone has a

similar model you can try out in person. Do plenty of research, read reviews and watch YouTube reviews. Also check out the store's return policy and make sure you keep all the receipts and other necessary items if it turns out not to be the perfect laptop for your student.

Tips for Middle School

Ah, middle school. That time of raging hormones and existential crises.

For most parents (and kids), middle school has gotten a bad rap for being, to put it mildly, a difficult time in everyone's life. But it doesn't have to be that way. Here are some tips from KidsHealth.org for making the middle school years a success.

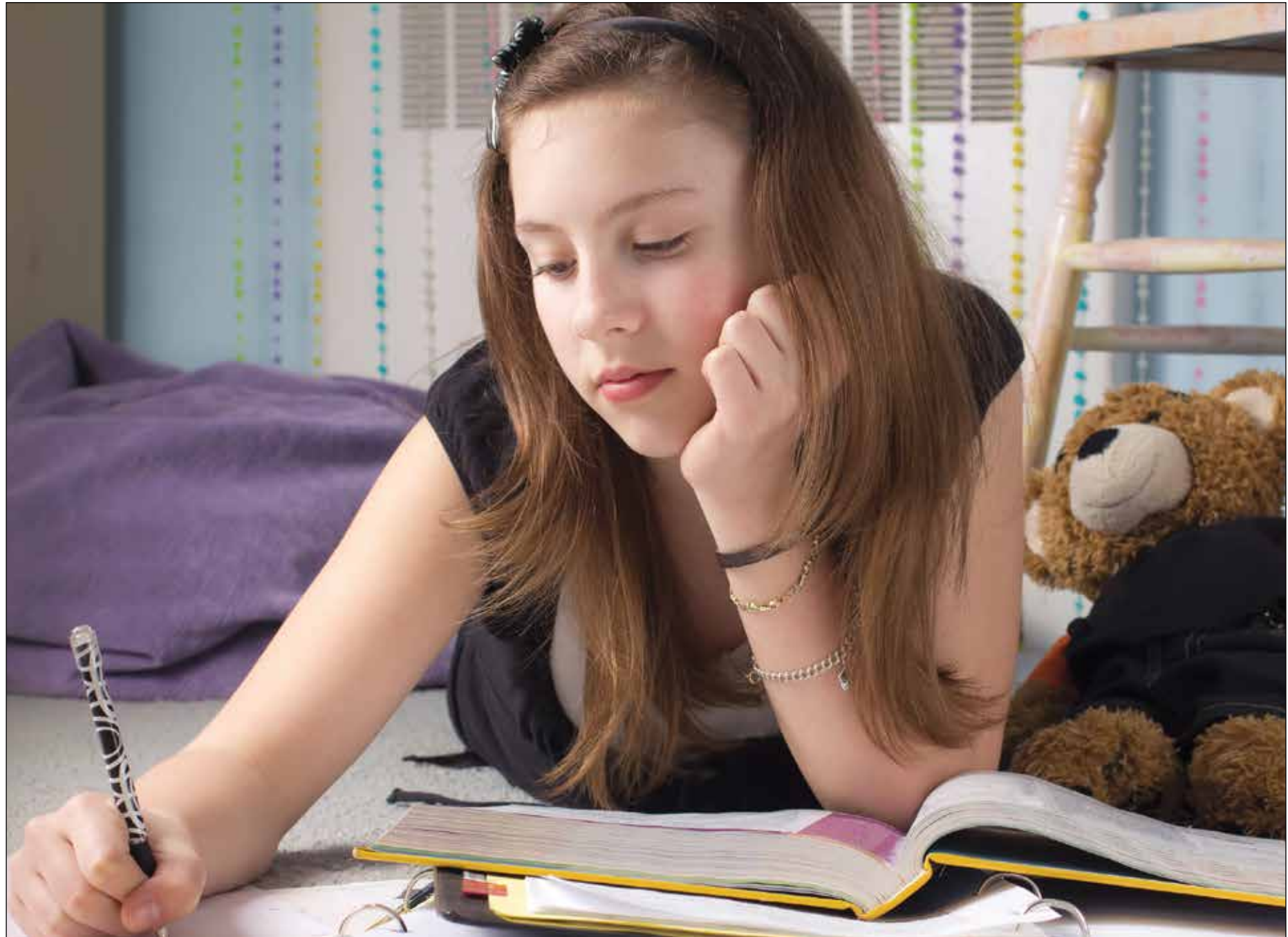
GET INVOLVED

A not-so-secret key to success in any school is for the parents to be involved. This means attending events like back-to-school night and parent-teacher conferences every time they're offered. Get to know your child's teachers and administrators and their expectations for life in middle school. Establish clear channels of communication to help give your student the support they need for success.

