

Chapter 7



Getting Organized and Staying Informed

I lost my...

I left my...

I didn't know...

Many sentences spoken by middle schoolers begin with those words.

I lost my jacket!

I left my lunchbox in the computer lab!

I didn't know I have a science test today!

I lost my locker combination!

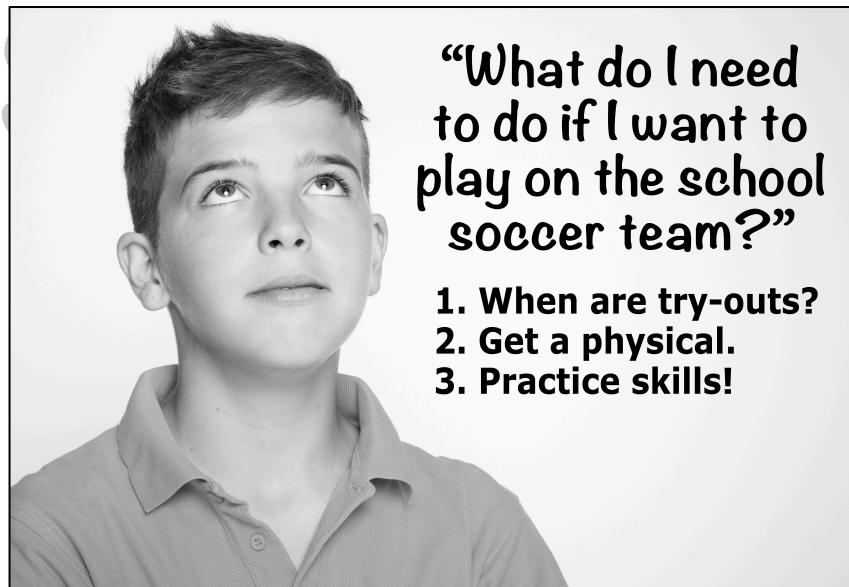
I left my band instrument on the bus!

I didn't know soccer tryouts were yesterday!

You probably didn't feel good reading those sentences. Maybe you've said those words, or something like them, recently. Losing things, forgetting things, and missing important events can make you feel really crummy. In this chapter, we'll look at ways to get organized and stay informed while you're in middle school.

Be Proactive

If you want to get organized and stay informed in middle school, you need to be proactive. What does it mean to be proactive? It means that you're going to take an active role in your life. You're not just going to sit back and let things happen to you. You're going to think about the future and what might happen tomorrow, next week, and next month. You take care of business today, and plan ahead for tomorrow.



Here's an example of a proactive attitude. Let's say you want to try out for the soccer team. You ask your PE teacher, and find out that soccer is a winter sport. Tryouts will be sometime in November. So, you open your planner

and write "Soccer Tryouts?" in the space for the last week of October. You go to the school web site and find the soccer web page. You learn that everyone who plays soccer needs to have a current physical on file. (A physical is an examination by a doctor.) So, you ask your parents to schedule a doctor's appointment for your physical. You bookmark the soccer web page on your computer. You practice your soccer skills a few times a week, so that you'll be ready for tryouts. You watch the bulletin boards, and listen to the announcements each day. Sure enough, at the end of October you hear an announcement about soccer tryouts. You are ready!

How would this work for someone who is not proactive? This student doesn't ask the coach about soccer, and never checks the web site. They talk during morning announcements, and never check the school bulletin boards. They miss the first day of tryouts, and show up for the second day after they hear their friends talk about it. But they can't participate because they haven't had their physical exam. This student wants to play soccer, just like our proactive student. But because he is passive about the whole experience, he has to wait until next year.

Anticipate, Ask, and Act!

As we've said throughout this book, middle school students need to be responsible. Being proactive works in many middle school situations. We'll look at some of them later in this chapter. Just remember – anticipate, ask, and act!

Dealing with Stress

Before we go any further, don't think that you have to be perfect. Everybody makes mistakes. Everybody learns along the way. If you lose your jacket, you will probably find it in lost-and-found. If you forget your locker combination, it's probably written down somewhere. If you forget about a test, just do your best and ask about extra credit. Things have a way of working out when you really try.



Your first week of middle school will probably be the hardest. It will get easier. Before you know it, changing classes five or six times a day will be normal. You'll open your locker without even thinking about it. You won't forget your math homework (again.) You will adjust.

It might be a big challenge, but remember to learn from your mistakes. Don't panic when you can't find your

history classroom. Don't scream and cry if you can't get your locker open. Just take a deep breath and ask a teacher for help. Stress just gives you something else to deal with. Focus on the solution, and be proactive in the future. The school gets a new group of students every year. You're not the first person to forget your pencil. Teachers and administrators will help you.

Organizing Your Schoolwork

In middle school, it's up to you to organize your schoolwork. Here are some things that you will need to organize.

