

Let's Talk Organization: Home Intervention for The Exploding Binder



Have you taken a look at your child's binder lately? The binder in middle school is a **"mobile office"** for your child, containing both classwork and homework for core subjects and encores. While most students are able to maintain their binder neat and organized, for a considerable number of students the binder poses a real challenge. These are the students who shove papers wherever they can, rushing to get to their next class. If you see your child do their homework, only to find out it was never submitted to the teacher, chances are your child was unable to find their homework assignment because it was lost somewhere in their binder. This means it is time for a **"Binder Makeover."**

Below are some of the steps for a "Binder Makeover":

- Check the binder sections. Each section should be dedicated to one subject. If you find "orphan" papers that are not correctly placed, start by having your child make separate piles for each subject.
- Ask your child if their teacher has any particular requirements for organization. Some teachers, for example, want class notes in a separate section. Some teachers require that papers be organized in a particular order. When unsure, communicate with your child's teacher.
- Ask your child what would be most helpful for them in organizing their binder. Should the subjects be staggered chronologically, so that the morning classes are first, etc.? Would color coding help? What is the best way to label?
- Consider a Homework Folder. Some students find it helpful to have a Homework Folder with two sections: one for work to take home, one for work to return to school. (If your child uses a Homework Folder, see that they remember to place old assignments that have already been checked in the appropriate binder section).
- Make sure the binder is in good working order. Unfortunately, many binders break after frequent use. Some binders are marked "Heavy Duty", and stand a better chance of surviving middle school use.
- If your child seems to tear pages easily, consider a binder that comes with an accordion file.

- Binders that zip or have a Velcro closing are better for students who lose papers. Watch out, however: if the binder is too full, the zipper will not close.
- Many teachers have binder cleanouts, so that older papers can be stored at home for future exams/finals. Students should not just throw out papers, but keep them in a subject file at home. Keeping older papers at home helps maintain a lighter binder that is easier to manage.
- Encourage your child to take pride in their organized binder. Initially, organization should be reinforced daily. After a week or two, a weekly ritual (perhaps Sunday afternoon, while getting ready for the new week) would suffice.

Word of caution: DO NOT ORGANIZE FOR YOUR CHILD, even if tempted to do so. While some students still need parental oversight with organization, it is important to have your child practice the mental and physical act of organizing on their own.

Also, DO NOT GET INTO ARGUMENTS WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT ORGANIZATION. As with everything else, maintaining a firm but supportive tone helps – yelling does not. Chances are, your child will “buy in” to this new focus on organization, because they will see that it helps. If necessary, reinforce the desired behavior by offering a mutually-agreed upon reward, such as a shared activity or computer time 😊

Recommended reading: Donna Goldberg, [The Organized Student: Teaching Children the Skills for Success in School and Beyond](#), 2005.