

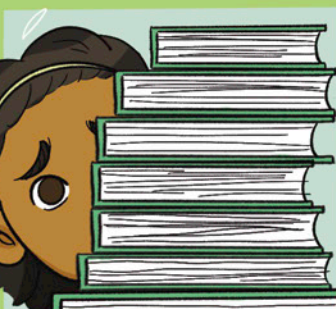
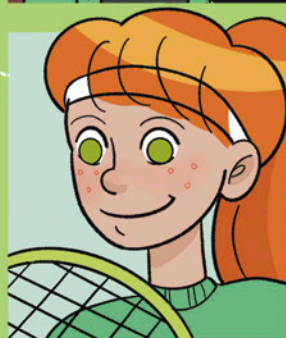
KID CONFIDENT

#4

"Smart and essential!"

—Jeff Kinney,
Diary of a Wimpy Kid

HOW TO NAVIGATE MIDDLE SCHOOL



KID CONFIDENT #4

How to
NAVIGATE
Middle School

KID CONFIDENT

#4

How to **NAVIGATE** Middle School

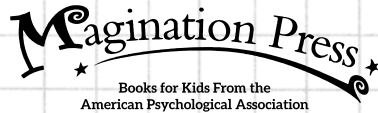


by Anna Pozzatti, PhD, & Bonnie Massimino, MEd
illustrated by DeAndrea Hodge

Magination Press · Washington, DC · American Psychological Association

To all middle schoolers, past, present, and future—*AP and BSM*

To Anna, Rebekah, and Lincoln, my best friends since middle school. Thank you for making me who I am today—*DH*



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CONTENTS



| | |
|---|----|
| Dear Reader (Don't Skip This!) | 7 |
| Introduction: Getting the Lay of the Land | 11 |
| A Note for the Adults in Your Life | 23 |



CHAPTER 1

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| Mindsets Matter | 29 |
|-----------------|----|



CHAPTER 2

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Grit: The Power of Perseverance | 55 |
|---------------------------------|----|



CHAPTER 3

| | |
|---|----|
| The Pitfalls of Pressure and Mastering Motivation | 77 |
|---|----|



CHAPTER 4

| | |
|--|-----|
| Teachers and Schedules and Materials, Oh My! | 109 |
|--|-----|







CHAPTER 5

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Lots of Learning Styles | 129 |
|-------------------------|-----|

DEAR READER

(DON'T SKIP THIS!)

| | | |
|---|--|-----|
|  | CHAPTER 6 | |
| | The Learning Strategies Superstore | 157 |
|  | CHAPTER 7 | |
| | Planning, Prioritizing, and Procrastination | 181 |
|  | CHAPTER 8 | |
| | Managing Your Stress | 207 |
|  | CHAPTER 9 | |
| | Tying It All Together and Self-Determination | 233 |
| | Extra Resources | 255 |
| | Bibliography | 263 |
| | Acknowledgments | 267 |
| | About the Authors & Illustrator | 271 |

You might be at the beginning of your middle school journey, or already be in middle school. Either way, you probably have some questions about what to expect and how to navigate the new demands. We don't know each other (yet), but if you are holding this book in your hands right now, we already know something about you—you are ready to be more independent and take control of your middle school experience.

Take a minute to think about your middle school concerns, hopes, and wishes.

- What are you looking forward to in middle school this year?
- What are some new activities you might want to try this school year?
- When faced with challenges, do you feel like you can grow and improve from them, or do you find yourself getting stuck?

- Do you sometimes feel stressed or pressured and have a hard time handling it?
- Do you already have good studying habits and know how to be organized?
- Do you have worries about having many teachers or more work than before?
- If you are just starting middle school, are you concerned about finding your way around the school building and switching classes?

Although this book is about middle school, it's not just about academics. We'll also focus on bigger picture topics like the best ways to think and act as you navigate the exciting journey of middle school. We'll talk about a whole bunch of interesting and useful stuff, like **MINDSET, GRIT, POSITIVE THINKING, LEARNING STYLES, MANAGING STRESS AND PRESSURE**, and more! Our biggest goal for you is that you will learn some things that you will be able to use in middle school and throughout the rest of your life!

In this book, you'll have a chance to be your own detective as we investigate what we think is

the most interesting part of middle school: the students (that's you!). We will be exploring how **YOUR THOUGHTS** impact **YOUR BEHAVIORS** to help you meet **YOUR GOALS**. We're here to help you feel confident as you tackle these things, take on more responsibility, meet those expectations, learn about yourself, and have some fun along the way!