- Making sure you have the right books and folders for each class
- Making sure you take home the items you will need for homework
- Giving yourself time to work on long-term class projects
- Writing down homework assignments, and upcoming test dates
- Packing your book bag for school each day
- Gathering items you need for band and sports teams.

You will be responsible for all of these things, and more.

Your Planner is Your Friend



Most middle schools ask students to buy a planner. A planner is a calendar about the size of a spiral notebook. It has plenty of space for you to write down homework assignments, sports practices, and club

meetings. Wouldn't it be great to have a friend who would always remind you of important things you need to do? That "friend" is your planner.

Some teachers post the weekly assignments on the board, and the students copy the assignments in their planners on Monday. You should also open your planner during morning announcements. You can write down club meetings, team practices, and upcoming dances. Sometimes students also write down non-school events in their planners – things like vacations, parties, and holidays. Every day you can look at your planner to see the important things in your future.

Completing Your Assignments

Your planner will help you keep track of your assignments, but it's up to you to complete them. As a middle schooler, you will be responsible for your assignments.

How much time will your homework take? The answer: as long as it takes to do it correctly and completely. Sometimes a few math problems may take five or ten minutes to complete. Your language arts teacher may assign thirty minutes of reading. You may need to study 45 minutes for a very important history test. You may spend an hour or more working on your science fair project. Some nights you may have no homework at all. That's why it's important to manage your assignments, and be prepared to work as long as it takes.



Try to avoid distractions while doing your homework. Let's imagine you have ten math problems for homework. This should take you about 20 minutes. So, you get out

your math book, and grab a piece of paper and a pencil. And you turn the TV to a music video channel. And you open the messaging app on your phone. And you log-in to Facebook on your tablet.



Before you know it, it's an hour later and you've done exactly one math problem. "I can't believe this math is taking so long!" You've probably figured out that there are just too many distractions. Limit your distractions, focus on the assignments, and your homework will go much faster.

When you have a long-term assignment, try to begin working as soon as you can. Some students make the mistake of trying to do everything at the last minute. Let's say it's Wednesday. Your history teacher tells you that by next Monday you should read Chapter 12 and answer the questions at the end of the chapter. Okay – you can do that over the weekend, right? But maybe your friend invites you to spend the night Friday night, and your Mom takes you shopping on Saturday. Then your grandfather calls on Sunday and says he has two tickets to the ball game – do you want to go? Too bad you have that history chapter to read. Start each assignment early, and work at a steady pace.

Finally, if you don't finish an assignment, plan to make it up as soon as possible. Don't expect to be excused. Most teachers will let you turn in one or two late assignments.

But the solution is to get more organized, manage your distractions, start early, and work until you're finished.

Organizing Your Stuff

You will probably have more things to keep up with in middle school. You will have a textbook and a folder for most of your classes. You may also have a band instrument, clothes for PE, and a jacket or sweater. In elementary school, you probably had the same desk all day. You could keep all of your school supplies and books in that desk. In middle school, you may have six different desks, and you won't be able to store items there. So, it's up to you to know what you need and keep those items under your control.



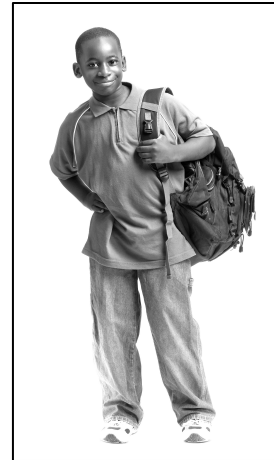
Consistency

Consistency is important. Consistency means doing things the same way every time. Find a good place to store your belongings, put them there every time, and you'll always know where they are. Where's your jacket? It's in your locker. You always put it there. Where's your math homework? It's in the front pocket of your math folder. That's where you always put your homework when you finish. Be consistent!

Here are some tips about organizing the things you take to school.

Organize Your Homework and Book Bag

Homework is the item lost the most often. When you finish your homework, put it in the same place every time – for example the front pocket of your folder. Do the same for every class. That way, you're not scrambling through your book bag desperately trying to find your homework. And remember to clean out your folders every few weeks. It will be harder to find your current assignments if you keep all of your old papers in your folders.



You should pack your book bag the night before school, and put it where you will see it in the morning. Some students put their book bags beside their bedroom door, beside the front door, or at the end of the couch. This is better than trying to pack your book bag in the morning, when the family is rushing around getting ready for school or work.

Take Just What You Need

If you need something, take it to school. If you don't need it, leave it home. The more things you take to school, the greater the chance of losing one of them. Don't stuff your book bag with things you don't need for school.

Your Locker

Because you'll be changing classes all day, your locker is very important. Keep your books, folders, jacket, gym shoes, and extra school supplies in your locker. Don't stuff your locker with things you don't need. You will probably

spend only a few minutes each day at your locker. Keep it neat, organized, and free of trash. You have just a few minutes between classes. You need to be able to open your locker, grab what you need, and move on to your next class.



