

## Back to school program helps kids manage middle school challenges

August 4 2015, by Ayleen Barbel Fattal

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While some parents are eagerly preparing for the first day of kindergarten, others are bracing themselves for a major change in their pre-teens' lives—middle school. As kids transition into middle school, they are dealing with physical, emotional and cognitive changes driven

by hormonal changes. They are also facing a new academic environment where classes are larger, teachers are less nurturing and peers are more competitive.

In preparation for the start of the school year, the Center for Children and Families at Florida International University offers a Back to School Preparation Clinic—a skills-based one-week intensive introduction to organization, time management and planning for kids entering grades 6 to 8.

Middle school kids are expected to independently manage their academics – including keeping track of assignments across multiple classes, knowing when long-term projects are due, and being able to pace themselves and resist distractions.

"This particular environment is challenging for many teens because their brains have not yet developed the executive functioning abilities to master these expectations," FIU psychologist Margaret Sibley said.

The Back to School Preparation Clinic is an opportunity for students to receive intensive instruction by trained counselors and practice skills that will help them overcome the challenges they will face. They will learn how to organize school materials, manage their academic work and daily responsibilities, and plan ahead for tests and projects. They will practice these new skills with peers in the program.

Sibley recommends parents balance independence with support to help their teens maintain the good habits acquired in the program.

"Teens need the autonomy to make their own decisions and should be held accountable for managing their own work," Sibley said. "On the other hand, they need some oversight from adults to help them overcome motivation obstacles that may slow them down during homework."

Striking the balance is very challenging for parents."

Sibley is the director of the Supporting Teens' Academic Needs Daily (STAND) program at CCF. The program offers comprehensive family-based services to middle and [high school students](#) with attention, organization and behavioral problems throughout the school year. STAND is a family-based intervention that teaches parents and adolescents to work together to set academic goals and to reinforce success on these goals through a comprehensive home privilege program.

Provided by Florida International University

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