Are you ready to start this adventure? Let's go!

~ANNA P. & BONNIE M.

INTRODUCTION: GETTING THE LAY OF THE LAND

*I*f you are just starting middle school, you might be wondering (or even worrying) how it's going to go. Or, for those of you that are already in middle school and starting 7th or 8th grade, you might be focusing on how school is getting harder and how you will manage even more expectations. Let's face it, middle school can be scary—but it can also be fun! During middle school, you will have new experiences, face new challenges, and have more independence than you did in elementary school: the school building is bigger, you have a new schedule with classes that are more spread out, you have more teachers, and you have more homework. This can be a lot to adjust to. But keep in mind that there are some good and exciting changes, too! With

more choices of classes and interesting clubs, you will have more independence, meet new people, and make new friends.

We want you to think of this book as your roadmap to a new adventure, and us as your tour guides.

YOUR TOUR GUIDES: ANNA AND BONNIE

I'm Anna, and I'm a psychologist working in private practice where I meet with children, teens, and adults to work on goals to take care of their mental health, focusing on issues like stress, anxiety, and feeling good about themselves. Before working in a private practice, I spent a lot of time working in schools, where I helped children and teenagers deal with some of the common challenges that come with being a student.

I'm Bonnie, and I'm a kind of learning specialist called an "educational therapist." I help neurodiverse students who have their own way of thinking that doesn't always match with the strategies used by teachers in school. Many of my students have learning challenges (such as a reading disability or dysgraphia), or trouble regulating their attention

and focus and staying organized. My goal is to help make school easier for my students by teaching them strategies to work efficiently and effectively based on how they learn best.

We have known each other for a long time. In fact, we lived in the same town and met when Anna was in middle school! As your tour guides, we will help you get the lay of the land and learn the tools to help you manage the challenges of middle school. We want to show you that you are not alone: all middle schoolers struggle with some aspect of middle school at some point. You'll see some examples of experiences based on actual middle schoolers that we know or were friends with.

MEET THE MAIN STREET CREW

MEET DILLON

Dillon is very active and loves sports and video games! He's lived in the same neighborhood since he was four, but was going to a different school, so this is his first year at Main Street Middle School (MSMS). At his old school, he played soccer, basketball, and baseball,



and he can't wait to join those teams at his school this year, too! He usually does pretty well in school... but sometimes he forgets to do his homework.

MEET CARLO

Carlo is the second oldest of five siblings. This is Carlo's second year in middle school. He is creative and loves to draw. His favorite subject in school is art, and his least favorite subject is English. Carlo really wants to get good grades, but it takes him a long time to get his homework done. There is always a lot of fun going on at Carlo's house, but with all those kids it's often noisy, which makes it hard for Carlo to concentrate sometimes.



MEET BRYCE

This is Bryce's first year in middle school. Bryce wants to be involved, and be good at, well...everything! Bryce always has her sights set on the next thing she wants to accomplish, whether it's getting good



grades or getting the lead in the school play. When she is not with her friends in the neighborhood, she's at a club meeting, attending band practice or music lessons, volunteering with her community youth group, or studying. She loves being involved, but sometimes finds it hard to make time for everything she wants to do.

MEET MADDIE

Maddie doesn't really like school. She is very quiet in class, and hardly ever raises her hand or volunteers an answer. She is not very interested in math, science, or social studies, and she doesn't really like to read. But Maddie certainly isn't shy! Outside of the classroom, Maddie talks to her friends non-stop and is a true optimist. She loves to be with her friends and is quick to offer encouragement when they are down.



MEET AJ

AJ loves the academic part of school; school just makes sense to them. AJ's parents expect them to bring home



straight As, and luckily for AJ, they rarely need to study to get good grades. Outside of academics, AJ isn't as comfortable, and sometimes they have trouble knowing what other people are thinking... which sometimes leads to misunderstandings or makes them angry. If there are more than just a few people around, AJ likes to watch what is going on instead of actually taking part in the activity.

