



## ***“How To Thrive In Junior High”*** ***A Parent’s Guide***

### **WHAT’S SO “CHRISTIAN” ABOUT BETHESDA CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS?**

The most significant distinction of Bethesda Christian School is our commitment to Jesus Christ, His teachings and commandments, His sacrifice for each of us and His gift of abundant life on this earth and eternal life for eternity. Everything we do as a school is filtered through this commitment. Our school exists to provide excellent academic instruction that is consistent with Biblical truth and which honors the name of Christ. Our faculty and staff must have a clear testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and a commitment to growth as a child of God.

We teach our students the truth found in the Holy Scriptures and are unashamed about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our goal is that every student and family desire a personal relationship with God through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This lofty goal is seen at work in the lives of our faculty and staff, in Bible classes, in chapel services, and in the daily classes that each student attends.

With all of the above being understood, we must remember that the school is filled with human beings who, according to Scripture, are sinners and are deeply flawed. We also understand that our students are in the process of great physical, emotional and social changes.

## **ACADEMICALLY SPEAKING**

In elementary school there was an expected set of academic and behavior standards. Students rising into junior high school will have a greater set of expectations. Students will be responsible to travel from class to class without an escort, behave properly in the hallways and in the lunchroom with minimal supervision. At the beginning of the school year, we will clearly specify how to be successful in rising to this new level of expectation.

### **1. Responsibility – the KEY to growth and maturity.**

What you're about to read will sound strange and almost unacceptable. But hang in there with us as we explore this!

We encourage you to let your student "fail" during their middle school years. It will be okay! Let your student earn a bad grade, leave a project on the kitchen counter, forget homework, make a wrong decision, or wear the wrong thing to school. The small consequence that he will receive for his decisions today will help him make better choices and smarter decisions for tomorrow.

When you as a parent "come to the rescue," you are actually hindering the development of responsibility; you're not allowing a small error and its small consequence to do the teaching for the future. It is far better, and safer, for your child to learn this lesson while young, rather than when he is older and consequences can be life altering!

Whatever consequences he may face at school should be followed up at home with a discussion surrounding what happened and how to avoid that situation in the future. Use stories from your personal life and share what God's Word has to say about the situation.

We sincerely believe that we do not have bad students at BCS, we have students that sometimes make bad choices. We have an obligation to help our students understand their responsibilities to our school community, to your family and to the surrounding community.

### **2. Don't wait to communicate!**

Just like a pancake, a story always has two sides! Remember that the middle school years are a rollercoaster of emotion and change. Perceptions change and can cause students to relate events of the school day to you that may be one-sided. Be open to consider that there may be another side to the story.

Additionally, when middle school students get in trouble, they may share a version of the situation that places them in the best light. Again, be open to the fact that there

may be more to the story and check with the teacher. BCS follows God's Word in handling conflicts. See Matthew 18:15-19.

Whenever there is a concern over grades, a classroom situation, or a possible misunderstanding, communicate quickly. All school personnel want your child to succeed and have a great experience at BCS.

In matters concerning the classroom, communication should always start with the teacher. If concerns continue beyond what can be resolved between the parent and teacher then parents should contact the Junior High Coordinator, Mrs. Lisa Berkey. If necessary, she will guide you on to the next level regarding the office of the Upper School Principal or the Guidance Counselor.

### **3. Organization is the key to success in Junior High School.**

Is your child inherently organized? Here's a good indicator: go to their bedroom. Does he keep his room clean, picked up and trash free with everything in its place without being told? If not, he will probably have to be taught organizational skills. Organizational skills help students succeed. Teach your child to:

- Keep a folder/binder/notebook for each subject or one binder with multiple labeled sections.
- Keep supplies handy – paper in binder; pencil, pen, highlighter in zipper pouch. Keep extra supplies at home. Teach your child to think ahead – what supplies do I need for tomorrow? For next week?
- Reduce clutter in locker – get a shelf organizer.
- Write homework and assignments every day into a planner or small notebook.

### **4. Homework**

Homework should be done as soon as possible. When this becomes a habit, stress and anxiety are reduced, and a lifelong organizational habit is established.

