

APPENDIX A:



A Survival Guide

For

Parents

The Middle School Years

Piedmont Middle School
740 Magnolia Avenue
Piedmont, CA 94611
(510) 594-2660

Dear Parents,

Welcome to ***A Survival Guide for Parents – The Middle School Years***. Over the years, our school has worked hard to cultivate open lines of communication among middle school staff, students, and their families to guide students along the path toward becoming independent learners and responsible young adults.

This guide was written to give you a broad perspective of the middle school years. If you are experiencing middle school for the first time, it helps to have a sense of what the range of so-called “normal” behavior is. If you have lived through these years already, it helps to be reminded of the current insights, information, and resources available to you when need assistance.

As you venture into the world of middle school parenting, be prepared for an action-packed, emotionally volatile set of years. Where the elementary years were more ‘hands-on’, expect your role as parents of middle school children to become one of consultant (for academics), active listener (for social issues), and referee/problem solver (for disciplinary issues).

We look forward to a strong partnership between our school and your family while your child attends Piedmont Middle School.

--

Piedmont Middle School Staff

Middle School Life in a Nutshell

We guarantee that your child will work hard and play hard here at the middle school. Life during the middle school years is much like a roller coaster ride – for students, staff, and parents.

In place to support this intensity of work and play are a team of teachers, administrators, counselors, library staff, and a caring support staff who function much like an enormously large family. Kids experience significant physical and emotional changes while simultaneously dealing with the academic rigors of middle school (letter grades, daily homework, and more long-term and group projects).

At Piedmont Middle School, parents and school staff join forces to provide the best collaborative team for helping your children to learn, grow, and become more independent. The staff believes in maintaining open lines of communication with students and parents to assist in setting clear guidelines, limits, acknowledgements and consequences for appropriate/inappropriate student behavior. Your support is essential to the process of continuous improvement and constructive problem-solving. We urge all parents to contact any of us whenever there may be questions or concerns about your child.

One of the primary goals of our school is to guide and educate your children to become more independent learners. To that end, you will notice that your child is expected to assume more responsibility in school-to-home communications, to bring home school assignments and test results, and to obtain parent signatures as required by teachers and staff. During their middle school years, we will work with your child on developing long-term planning goals as they decide what electives they would like to take the following school year. In the winter quarter, the school counselor meets with students to help them plan their course schedules for the coming year. Students learn to develop goals that are in line with their particular interests and strengths. As parents, we encourage you to support your children by reviewing the *Course Directory* with them, talking, listening, and serving as sounding boards in helping them in the course selection process.



To Call or Not to Call, That is the Question ...



Maintaining open lines of communication among students, staff, and families is an important goal at our school. Please call us, even when friends, family, or that inner voice advise the contrary. And once you find the courage to make the call, please be patient in receiving a response. We serve the needs of about 600 students with just over 70 faculty and staff members. We make every effort to return calls within a reasonable period of time.

During these years as children take more risks, it is important for the schools and parents to advocate for the safety of all the children. You can call or e-mail any of us at the school at any hour of the day or night. The school's phone system records the time you call, so if something is bothering you at 1:00 am, just leave the message then. You may also leave messages by phone or e-mail anonymously. You might be worried about the well-being of another child ... You might see kids harassing others ... Your child might say something that scares you or has you worried ... Whatever the concern, the school urges parents to report such information. Even though it is difficult to make the call, ask yourself how you would feel if you had not reported the concern – and something happened to the child or children? Again, please remember that it takes time for the school staff to respond carefully and systematically to incoming calls.

On the academic front, contact your child's teacher or counselor if you observe a significant shift in attitude or performance. It is important for the school staff and teachers to know when this happens because it may indicate that the child is not finding sufficient avenues for success in school. Some parents become frustrated when their child spends inordinate amounts of time on certain subjects or projects, and far less time on subjects that are more difficult for the child. Again, the school urges parents to share with the teacher what they see at home in an effort to find ways to link the teacher with the student. It is important to the teachers and staff for students to develop a caring attitude about themselves and their school work.