VISIT THE SCHOOL

While you're on campus, get to know the physical layout of the school. Know where important locations are like the front office, the school nurse's office, cafeteria, gym, athletic fields, auditorium and any special use spaces, like the media room or music room.

Also get to know the school's online presence. Get familiar with the website and bookmark things like the school calendar, special events pages, testing dates, grades and



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homework assignments. Follow the school on social media, including any clubs or athletics your child may be participating in.

HOMEWORK EXPECTATIONS

Middle school homework may be a little more intense than your child was used to in elementary school. Prepare

your student to devote more after-school time to completing assignments. Make sure they have a quiet, distraction-free place (yep, no phone or TV) place to do homework and study, and check on them from time to time to see how they're doing while they're working. Have regular talks with your student about the work they're doing in school

and what assignments are coming up to avoid last-minute surprises.

FOSTER ORGANIZATION SKILLS

Organization skills have to be learned and practiced. Help your child set up a system to keep them on track in middle school. Have them organize class information

and assignments in binders, notebooks or folders and teach them how to use a calendar to track how they're spending their time. Include non-academic commitments, too. Lists can be an effective way to make sure everything gets done. In addition to keeping a calendar, have your child make lists of things they need to do and prioritize them.

Online Safety

With more and more of a student's life happening online these days, staying safe on the Internet is critically important.

Here are some tips for safe surfing from Kaspersky, an internet security company.

1. Lock down personal information. Don't tell people your full name, address, phone number or any other personal information. Think about what you'd tell a stranger you met in person, and leave it at that.

2. Don't turn off your privacy settings. It's tempting, we know. But don't do it. The same information stream that feeds online marketers can also deliver up your personal information to bad actors. Make sure both your hardware and software settings are as tough as they can be.

3. Practice safe browsing. WiFi is convenient, but remember not to share personal information over public networks, such as those in coffee shops, libraries and other public spaces. Also beware of websites that can infect your device. Keep a good, strong security software on your computer and use good common sense when it comes to emails and websites.

4. Be careful with downloads. Malware is a package of software that try to steal your information. It can be dis-



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guised as a document, an app or anything else. Don't download anything that looks suspicious or that comes from a site that you don't trust.

5. Pick a strong password. No, not "password." The best passwords are tough to untangle, bearing a mix of at least 15 characters, including capi-

tal and lowercase letters, numbers and characters. Don't use your address or Social Security number, either. Try using password manager software to help you manage multiple passwords so you don't forget.

6. Be careful what you post. Any comment, picture or post

you put online, even if it's just for a few minutes, is there forever. At any time in the future, savvy web users can dig up your past posts and those regrettable selfies. Don't put anything online you don't want your mom, grandma or prospective employers to see.

7. Be careful who you meet.

If you're underage, never, ever meet anyone in person that you've met online. Ever. People online don't have to (and often aren't) telling you the truth about who they are and no matter how charming they may seem online, they may not have your best interests at heart.

Going Back to the Classroom

Many students spent all or part of the 2020-21 school year in online classrooms.

The new school year means more of those kids are going to back to brick-and-mortar learning, albeit with some extra precautions as the COVID-19 pandemic waxes and wanes around the country.

As tough as the transition was to digital learning, the transition back to school may be even more difficult. Some students may have picked up a little extra anxiety about returning to a crowded classroom.

TALK ABOUT ANXIETY

Well in advance of returning to school, talk to your children about what worries them about returning to in-person learning. Ask questions such as:

- What are you looking forward to most?
- What are you looking forward to least?
- What are you concerned about?

Don't discount their fears. Hear them out and give them a safe space to share what's on their mind.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Review the school's safety protocols and rules with your child so that they know what to expect. Have them consid-



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er what to do if their mask falls off or what will happen if a classmate falls ill. Also get them used to different routines.

