



Transitioning from Elementary to Middle School For Children in Special Education

The Big Leap

Entering middle school can be an adjustment for any child, yet a child with special needs may face even more challenges than other children. What are some of the new experiences that middle school brings?

- A bigger campus with more teachers and students
- The need to move from one class to another throughout the day
- An increase in homework and the need for more planning and organization
- Academic skills become more crucial
- Grades and academic performance have a greater emphasis
- Multiple teachers with different styles and expectations
- Taking responsibility for binders and supplies as well as the possibility of lockers
- For students who spend time in special day classes or resource classes, the complexities of ensuring there is adequate time for inclusion in general education classes
- Pre-teen developmental changes such as social pressures to be accepted and belong, increasing independence from parents and the need to express individuality

Needed Support

How can you support your child during this important transition?

- Ask your elementary school what they offer to ease the transition to middle school
- Set up an appointment to meet with a middle school counselor who can be a huge support for both you and your child
- Talk to your child in advance about the coming changes and any concerns she has
- Work with your child to resolve concerns by gathering information, talking to other students, getting support from school staff

The IEP Meeting

Before the end of the last year in elementary school, an IEP meeting should be held to discuss and plan for the transition to middle school. Some areas of focus:

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- New assessments might be needed to ensure that a student's identified needs and levels of performance are current
- Middle school as well as elementary school staff should attend the IEP meeting to ensure that important information is transferred to the new school and so that the new IEP is developed to meet middle school needs
- How and where related services will be provided (e.g. speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy) in middle school
- Accommodations that relate to agendas/plan books, test taking, breaking long term projects into smaller parts, need to be discussed in middle school terms
- Clarifying IEP goals that still address basic skills needing remediation so the time in resource or other special education settings is not just "keeping up with the homework"
- Including IEP goals that teach study skills such as memory strategies, note taking, studying for tests, as well as keeping track of homework and other items
- There should be a discussion about the impact of modifications or out of grade level curriculum on working toward a high school diploma
- Involving your child more in the IEP process when appropriate

Ahead of Time

A few days before middle school starts:

- Stop by the school with your child to meet the special education teachers
- Introduce yourselves to the office staff so that you know someone in the office and so does your child
- Ask for a "dry run" to walk the route between classes,
- Practice how to open a combination lock at home if lockers will be used
- Talk to your child about lunch time (will she bring a lunch, buy in the cafeteria or at the "snack bar")
- Discuss Physical Education requirements such as PE clothes, changing in the locker room, etc., and try to assure your child with support and information
- Learn what supports the school has to manage peer pressure, teasing and bullying
- Allow your child to have an item of clothing or an activity that is "more grown up" and still appropriate to mark this special transition

Moving On!

Some children do better than others with the variety that middle school offers. This is an exciting time and information and support can ease any anxiety that you or your child is experiencing. Whether your child faces new challenges or finds new successes, building a supportive IEP team helps! Remember you can revise the IEP or call a new meeting if adjustments are needed in the coming school year. Stay in touch with teachers and other staff and pay attention to your child's reactions and how well he is adapting to this new environment.

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