PMS Office Staff and How to Reach Us:

Main Office 510-594-2668

Tips on Maintaining **O P E N**

Lines of Communication with Your Kids ...

As your kids get older they may share less information with you and confide more in their friends. In spite of this pattern it is still important to keep lines of communication open between you and your child. This is easier said than done.

Let your child take the lead in deciding when to talk. It might be late at night before falling asleep ... while in a car where eye contact is unnecessary ... or right after school while having a snack.

When your child comes to you with a problem, resist the urge to solve it for them. Instead, use what are called "**active listening skills**" to help them problem solve out loud. If you need a refresher course on this, the school counselors suggest reading the book, How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. The general rules of active listening –

On the 'To Do' List:

1. **Repeat back what your child says.**
2. **Check for accuracy reflecting your understanding of what they are saying.**

On the '**Not** to Do' List:

1. **Interject your opinions on the matter.**
2. **Offer advice.**
3. **Use body language that would suggest you disagree with what your child is saying.**
4. **Do other tasks while listening (ie., answering the phone, reading, paying the bills).**

A common mistake that parents make when reflecting understanding is to talk about their own experiences as junior high school students. Your child does not want to hear about **your** experiences. They want **you** to understand what **they** are going through. Another approach that parents often use to find out what's going on with their child is to ask lots of questions, expecting the child to answer each question with sufficient detail. Although efficient, this approach is often met with resistance by the child.



Learning the Ropes -- Consistently

Each year at registration, your child receives a Student Handbook that contains everything that students need to know about our school when it comes to rules and regulations. Because this handbook is given to students, parents often don't have easy access to this information. For this reason, we have taken excerpts from the handbook and included them in this guide.

The middle school years are ones in which your children begin to push and test the limits defined by the adult world. Mark Twain once said,

*“Good judgment comes from experience,
and experience comes from bad judgment.”*

An important thing to remember during these years is that even though your child may resist or question having rules, guidelines and limits placed before them -- without them, it's tough to develop “good judgment”. To understand what limits must be placed on children of this age, use the school's approach to hosting dances as a model:

1. Written parent permission is required to attend.
2. Provide plenty of adult supervision.
3. Adhere to a set time period.
4. Agree on how the child is to get home once the party is over (preferably an adult should pick up the child).

If your child has been invited to a party, contact the parent(s) hosting the party and use the above parameters as a way to assess whether it is O.K. with you that your child attend. When hosting sleep-overs, be present at all times. If you have alcohol in the house, lock it up. And as your child aggressively tests her/his limits at home, know too that students are testing their limits at school.

The school-home partnership is an especially important relationship in these years. The relationship works particularly well when we work together to develop and apply consistent consequences for students when they use “bad judgment”.

Please learn and become knowledgeable about our school rules and policies. As a public school, we are guided and must abide by the California Code of Education and our commitment as a school community to create a safe and stimulating learning environment for our students.



Surviving Together

It is important for parents to network and communicate with one another as a way to learn what's going on with their kids in the middle school years. This can be done formally by attending school-sponsored forums or by joining a parent group -- or informally, for example, by making it a point to contact a family who is hosting a social function in their home. Most parents find it difficult to contact a parent they do not know. They might even be led to believe by their child that it is not appropriate to call. When in doubt, parents are encouraged to make the call. Yet another way of learning how best to support your middle school child is by checking our **Counseling Library** and the many books available on parenting and child-rearing in the pre-adolescent years.

Parent Education Forums – Organized by the Piedmont Middle School Parents' Club, the forums feature guest speakers and panelists who offer a more in-depth look at issues and topics of interest to middle school parents. Past speakers have included: Dr. Michael Riera, author of *Uncommon Sense for Parents of Teenagers*, *Surviving High School*, and *Field Guide to the American Teenager*, who spoke to parents about, "The Hidden Logic of Teenagers"; and Michael Pritchard, an inspirational speaker, who met with students and parents to discuss and reflect on an important theme of our school: RESPECT.