To help your child accomplish this:

- Encourage your child to write down his homework – you may want to provide a planner or small notebook to record assignments.
- Set a specific time after the school day to complete homework.
- Have a couple of breaks within the homework time.
- Create a space in your home that is quiet for homework to be completed.
- Your student should ask his teachers how to 'study' for quizzes and tests and get any clarification for assignments. If your child gets stuck on homework, have them email the teacher. (This way the teacher knows homework is given attention!)
- Bring all necessary books and binders home. (You might ask, "Do you have everything you need? I'll wait while you look at your notebook.")

- Review your child's completed homework and projects for neatness, clarity, and completion, but remember, it is their work. Discuss the definition of plagiarism and note that a zero will be given for any plagiarized work.
- Students are expected to have all assignments ready to be turned in at the beginning of class and on the date they are due. Late assignments will have points deducted before they are graded.

What about missing a class for an appointment, illness, or sports?

- Teach your child to talk to the teacher either personally or via email to obtain any missed assignments due to illness, appointment, etc. Homework assignments are also posted on Sycamore for your convenience. Students should check online first. Junior High teachers are training your child for high school. In high school, teachers don't come and find students when they've been absent - students are responsible to find teachers to get missed assignments.
- Have your child talk with trusted students who take good notes.
- Students involved in sports may periodically have to leave early to reach the game venue. Student athletes are responsible for getting assignments in advance of their departure and for getting notes as mentioned above.

One last note on class work:

- Have your child monitor their grades on Sycamore.
- Check out [www.howtostudy.com](http://www.howtostudy.com)

## 5. Lockers

Lockers are assigned to each student at the beginning of the year and are not to be switched. Teach your child to:

- Keep the locker combination private (only the student, parent, and school receptionist should have the locker combination).
- Use a locker shelf to double the area for textbooks and binders.
- Clearly label each binder for easy access.
- Keep his locker clean. Take out the trash; keep extra supplies at home; keep non-related school items at home (toys, games, electronic devices, clothes, etc.).
- Do not put personal stickers on lockers. No items are to be attached to the outside of the locker with the exception of team information. Any birthday décor is to be limited to the day of the birthday only.

- DO remember the locker is school property supplied for your child's convenience to store daily school supplies.
- A damage fine may be assessed at the end of the year if the student defaces or damages a locker.

## WHO IS THIS CHILD AND WHERE DID HE COME FROM?

It is known that the middle school years are often marked by significant physical, emotional and relational changes often characterized by the movement towards independence. This often includes identity struggles, feeling self-conscious about self and one's body, increased peer influence regarding interests and clothing style, self-focus fluctuating between high expectations and low self-esteem, and increased moodiness (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 1997). The middle school "bridge" is a developmental stepping-stone to help students successfully transition from elementary to junior high and ultimately prepare each student for high school. As you read through the following, be prepared to address these issues when they occur in order to help your student make a smooth transition into junior high school.

### 1. Behavior

As our children progress through early adolescence, (ages 11-13), major changes are taking place in their lives physically, socially and emotionally. What was once important as an elementary age student now becomes a low priority for a junior high student. Praise and encouragement from parents and teachers are now replaced with peer influence, both positive and negative. It has been said that junior high students are "mesmerized" by the social actions of their peers. Any parent of a middle school student knows the daily drama that can occur and the time that students spend on this activity. Add technology to this social mix, and you have a great deal of time and energy focused on the social efforts of the students. Imagine if we were able to take 80% of this time and energy and refocus it on homework, studying, and family!

#### Freedom = Responsibility

- *Why are friends so important?*

It's difficult to refrain from ridiculing your child's choices in friends and time spent in 'trivial pursuit'. Expressing how things were different when you were his age needs to be done without condemnation of his world.

- *Are they listening to me?*

You'll get the feeling that your child is looking at you but not hearing you. They're waiting for you to finish so they can return to their isolation.

- *Don't give me that dirty look!*

You'll start to see some negative attitude coming your way. Students at this age are discovering that they want a say in how their life should be conducted. They're starting to try to gain independence from their parents. They lack any experience and discount your experience as irrelevant.

- *Who's the boss around here?*

This struggle has its roots from early childhood. Remember, human toddlers do not have to be taught how to be selfish – they are absorbed with self. We clearly are born with what the Bible calls a ‘sin nature.’

