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**March 31, 2010 – Middle School Mystery**

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Have you ever seen a completed homework assignment in your child's possession, but somehow it vanished between your house and the school? You may have even watched while your child reduced fractions or answered questions about ancient Egypt, but somehow the finished product was never seen again. Where did the assignments go? This is referred to as the "middle school mystery."

What really happens to the assignments? Just like many unsolved mysteries, there are theories. Some students start an assignment at school, forget to complete it at home, and do not want to hand it in incomplete. Many students would rather be seen as unprepared in the eyes of their peers or get a lower grade, then get the answers wrong. To try to change these ineffective thinking patterns, *communication* is the key.

**COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS:** During middle school, children want to become more independent, but consciously or subconsciously they still want their parents' attention and guidance. You can help your child become more independent and responsible by asking to see his or her assignment book daily. This can be a formal daily planner or another system that you and your child's teacher think will work best for communication of daily assignments and projects. Ask questions about the contents of the book. If it is continually blank, then provide guidance by asking to see assignments written in every subject for the day. If no assignments are given then "none" is written. Parents can explain that always having the correct answers is not as crucial to learning as putting forth effort.

**COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHERS:** It is really important to talk to your child's teachers to find a way to communicate about assignments and continue to foster your child's independence and responsibility. If assignments aren't shown to the teacher, then it is difficult to judge if assistance is needed. If middle school students spend several hours every night on homework this can lead to frustration. Many teachers recommend that parents write on the assignment or in an email that the student worked on it at home, but still needs assistance.

Some teachers will initial the planner/assignment book to make sure the information is correct or suggest that parents verify assignments on their websites. If your child does write assignments down, but routinely replies, "I left my book at school," you can ask if the school is open after hours. Parents may "charge" for the time or gas money used to drive back to school. Sometimes parents need to see the assignments their children say are "done." For example, a student may have found the correct calculation for a math problem, but forgot the written explanation. Lastly, some students work well with incentives; "if you write down assignments, you can have one hour of computer time."

Overall, to help solve the mystery, it is important to communicate to find out what works best for you and your child so that the middle school years lead to success.

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