If your school is small and your locker is near the middle of campus, you may be able to go to your locker several times a day. Students at larger schools need to plan their locker visits around their schedules. For example, you might be able to go to your locker before school, after third period, and at the end of the day. At each locker visit you get what you need for the upcoming classes, or for homework.

At some schools students bring their own locks. At other schools, the locks are built-in to the locker and the school will tell you the combination. Either way, you need to write down your locker combination somewhere. You will remember it...until you forget it. Your planner is a good place to write your locker combination. But don't make it obvious. Don't write "My Locker Combination: 17-01-16" in the front of your planner. Instead, write the combination in a special place that you will remember (maybe your birthday in your planner.) That way, your locker combination is safe, even if you lose your planner.

School Supplies

You will probably want to keep some extra school supplies at school. It's nice to have an extra pencil or pen in your book bag, and two or three more in your locker.

Just remember, don't overstuff your locker, and don't buy more than you need at the store. One of your teachers may ask you to buy a yellow highlighter for class.

So – buy a yellow highlighter and bring it to school. Maybe you buy two yellow highlighters in case the first one runs out of ink, or your friend forgets his highlighter. Don't buy the 12-pack of highlighters in every color imaginable and bring them all to school. You probably won't need your own stapler, hole-punch or tape dispenser either. (Yes, some students bring these to school!) Don't be a school supply show-off. Bring what you need, and leave the rest at home.



Jackets and Shoes

Of course, it all depends on the weather at your school, but you probably won't need your jacket all day long. Keep your jacket in your locker during the day. That way, even if you forget to take it home you will know that it is locked-up safe and sound. And it's also a good idea to keep your gym shoes in your locker, rather than carry them around to your classes. You can go to your locker before PE class if you need to get your shoes.

Keep Up With Your Things

Jackets and shoes can be very expensive. Someone worked hard to buy those things for you. Take care of your jackets, sweaters, sweatshirts, and gym shoes.

Lost and Found

Even if you bring only what you need and carefully manage your things, you might lose something at school. Most middle schools have a lost-and-found box for items that are left in class, the cafeteria, the gym, or in the hallways. This should be the first place you look if you can't find something that you lose at school. If the item that you lose is very valuable or unique – like a band instrument or cell phone – you should also tell someone in the school office. The people who work there will be on the lookout for your lost item. When you find your lost item, ask yourself why you lost it, and make a plan for keeping up with it in the future.

Staying Informed

In middle school, there are a lot of clubs, activities, and sports teams. If you have any interest in these, you will need to stay informed. Of course, you also need to know about assignments and projects in each of your classes. Here are some tips about getting the information you need in middle school.

Class Assignments

Most middle school teachers write their assignments on the board each week. Some teachers also have a class web page that lists the assignments. During the first week of school learn where your teachers write their assignments. Copy the assignments in your planner.

Morning Announcements



The morning announcements are very important in middle school. (Some schools make morning announcements over the intercom, and other schools have a TV news program.) If you want to know what's going on at school, listen to the announcements. You can write important dates in your planner.

Morning announcements could include:

- Club meetings
- Sports tryouts
- Band and chorus rehearsal
- School events, like dances and parties
- Important announcements about classes
- Canceled meetings or activities.

Some schools also make afternoon announcements. These announcements are often about changes, such as practices that have been canceled, or a change in the location of a club meeting.

School Web Site

Most schools have a web site with important information. Find the web pages for your clubs and teams, and check them frequently. You can also use the school web site to find out about team tryouts and special events.

Early Opportunities

If possible, learn about your middle school before you attend. Maybe you and a group of elementary friends can go to a middle school basketball game. You could attend a middle school play, or take part in a summer art or music program. Some middle schools have an Open House for elementary students, and that's a great way to learn about the school.

Learn Locations



When you have the time, do a little "research" on the different places at your school. Most middle schools have maps. Take a few minutes and learn where the office, the library, the cafeteria, and the bathrooms are on campus. A school map can help you get the big picture of middle school. If you go to a small school, this may not be an issue. But if you'll be at a large middle school, it's very important to learn your way around.

We started this chapter with three phrases: *I lost my*, *I left my*, and *I didn't know*. Be proactive in organizing your schoolwork and your personal belongings. Listen to the morning announcements and check the school web site. Learn everything you can about your school. A student who avoids *I lost my*, *I left my*, and *I didn't know* will be much happier in middle school.

Your Turn

You find out that your school has a photography contest every year. Because you are proactive, what are some things you would do if you want to enter?

Have you ever used a planner before? If so, what did you write in it? Why will it be important to use a planner in middle school?

Where will you put your book bag in the evening so that you won't have to search for it in the morning?

What are some things that students bring to school that they don't really need?

Ask a teacher or current middle school student: how does the middle school provide information to students?

Does your middle school have any Open Houses or summer programs for incoming students?

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