- DO expect respectful attitudes and speech within your family, at school and in daily life.

## **2. Bullying, Harassment, and Sense of Self**

Why are middle school students mean to each other? Medical research tells us that children during the ages of 10-14 are flooded with testosterone and estrogen. This dynamic change within your student can cause a variety of physical and emotional changes. Since all students are different, these changes manifest themselves in different stages. However, there are some similarities that we will highlight. Add to this mix the family structure and the challenges that students face and we find that students may become angry, frustrated, anxious, and unsure of themselves within the student culture of their school.

- Reinforce and expect your student to follow “The Golden Rule” – treat others the way that they would like to be treated.

Both boys and girls can bully others. Many times, this behavior is a symptom of a greater issue in the student’s life. Many things can foster anger, resentment, insecurity, rebellion, etc. A change in family status, the death of a relative, moving, and other dynamic changes can affect students of all ages. This in turn can lead to bullying other students. Typically speaking:

- Boy Issues – include the tendency to exhibit aggressive behavior
- Girl Issues – include the “Queen Bee” Syndrome; looking for attention, often at the expense of others

*Solution:* Reinforce positive ways that students are to interact that are respectful, loving and kind. See I John 4:7-8

How to insulate your child from bullying:

- Teach your child how to handle hurtful statements and practice how to respond to hurtful words.
- Handle any bullying situation by having your child tell the person to “stop.” If behavior does not stop, seek assistance from the BCS junior high staff.
- Reinforce your love for your child by telling them that you love him/her and spend time with your child. Spending time with your child gives action to your words.
- At the end of each school day, ask your child how his day was; listen for subtle messages.

### 3. The Powerful Effects of Technology & Internet Safety

#### A. The Technology-Dependent Generation

Considering the technological advances that have taken place in the last 10 years, society as a whole has become very dependent on technology. By dependence, we mean not only its growing use in our business and personal lives, but also how uncomfortable we feel without its constant presence in our lives. Think of your cell phone and the panic you feel when you leave home without it...or when your computer crashes.

Our generation sees technology as a tool. Your child's generation sees technology as culture....where friends are in cyberspace and communication is no longer face-to-face. If this is where your child "lives" then it is no surprise that students feel they need to be connected during school.

A cell phone ringing in class, however, is very disruptive. The capability of cheating is greatly increased. When electronic items go missing, it causes distraction in the education process. We need parent help in this area. We need you to support us as we create guidelines to help our students understand their responsibility with their electronics.

All personal electronics are to be kept out of sight or on top of the student's desk during the school day – from 8:30 am to 3:35 pm. Any student who needs to contact a parent must come to the school office to use the phone or may be permitted to make a call with permission from the teacher. Any parent who needs to contact their child may call or email the school office. If used improperly, electronic devices will be confiscated and brought to the Upper School office. The confiscated device will only be returned to a parent.

#### B. Internet safety

- You may want to refer to the Dateline NBC, "To Catch A Predator," television special which revealed shocking evidence of student vulnerability online.
- Limit your teen's ability to allow strangers into your home via the Internet. Ex: chat rooms, friends of friends, etc.
- Keep your computer in a 'public space' within the home. (This does **not** replace parental monitoring).
- Consider whether your child uses discretion, common sense, positive character traits, and responsibility in using the computer privately. Most do not. Brain research indicates that the middle school brain development is not ready to discern actions with future consequences. This ability is usually fully in place by the mid-twenties.
- Question who is on your child's Instant Messenger list, Facebook "friend" list, etc..

- Social networking sites (MySpace, FaceBook, Instagram, etc.) offer discrete friendships and relationships of which the parent is uninformed. These sites are not secure – even if you think your page is private, it's not.
- If your child has a Facebook page you should have your own page so that you can visit their page as well as the pages of their friends. Pay attention to who your child is talking to.
- Remember that you are the parent. You should know all passwords – you wouldn't give your child the keys to a car without a spare set.

### C. Current Technology Use Promotes Isolation

iPods, MP3 players, cell phones, computers, personal video, text messaging, game systems, etc., have the same things in common: they're fun and they isolate the user from the family. At a time when children desperately need the positive influence of their family and other significant adults to learn social skills, they're given devices that isolate them from the very people that can contribute to their academic and social growth.