RUMORS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD

Whether you are just starting middle school, getting ready to enter a new grade, or even just starting a new week at school, you probably have ideas in your mind of what your middle school experience will—or should—be like. You might have imagined your perfect day in middle school: one where you are picked class president, make tons of new friends, or are made captain of the soccer team. Or, you might have imagined a day that is more of a disaster: where you can't get your locker open, don't have anywhere to sit in the cafeteria, or trip while walking down the hallway. Maybe you've heard from a friend or an older relative that in middle school the teachers are mean, or you will have

10 hours of homework a night. Whatever rumors you've heard, they're probably a combination of some truth and a healthy dose of exaggeration. Let's talk about some of the rumors (and the truths) that the kids in the crew heard before they started middle school.

RUMOR #1: "You'll never be able to do all the work in middle school!"

The truth: We're not going to lie...the work that you will have to do in middle school is harder than elementary school, but you **can** do it with the right tools. The fact that you're reading this book is a great start! Before you can overcome the academic work challenges of middle school, the first step is for you to start believing that success is possible. If you still aren't convinced, give the kids a chance to show you how they learned to have a positive mindset and believe in themselves.

RUMOR #2: "I have to get straight As. Otherwise it will be a disaster!"

The truth: Many middle school students feel a lot of pressure about grades and friendships—from

parents, teachers, friends, and even themselves. Middle school is a time to learn how to become the person you want to be. Working hard and having high expectations is a good thing, but *no one* is perfect—and no one needs to be! If you struggle with that balance, fear not! We will be exploring the tools that the crew each use to create a balance between working toward what they want to accomplish and handling the pressure that comes with it.

RUMOR #3: “In middle school you better do what everyone else does, or no one will like you.”

The truth: There are definitely a lot of things that middle school students have in common with each other, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t be your own person! The kids in the crew are similar in a lot of ways, but they are all unique, too—which is what makes them interesting! You’ll probably find that you have something in common with at least one of them, whether it’s a preference for how they like to study and learn, activities they like, how they handle stress, or how they manage their schedules. It’s OK to do some things the same as your peers *and* to

have characteristics and preferences that make **you** uniquely, interestingly, wonderfully, **you**!

RUMOR #4: “You’ll get lost. You won’t be able to open your locker. You’ll never be able to get to class on time. You won’t have enough time to eat lunch.”

The truth: Yes, middle school buildings are usually bigger than elementary school buildings. Yes, in middle school you’ll have more teachers and have to change classes throughout the day. Yes, opening a locker can be tricky. But, with the right strategies and a little practice, you can master all of those things!

WHAT’S IN THIS BOOK

Have you ever gone sightseeing while on a trip with your family to a new place? You could just start exploring on your own, but it could be hard to find your way around and discover the most interesting tourist attractions if you’ve never been there before. It’s easier if you have a tour guide who can show you where to go and what to do so you can make the most of your adventure. To get an overview of the highlights, many cities offer tours. The tour guides take you around the city to talk about the town. You

can stop in various places to spend time looking around, or go on to the next attraction.

We've planned a trip for you that won't be boring, and we've included plenty of interactive activities for you to explore as we go. There is not only one way to sightsee. Some people like to go to every single tourist attraction in order. Some people like to casually roam around the streets a bit more. Some people like to go back to a particular attraction more than once. Just like sightseeing in a new place, we encourage you to use this book in the way that works best for you. We have laid out the chapters in an order that makes sense to us, but if there are particular "attractions" that you are more interested in exploring, go ahead and skip to what interests you. If you want to spend extra time with some of the activities before continuing on, go for it! Whichever way you choose, we are looking forward to sharing this adventure with you.

Our goal is to provide you, a driven, hardworking, eager student, the opportunity to learn some new skills that will help you out not only during middle school, but through all your school years and life in general. We will explore the non-academic parts of

middle school success, like mindsets, the power of grit, perseverance, and goal setting, and the impact of pressure. We will also explore the academic skills needed in middle school, like navigating your new environment, dealing with teacher expectations and schedules, and skills for learning information.

We don't expect you to already be an expert at navigating middle school—if you were, there wouldn't be any point in reading this book 😊! But we hope you read this with the goal of learning more about both your strengths and the things you find challenging as you make your way through middle school.

A NOTE FOR THE ADULTS IN YOUR LIFE

You might be just beginning your journey as the parent of a middle schooler, or you might already be deep in the trenches. Either way, you probably have some questions about ways you can help your child navigate the expectations and demands of middle school. You might be thinking, “I already know about middle school. I went to middle school.” But the reality is that it’s much different now than it used to be. Not only in terms of what is taught but *how* it’s taught, the use and impact of technology, frequency of communication with teachers, classroom expectations, and increased demand for organization. Learning these things takes time and effort, and middle school can be a stressful time for kids; they are not just being “dramatic.” We hope the information in this book

helps your child learn more about themselves and provides you with an opportunity to explore alongside them.