For instance, your child's school may be eating lunch in the classroom instead of in the cafeteria, or they may be doing physical education in a different way. Talk to them

about all the eventualities they may encounter and let them know that, no matter what, they're going to be OK.

CHECK ON MENTAL HEALTH

Get in the habit of regularly checking in on your child's mental health before they return to school. Once school

and the chaos of scheduling hits, it's good to already be in the habit of looking in, and, on their end, they know they can talk to you anytime, about anything.

STAY FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE

It's not going to get back to normal overnight, if ever.

Keep some flexibility and adaptability when it comes to your student. Know that their grades, abilities and interests may have changed during the pandemic and be ready to accept that.

Things are different now, remember, for them as well as for you. Give yourself both some grace.

Taking on High School

High school means high stress, for both kids and parents. GreatSchools.org talked to some recent graduates about what advice they had for kids starting their freshman year and here's what they said.

GO FOR WHAT INTERESTS YOU

Pick extracurricular activities based on what interests you, not on what your friends may think or how it'll look. "I was tempted to join Mathletes but never did because of the general unfavorable status," said Bona Kang, UC Berkeley. "Later I realized that probably would have been a great experience."

Whatever you choose, if you're interested in it, you're likely to get more involved, and that passion will shine through when it comes to apply for college.

BOND WITH YOUR TEACHERS

Make the effort to really get to know your teachers. Talk with them during their planning period, after school or at lunch. They can help you get through the toughest days of high school and also with your college application process.

BE YOURSELF

This is a corollary to the first



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one. Try not to focus so much on what other people think and, instead consider what makes you happy.

"Anyone can do anything with their lives," Alastair Brown, Cornell University, said. "Students should not define themselves by their place in high school."

TAKE PRACTICE STANDARDIZED TESTS

SAT and ACT scores are more than just a number. They're an important part of getting into the right school with the right financial aid. Take as many practice tests as you can.

Your school may even offer

a special study course for both tests that can help fetch you a higher score.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALL NOW

Take a deep breath. High school is full of big decisions, but realize that not all of them are permanent. Have a gener-

al plan for your life, but also remember to be flexible and adaptable. "What many students fail to realize is that you can always change majors or schools. There's no shame in trying something out and deciding it's not for you," Sera Harold, University of San Francisco, said.

Bullying

Bullying is the use of force, verbal or physical, to intimidate or dominate another person.

Bullying behavior must be aggressive and include an imbalance of power, where kids use power to control or harm others, and repetition, behavior that happens more than once or has the potential to happen more than once, StopBullying.gov says. This includes making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose.

THREE TYPES OF BULLYING

Verbal bullying is saying or writing mean things about someone. It includes teasing, name-calling, inappropriate comments, taunting or threatening someone. Social bullying or relational bullying involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships, including leaving someone out of an activity on purpose, telling other students not to be friends with someone, spreading rumors and embarrassing someone in public.

Physical bullying involves hurting another student or their possessions, including hitting, kicking, pinching, spitting, tripping or pushing, taking or breaking someone's



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things, or making mean or rude hand gestures.

EFFECTS OF BULLYING

Bullying affects both the student bullying others and the child being bullied; no one wins in this situation. Kids who are bullied are reported to experience depression and anxiety, feelings of loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, health complaints and

decreased academic achievement. Kids who bully others are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, get into fights, vandalize property, drop out of school, engage in early sexual activity, have criminal convictions and be abusive toward others.

Even kids who witness bullying are affected. They are more likely to have increased use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs; have increased

mental health problems; and miss or skip school.

RESPONDING TO BULLYING

It's up to adults to stop bullying as soon as they see it. They should intervene immediately, even if it means grabbing another adult to help. Next, separate the kids involved and make sure everyone is safe. Meet any immediate medical or mental

health needs while staying calm and reassuring all the kids present. Model respectful behavior whenever you intervene.

Get police or medical attention immediately if a weapon is involved or if there are threats of serious physical injury, if there are threats of hate-motivated violence, if there is serious bodily harm or sexual abuse, or if anyone is accused of an illegal act.