- DO take steps to find out where your child has been on the internet. Go beyond just checking the History folder – kids often know how to delete the History. Filters and firewalls are not 100% safe. Check out safeeyes.com.
- DO stress proper technology usage with your child. Discuss its advantages and disadvantages. Set appropriate time limits. Make technology a regular conversation point in your family routine. Sign an "Internet Safety Agreement" with your kids.

## **HOW REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS BENEFIT YOUR CHILD IN THEIR TRANSITION TO JUNIOR HIGH**

As parents, we know you want the very best for your student. This can lead to many wonderful outcomes and improvements in their lives. A possible downside to all of this involvement, however, can be adopting unrealistic or misguided expectations for our child.

We have already discussed what to expect developmentally in the way of physical, behavioral and social/emotional changes. We would now like to briefly discuss some expectations parents need to adopt to help students succeed.

### **1. Expectations Concerning Grades**

We have found there are some typical patterns that occur in middle school students. Often, grades of middle school students will dip. (That's not just a BCS phenomenon, that's a national phenomenon.) This can be upsetting to parents, especially if your

student has never struggled academically before. As parents we can prepare for this potential drop in grades. (We are not advocating resigning yourself to this fact and accepting lower grades.) We are just stating that we should be prepared for this potential occurrence.

## **2. How Can I Prepare?**

A useful way to prepare is to sit down with your student over the summer and together decide what the expectation for grades will be. Determine together how often grades will be monitored by you as the parent. Also establish consequences for exceeding, maintaining, and falling short of these expectations.

You may want to make suggestions to your student about how often he may want to monitor his own grades, which should be more frequently than you. The key is to let your child decide. In turning this decision over to him, you are helping him to understand that he will be responsible for maintaining his grades. He will also be clear on what the consequences are if his grades get below a certain level. You may want to provide incentives for performing at a higher than expected level. These two factors work together to encourage your child to maintain his academic focus.

Your main objectives here are to lay a foundation of cooperation, allow him to be part of the decision making process and follow through with the consequences you agree on. These goals help promote feelings of competency and responsibility. You are expecting your child to be in charge of his grades and honor his agreements.

## **3. My child seems so self-conscious, what can I do?**

Another common concern among junior high school students relates to self-esteem. It is not uncommon for students to become much more self-conscious during this phase of life. Be aware that this is normal. His body and "world" (school), where he spends so much of his time, are changing dramatically. It could make anyone doubt himself, and this is his first time going through such a change!

You can help your student in this area by promoting positive social skills through involvement in social activities. Socializing will become very important to your child at this developmental stage of life. Create opportunities for him to be around other kids while trusted adults are monitoring. After the event, ask for and provide feedback about both positive and negative interactions you both saw take place. Providing this type of opportunity allows us to train our children how to properly and successfully interact with others.

Other ideas include letting your child join a club or pursue a sport inside or outside of school. Your church youth group is usually another great place for him to practice these skills. The main idea is that he has to practice to become competent at social interaction. Design situations for him to practice!

Another factor that increases self-esteem is promoting independence in decision-making. This is a time to tweak your parenting approach with your child. Give him more responsibility regarding grades, chores, scheduling, friends, etc.

If you allow your child to have input in determining his daily routine, he will be more likely to buy into and follow “his” plan. A great goal prior to entering junior high is to regularly discuss how he thinks things should be managed. This would include where and when he will complete homework, how many after school activities he thinks he can handle, when and how he can communicate with friends, etc. You can then collaborate with him to determine what would be the right plan of action concerning these activities. (You provide limits and let them fill in the details.)

Finally, it will help him to feel better about himself to be involved in activities in which he has an interest or talent. These activities not only help him get to know himself and others better, but will help your child receive positive feedback during a time of uncertainty and change. He may not end up enjoying all of the activities, but he will be learning more about who he is and what he likes to do.

#### **4. What’s the big deal about friends?**

It is also common to notice changes in your child’s friends. He may find himself in the position of maturing and developing at a much different rate than a friend he has “hung out” with for years. This can be confusing and hurtful to some children.