This book will teach your child how to adopt the best approaches to their thinking (mindset, grit, and motivation) and specific strategies for school success (navigating the environment, learning styles and study strategies, executive functioning, and stress management). Within each chapter, your child will have opportunities to “be their own detective” to learn more about themselves and how they approach problems using cognitive and behavioral concepts that incorporate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. To help your child be actively involved in the material of this book, we have included interactive activities, such as fun quizzes, so they can learn more about themselves and implement tools and strategies to help them achieve their goals. We strongly encourage you to talk with your child about the activities with an open mind and a positive attitude! Even if you find that your child is not yet where you want them to be, keep in mind that this is a time of exploration and growth. We

hope this book serves as the first step in building self-awareness as a middle school student.

As a parent, middle school is a time when you might want to practice stepping back a bit, allowing your child to figure it out and even fail at times. Doing this now, even if it involves letting them learn from their mistakes, is the right time since the stakes are lower than they will be in high school. We know that parent involvement is related to school success, so by no means are we suggesting you be uninvolved; rather, the idea is that stepping back at times will create more independence and will likely foster feelings of ownership and accountability for their work. So this is the time to encourage them to be curious, creative, and figure out their best approach to school and learning. For example, when your child wants to try a new strategy, give them a chance for a trial run, and then afterwards, help them assess if it worked for them or if it needs to be tweaked. Amongst the many parenting goals during the middle school years, you want to help your child develop intrinsic (internal) motivation and become more invested in their learning process and academic growth. One way to

support this is to encourage your child to generate their own ideas, solve problems on their own, and advocate for themselves. It will be a gradual process for sure, but you want to find the right balance of being there to help them while also supporting their independence.

Middle school is often a time when learning challenges and differences become apparent. Some kids breeze through elementary school only to discover in 6th or 7th grade that they struggle to focus or stay organized. Or that reading and comprehending doesn't come as easily as it did in the past. As the work becomes more sophisticated, and as they have more to manage and be responsible for, certain learning challenges such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a reading disability (such as dyslexia), and others may become apparent. If you are concerned, we recommend talking with your school counselor, pediatrician, or if possible, a reputable psychologist for possible educational and/or neuropsychological testing. While getting a diagnosis can be emotional, having a clear understanding of your child's strengths and challenges and how they can use their strengths to support their challenges

now—before high school—is essential. Moreover, it can help protect your child's self-esteem to know, for example, that they have inattentive-type ADHD and it's not that they aren't motivated or trying hard enough. Then they can explore options for interventions and supports and feel relieved that there are good resources out there to help.

We know you want what is best for your child, and sometimes their output doesn't align with your expectations. Many caregivers of middle school kids can sometimes judge their child's work to be less than excellent, or inadvertently compare their child to their siblings or peers. It's important to avoid comparisons and labels such as “lazy,” “unmotivated,” or “uncaring.” Remember that it's your voice that's often in your child's head when they are struggling, and we want that voice to be one of support, encouragement, and positivity. We encourage you to show your child that you believe in them, are there for them, and understand that managing this transition to middle school—both the academic and social aspects—is not easy. Feeling understood and supported by you, their caregiver, is one of the best protective factors you can offer them for their mental health and well-being.

*"They used to tell kids to chant 'sticks and stones' or 'just ignore it.' It didn't work. This series helps kids find the opposite approach: don't ignore it; understand it."—Tom Angleberger, *Origami Yoda**

HOW DO YOU IMAGINE THE NEXT SCHOOL YEAR?

Maybe you imagine that perfect day in middle school, where you are picked class president, make tons of new friends, or become the captain of the soccer team. Or maybe you imagine more disastrous days, where you can't get your locker open, don't have anywhere to sit at lunch, or trip while walking down the hallway.

This book will give you the tools and strategies you will need to find your place and be your best self in middle school. It will help you handle the increasing academic demands of middle school, teach amazing organizational and time management skills, show you what it takes to have grit, and help you grow in amazing ways!

Check out the entire series developed with expert psychologist and series editor, Bonnie Zucker, PsyD, which authentically captures the middle school experience.



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