

## **Advice to parents (from a 6<sup>th</sup> grade counselor):**

*Please know that all these thoughts, examples and advice come from real experiences kids have in middle school. I hope that sharing this information helps parents of incoming 6<sup>th</sup> graders feel more informed and equipped to be the best parents they can be during these middle school years.*

### **AWKWARD AND MIDDLE SCHOOL GO TOGETHER LIKE MILK AND CEREAL:**

It would be an understatement to say that middle school is a very significant time in a child's life. Kids go through unbelievable changes emotionally, physically, and socially. Expect these changes will occur and try to understand that although extremely awkward at times, these changes are normal and natural. Be prepared to expect the unexpected. Middle school is also an amazing time with many great things happening. There are lots of opportunities with sports, clubs, and so many other incredible experiences to share. We recommend allowing your kids to join at least one club or sport. The more they are engaged with extracurricular activities, the happier and healthier they will be and the more their middle school experience will be memorable. This article will focus more on things you need to be aware of, but please keep in mind as you read that while middle school can be challenging and awkward at times, it can also be a wonderful time of growth and development.

### **TECHNOLOGY AND THE NEED FOR SLEEP:**

Because of all the incredible changes middle school kids go through, it's a scientific fact that middle school-aged kids need more sleep - even more than elementary school kids - at least 9 hours/night. The temptation for parents of middle school kids is to let them stay up **later** and **not** monitor their technology usage. Technology (phones, games, etc.) are the #1 reason kids stay up late. It's common to see increased negative behaviors in school and at home as technology usage increases and hours of sleep decreases. You should have a plan for how many hours of screen time your child is allowed per day or put a time limit on when all technology should be shut down. Whether or not your child proves that he/she cannot moderate their screen time, you should strongly consider having phones and other devices shut down and turned in by a certain time, and have them charge their devices overnight in your room.

### **TECHNOLOGY AND ADDICTION:**

It is an unfortunate reality that devices, apps and games are designed to be addictive. There are many cases of technology addiction, and the struggle is real. For example, games like Fortnite are specifically designed to be addictive, and kids will go to great lengths to feed their addiction. They will sometimes stay up until 4 am and try to hide this from their parents. With addiction comes a lot of issues. These may include your child not wanting to go to school, going to school with only a couple hours of sleep, performing poorly, falling asleep in class, and behaving in a way that gets them into trouble. Many kids experience a lack of real-world identity, increased anxiety, and depression. Games can be fun but should be moderated with limits parents set and hold. If your child doesn't follow your rules, it might be better to take that game or device away for a while. Sometimes they need to know that technology is a privilege and is something that can and will be taken away if that privilege is abused. Middle school is a time when you might feel a shift in your relationship, and this is normal.

**INDEPENDENCE IN MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

It is also normal for middle school kids to become significantly more independent. This means they are less dependent on you to take care of their basic needs. They still need your love and guidance on higher level needs like maintaining their self-esteem or helping them balance their time. As they become more independent, it is normal for kids to not talk to their parents as much or desire to spend less time with their parents. It is important to set aside some quality time each day to allow for the opportunity to check in with your children about school. You might plan dinner time where you all share stories from the day, such as “highs and lows”. Just remember that it’s normal and OK for them to become more independent. They are starting to gain the skills that will help them someday be ready to move out on their own.

**STRUCTURE AND EXPECTATIONS AT HOME:**

Kids thrive with structure, expectations, and consistency. Giving them assigned time to do homework is helpful. You should consider setting aside one hour each day where kids can do homework or read a book if they don’t have homework. However, it can be very tricky to tell whether or not your child has homework or not. To answer these questions, you will need to be resourceful. You will need to make sure you have access to your Parentvue account at the beginning of the school year. This is where you can check their grades and attendance. Never hesitate to email the school counselor if you have questions about work completion.

**COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION:**

You are encouraged to have open communication with teachers. Realize your child’s teachers are your neighbors and friends, and sometimes it takes a village to effectively raise children. Communication is key. The best way to communicate with teachers is via email. One strategy that works well for parents is to set aside one day each week where you sit down with your kid and check their grades and assignments on Parentvue and Google Classroom. You might tie their free time and privileges to their grades (for example, if all their grades are a 5 or higher, they get more free time).

**GRADING IN AN IB WORLD SCHOOL:**

At Lincoln, the grading is on a 0-8 scale. A zero means they simply haven’t turned anything in. A 5-6 is grade level or demonstrating proficiency of a skill. Scoring a 7-8 indicates that your child is performing above proficiency in certain skills. No matter what level your student is at, they should always be looking at what they need to do to get to the next level. Ask your child what they can do to get their grade up. If they don’t know or can’t tell you specifically what needs to be done to improve their grade, this is the perfect time to sit down with your child and email that teacher or the counselor.

**TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM (AND AT HOME):**

Most classes use Google Classroom. This is great because this is where you can see their actual assignments and ask teachers more specific questions when needed. Now more than ever, it is super helpful to have internet access on some sort of device. Kids will need internet to access Google Classroom and to do much of their work at home. If you need help with

getting internet or simply can't afford it, let the counselor or principal know. They may be able to find other ways to help.

### **ATTENDANCE - MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN:**

One of the biggest components to student success is attendance. It's kind of like a drawing - you must be present to win. And when your child is absent, they miss a lot of opportunities to learn. Unlike elementary school, where they have one teacher that teaches them many subjects, they now have about 7-8 different teachers. Students and parents need to take the initiative to collect and do makeup work when they are absent. If you know your child is going to miss school, the best thing to do is to email their teachers and kindly ask them what your child needs to do to not get behind. Although most classrooms are now on Google, there are still a few teachers who use hard-copy assignments that you can pick up from school. You may need to teach them how to do this by sitting down with them and emailing their teachers together until that is a skill they can do on their own.

### **BEHAVIOR AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MIDDLE SCHOOL:**

In middle school students have many different teachers and expectations may be slightly different from class to class. We do have school rules that apply to all students in all classrooms. Those rules and the Student Code of Conduct are written in each student's planner and covered in advisory classes during the school year. It's normal for kids to make mistakes; it's often how they learn. The important thing is they learn from their mistakes so they can correct their behaviors and become better people and not make the same mistakes over and over. We want to help your student develop a growth mindset in all areas of their life.

### **CHALLENGES ARE OPPORTUNITIES:**

Please remember that, while expecting a variety of changes, the challenges your incoming 6th grader will face are opportunities to grow and become smarter, stronger, and more equipped to deal with future challenges. Work with your kids in this spirit - set limits, help them set healthy boundaries, and let's work together to help keep all our kids healthy and safe!

### **ADVICE FOR AN INCOMING 6TH GRADER:**

Although this article was written for parents, I felt compelled to include some advice for incoming 6th graders that parents can consider as well:

- Get plenty of sleep (try to get 9 hrs/nt)
- Get to school on time, and be on time to your classes
- Make sure you are eating (you get breakfast and lunch at Lincoln)
- Get involved - join a sport or club
- Don't be afraid to make new friends
- Keep it simple: Give your best effort and have a good attitude (The Lancer Way).
- Stay out of drama - drama is always distracting and negative.
- Set and communicate healthy boundaries
- Stand up for what is right
- Be kind - to everyone

- Embrace the awkward - middle school is an awkward time for everyone and it's ok!
- Find something to laugh about every single day.

Thank you for reading and feel free to contact me anytime at Lincoln. I love helping middle schoolers through the next three years with humor and an open heart. I am from Loveland and have a wife of 25 years and two children. My beautiful daughter has Down Syndrome and is a cheerleader, swimmer, dancer, and future contestant of The Voice/former prom queen. My son is a musician. He attended Aims and Colorado State University. He is learning how to be a sound engineer. I am also hysterical about my cat, Tobey, who has 7 nicknames!

I can't wait to meet all of you, and welcome to the Lincoln Family!

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***"When we seek the best in others, we discover the best in ourselves."***