As parents, we can help ease this transition for our children. By mentioning that such a change can occur or informing your child that it is a normal stage that everyone experiences can be enough to reassure him. We can also listen, acknowledge his feelings and teach him coping skills regarding how to make new friends and develop his own interests.

It is still important that we know our child’s friends. Peers become a greater influence at this time, so you do need input into who he is spending time with. A great idea is to frequently invite his friends to do things with your family. This allows you to observe the interaction and what the group is collectively getting into without being overly involved.

#### **5. Responsibility**

We all know this is a time of rapid growth and change for our children. Along with facing many other changes, your child desires to be more in charge of his own life. This responsibility is not something that is just handed to your child all at once. That would be overwhelming and frightening to him! Responsibility can be handed to him gradually. As he shows more responsibility in certain areas, then more responsibility can be given.

## **6. So, where do we start?**

The first step sounds very simple, but it is very important...have high expectations for your child. There is an underlying message in expecting the best of our children. When you expect the best, you are basically saying to your child, "I know you are capable and competent to accomplish great things!" Expect great grades, behavior and attitude. Your child will live up to your expectations!

A second step is to challenge your child. Have a talk prior to the beginning of junior high that includes the message, "You are getting older now, I expect you to be able to manage your own homework and grades, maintain your own schedule, and be responsible for more things around the house. Let's talk about how you will do that." This message will be very empowering to your child. Remember, now is the time he wants to feel more mature and competent.

You know your child best. Some children will need a more gradual process in taking on more responsibility for activities over time, while others may be ready to "hit the ground running" in several areas at once. Individualize a plan that is appropriate for your child.

The final area to consider is increasing accountability. Your child needs to be gaining greater knowledge about how the adult world works. Laying a foundation at this time will make his entire future easier to manage. In the adult world we are accountable for organizing ourselves, keeping up with our work, and honoring our agreements and our word. We should expect nothing less from our children.

We do all of these things knowing children will struggle at times, so we have a system of consequences (loss of privilege, freedom, or decision making power) and rewards (gaining privileges, freedom, and decision making power) in place for them much like a company may provide disciplinary procedures or bonuses.

In following these guidelines, you are not being harsh with your child. You are teaching him that he is capable and trustworthy. You are also teaching him valuable lessons that will help him be successful for the rest of his life.

Aligning our expectations with reality for our children will alleviate a lot of frustration. Adolescence can be a very difficult time for children. Overall, it's acceptable...even necessary for children to struggle during this time. That is how they learn and grow. It is our job as the parent to know our child and guide him back, "in the way they should go", to the path of success. We do this by listening, collaborating, and preplanning for "bumps" in the road. A well thought out plan, including high expectations, challenges, and accountability can save a lot of heartache for you both. It is also proven to be a determining factor of success for your student in junior high and beyond.

## **A CHANGE FROM ELEMENTARY PROCEDURE**

Communication in junior high is different than elementary school. No longer will you receive a Friday Folder, calendars from teachers, etc. To help you “bridge” this gap, ask your child questions, look at his homework, and refer to Sycamore. You will find the school calendar on the school website. Occasionally we will send out mass emails to a specific grade or sometimes the entire BCS Junior High. Please make sure your email address in Sycamore is current so you do not miss important information.

Please take note of these procedural changes:

- Late in the morning? Your child will need a note or phone call to the office from you explaining the reason for the late arrival. He/she will take the note to the office, sign in, and receive a pass to give to his/her teacher. When the reason for lateness is the fault of the parent, the tardy will still be considered unexcused and notated as such in order to maintain consistency for all students.
  
- Leaving early? Your child will need a note from you explaining the reason and a time of departure. At the time of departure, your child is required to stop by the Upper School office and must be signed out by a parent or approved individual.
  
- Three (3) unexcused tardies (any period) will result in a detention. Each subsequent tardy will also result in an additional detention during the same semester. Tardies shall be accumulative by the semester.
  
- In the event your child is ill and misses class, homework assignments may be found on Sycamore Education. When your child is well enough, *let him check this to reinforce responsibility*. Send all attendance related emails to [larcher@bethesda.org](mailto:larcher@bethesda.org) and if you would like, copy your student’s teachers as they will be concerned if your student is not in class and would like to pray for him.

