Change is challenging for any child and since all children are unique, even typical children struggle with transition. This guide intended to share the common challenging experiences and possible ways to defuse them. As the parent, you are an important part of making the process a positive experience for your child.

While in elementary school, your child may have learned many of the skills needed for middle school. They may be familiar with things like:

* Making new friends
* Changing classrooms several times a day
* Navigating crowded hallways
* Working with different teachers in a variety of subjects

In Middle school your child may encounter new situations that go hand in hand with developing independence including:

* Developing self-advocacy skills
* Making choices (such as joining a club)
* Attending social activities (Such as dances or sporting events)
* Increased expectations for organization and homework
* Learning to make a to plan and pursue goals

When preparing to make the transition from one building to the next it is important to think about your child’s needs. Newness can be one of the biggest challenges to overcome. (New building, new teachers, new Principal etc.)

1. **Developing a “Plan of Action”**

Major transitions will go more smoothly for your child if you gather information and prepare for the change. The time and resources needed, will depend on the needs of the child. Generally, the schools start having meetings to prepare families for the transition from Elementary to Middle School in February or March with a transition IEP meeting.

Things to consider:

* Will a group orientation visit be enough for your child? (Or is an individual orientation needed?)
* Would it be beneficial to have additional supports such as using the school’s website to help recognize key people at the school?
* Does your child need extra supports in the Lunchroom or other less structured areas?
* Will an interpreter be needed? (Sign Language or other languages?)
* Some schools do a meet and greet or other activities to encourage positive transitions. (Listed on the school’s web sites)  **Please be aware that plans may change due to Covid guidelines, so check the website regularly.**
* Arrival and dismissal will be less structured than in elementary school. Students are expected to get on the bus or go to the car line independently. (Will your child need extra supports?)
* Is your child going from a small school to a larger one? If so, what may be needed easy this change?
* Update shot records.

1. **Gather information**

Ask your Elementary Case Manager for a contact person to get more information about the Middle School.

* Ask for a copy of the student handbook, class schedule, listing of possible clubs or extra-curricular activities, and supportive academic services. (Such as tutoring or after school programming)
* Identify the names and contact information of resource people such as the grade level principal, case manager, and school nurse.
* If appropriate, ask/ check for accessibility
* Other supports: **Parent Liaison (Sue Ownby)**

**865-594-8889**

[**sue.ownby@knoxschools.org**](mailto:sue.ownby@knoxschools.org)

1. **Developing an IEP**

Questions to ask:

* What are the attendance and discipline policies?
* Are there expectations for the student’s ability to use technology?
* Are there specific accommodations needed (Cafeteria, Library, or Bus Room)?
* Are there specific needs in transportation?
* What are the emergency and evacuation plans? (Are there any special consideration needed?)
* Are there any additional supports needed to be added to the IEP?
* Do teachers have additional communication (Such as Teacher specific websites or chat rooms)?
* What is the best method of communicating with my child’s Case Manager?
* Think about areas of support. If your child has extra time for assignments or tests, what does this look like?
* Discuss the future with your child, what will they want to do in High School and what will life look like afterward?
* Additional information including contact information, community calendar with free events and trainings and other important information is available at: <https://www.knoxschools.org/domain/5429>

1. **Developing Self Advocacy Skills**

The best way to learn self-advocacy skills is to practice them. For a middle school student these skills include: making decisions, communicating needs, and asking for help when necessary. Student participation in the IEP process, as in much as deemed appropriate, is a good way to develop these skills.

Possible opportunities:

* Is my child being encouraged to assume the responsibility for explaining how he or she learns best?
* Is my child able to present information about his or her disability, skills, and interests?
* Do you include your child as much as possible when planning and goal setting?
* Have you had regular conversations about your child’s dreams and plans for the future?

1. **Getting Ready for the Move-** In the spring of 5th grade year, you need to begin introducing positive and exciting things about the new setting.

Some suggestions:

* Purchase a t-shirt or other swag from the school
* Attend functions such as concerts, science fairs, or ball games are fun ways to introduce the school building.
* Talk to them about the move (count down on a calendar) and ask about any concerns that they might have. Make a plan ahead of time so they will know what to do.
* During the summer drive by the school
* Attend any orientation type programming
* Ask about meeting teachers or touring the school before school officially opens

Helpful hints:

* Locate restrooms and water fountains, the school main office, nurse station, counselor’s office and other significant areas
* Map out the best routes between classrooms
* If your child has a locker practice doing the combination.
* Plan the routine for getting on or off the bus. Discuss what to do if the routine changes (miss the bus or have an appointment)

**Parent Check List**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED | CHECK | NOTES/ COMMENTS |
| I have reviewed the Student Handbook and discussed the expectations with my child |  |  |
| We have discussed grading, behavior, and homework expectations |  |  |
| I have reviewed any new accommodations and or modifications |  |  |
| I have the contact information for my child’s case manager |  |  |
| How will the teachers be notified about any procedural changes in the IEP |  |  |
| I have reviewed the emergency and safety plans |  |  |
| How are the middle school students introduced to possible extracurricular activities? |  |  |
| I have reviewed the plans for transportation including arrival and departure procedures |  |  |
| I have met with my child’s teachers |  |  |

**Notes**