Parent Groups – Thanks to the energy and enthusiasm of a team of middle school parents wanting to help and support fellow middle school parents, parents of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students are forming into Parents Groups to meet informally throughout the school year. In a Piedmont Parent Network (PPN) group, you can:

- Meet the parents of your children's friends.
- Participate in discussions on a wide variety of topics concerning teens.
- Exchange information, ideas, and experiences with fellow parents.
- Let your child know you care.

If you are interested in joining a group, please contact parent coordinator listed in the directory for more information: _____

Counseling Library - As a result of the generous support of the Parents' Club, we have an extensive counseling library for parents. The titles of books and references are noted below. Just give the office a call at 594-2668.



FACT or Fiction?

Alcohol and Drugs during the Middle School Years

As frightening as this may sound, drugs and alcohol are available to kids during the middle school years. Beginning in middle school, students take more risks and test and push at the family and school-defined envelopes.

Author Michael Riera notes in his book, *Uncommon Sense for Parents and Teenagers*,

“What parents can do is educate themselves, model a healthy relationship with alcohol, provide clear guidelines, expectations, and consequences, and always emphasize safety as the bottom line.”

When the school discovers or is informed of students who are in possession of alcohol and/or drugs, we are guided by the California Education Code to impose strict consequences. The following consequences are dictated by Ed Code 48900 and State Penal Code depending on the infraction:

- 1. Subject to immediate suspension**
- 2. Parent conference**
- 3. Police involvement where appropriate**
- 4. Expulsion**

Our experience indicates that alcohol and marijuana are the substances most commonly used by some middle school students. A proactive approach of talking with your child about your family's views on drinking and drug use long before the temptation arises is advised. In addition, if your child is caught or reported drinking or using drugs, try not to overreact. Instead, at the appropriate time, use the incident as an opportunity to honestly talk with your child about your concerns and reiterate what is or is not permissible in your home and under the law. Remember that many kids experiment once or a few times and then decide to stop.

As parents, it is vital for you to acknowledge the importance middle school children place on belonging to a group. Experimenting with drinking or drugs creates an immediate and accepting group for a young adolescent. For this reason, it is important for parents to support healthy alternatives to these groups. Parents can support their children by encouraging participation in school-sponsored after school programs, activities outside Piedmont, athletics, visual or performing arts groups.

If you believe your child is regularly experimenting with alcohol and/or drugs, seriously consider getting professional help for your child. Please remember that your child's safety and health are of the utmost importance to everyone. Parents who have weathered the storms of having a child suffer from serious substance abuse will say that in the end, denial was their worst enemy.



The Art of Dealing with Homework



Our Philosophy . . .

According to many parents and students, homework is one of the most talked about subjects as kids leave elementary school and head to the middle school. We have a great book in our counseling library entitled, Solve Your Child's School Related Problems, that has a helpful chapter on homework. In the chapter, they say that,

“The function of homework is one point many educators agree upon: well-designed assignments boost achievement levels among all abilities of students because they not only augment classroom activity, but they teach responsibility and self-discipline, too.”

We agree wholeheartedly with this statement. Homework plays a very important part in the academic program at Piedmont Middle School. Doing homework every night helps students to practice and reinforce basic skills, prepare for upcoming assignments that the teacher plans to introduce to them, review for tests or quizzes, and extend or apply something they learned in class to a special project.

Your Experience . . .

Even though there is lots of agreement on *why* homework is a good thing – we understand that you as parents are left with the challenge of using homework as a way to teach your kids about responsibility and time management – not an easy charge when there are competing forces at work, such as music lessons, sports practices, having dinner, and the distractions (or pleasures) of friends, television, and computers.

Although this is easier said than done, it might be beneficial to sit down with your child early in the school year and talk about how she/he would like to spend their time after school each day. Having surveyed students over a period of many years, the majority of students understand that doing homework helps them improve their grades in school. Helping them to develop an after-school schedule that includes enough time to do homework each day most likely will be viewed as a positive exercise.

The Partnership . . .

Bottom line: homework works best when the teacher, student, and parent know exactly what is expected of them. Take a look in the “*Information for Parents from the Student Handbook*” section of this guide under “***Homework Policy -- Philosophy***”, to learn about our respective roles and responsibilities.