On the day your child returns to school, please send in a note with the dates absent and direct your child to take the note to the office prior to the beginning of the school day.

- Detentions issued by teachers will result in a detention form sent home to parents via their student. Please be reminded that if you have specific concerns about the detention you will need to speak with the person who wrote the detention.

## **A Word about Dress Code**

The Dress Code may be found on the BCS website. It is also published in the BCS Handbook, which is given to each family at our Back to School Night (check the website over the summer for date and time). It’s important to read and understand the school expectations required for each student. There are consequences for students who choose not to comply with these guidelines. If you have questions about the dress code, please feel free to contact the office at anytime.

## **WOW! THIS IS A LOT OF INFORMATION. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

It's true – you have received a lot of information. Take it one step at a time. This is a process – after all it takes a lot of work to build a bridge! During the summer begin to prepare your child in these ways:

- Keep and maintain a calendar or daily schedule for the summer including camps, vacations, etc. Teach your child to plan 1 to 2 weeks or even a month ahead.
- Check the BCS website for required class supplies. Help your child get organized for school 1 to 2 weeks before the start of school.
- Check the BCS website for the dates and times of the Back to School Night. Make it a priority to attend with your child.
- Get a good night's sleep starting one full week before the start of school. This will help him adjust back into a morning routine.

As a parent please take note of the following:

- Model good organization for your child.
- Set a timer for 5 minutes (the length of time your child will have between classes). Practice a task of some sort during that time.
- Your child may feel nervous or anxious about beginning this new adventure, about making new friends, about lockers and about having 5 minutes to get from class to class. Reassure him that our entire junior high school team is here to help. The first 2 weeks of our school year will find teachers guiding students through their schedules. We'll be flexible concerning class tardiness or being in the wrong place. It usually takes about 2 weeks for the students to get acclimated to their schedule and they will have their schedule memorized in no time.

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

*My son/daughter has always been an A student. Why are they having so much trouble in their classes now?*

Many students who have historically done "A" and "B" work start to have challenges in middle school. Their normal effort level in junior high may not translate into the grades a student used to earn in elementary school. As the work begins to get more difficult, help your student adjust his study habits to make sure he is spending efficient and adequate time mastering the materials being taught. This may mean doing things differently than before.

*If my child is struggling academically what support or help is available?*

Certainly the teacher is the first line of communication regarding your concerns about your child. He or she may be able to give you good tips on how to help your child

improve their academic performance. Many teachers provide extra help sessions prior to big tests. Please have your child plan to attend these sessions if they are struggling.

*Can my child change his fine arts/elective class selection if he decides to do so?*

As students transition to junior high the number of choices increase. It is important to talk with your child about the choices available to him and process through whether this is the best choice. Students who select one of the semester-long fine arts classes will stay in that class during the entire semester, as changes will not be made at the end of the quarter. If a child chooses the quarter length classes, he will be required to switch to the other class for the next nine weeks.

### **ONLINE RESOURCES:**

Computer Filter/Parental Control: [www.safeeyes.com](http://www.safeeyes.com)

Study Skills: [www.howtostudy.com](http://www.howtostudy.com)

How to Help Young People Succeed: [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

Smoothing Your Child's Transition to Middle School: [www.schwablearning.org](http://www.schwablearning.org)

The Transition to Middle School: [www.ericdigests.org](http://www.ericdigests.org)

National Middle School Association: [www.nmsa.org](http://www.nmsa.org)

(no membership required to use the "site search" or read publications)

Teasing & Bullying: No Laughing Matter:

<http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=1438>

Partnership for a Drug Free America: [www.drugfree.org](http://www.drugfree.org)

Join Together: [www.jointogether.org](http://www.jointogether.org)

### **BOOKS:**

Parenting by the Book by John Rosemond

Mean Girls by Hayley Dimarco (A Christian perspective)

Queen Bees and Wannabees by Rosalind Wiseman (A non-Christian perspective but good information about this cycle of behavior)

Parenting with Love & Logic by Jim Fay and David Funk

Overcommitted, Overwhelmed, and Over it! Stress Management for High Achieving Families and Schools by Juliet Fant

Doing School: How We are Creating a Generation of Stressed-Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students by Denise Clark Pope, PhD (Yale University Press, 2003)

