

PARENTING THROUGH MIDDLE SCHOOL

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10 Key Tips for Parenting Middle Schoolers

- 1 Keep home a safe haven as much as you can.** A teenager's life is mentally exhausting from participating and competing in middle school. Home needs to be a place where your teen can restore energy and relax without fear or criticism. At home, build up your teen's confidence, don't undermine it.
- 2 Try not to let their moods run the house.** Don't allow your teens' inevitable mood swings to negatively impact family dynamics. When conflicts arise, they do not always have to be resolved immediately. In fact, few conflicts are resolved in the heat of the moment! It's best to wait, and address issues when everyone is in a calm frame of mind.
- 3 Encourage your child's connections to the school; make this a priority.** School performance is the single most important determinant as to whether a teenager will engage in destructive behaviors. Connections to the school can come in many areas, not all of which have to be academic. Clubs, sports, and music programs are some good examples of other ways in which your teen may find a connection to school. Encourage some school activities your child does simply for enjoyment.
- 4 Expect behavior that covers up insecurities.** Sometimes an exaggerated sense of confidence, or being hypercritical of peers, is actually a way for teens to cover up for their insecurities. Parents should guide their teen to behave with sensitivity to others. Don't forget that one sure way to guide this behavior is to model it!
- 5 Do not count on teenagers to always use good judgment or see consequences of their actions.** The prefrontal cortex, the section of the brain responsible for judgment and planning ahead, is still developing in adolescents. You may have to step in to support your teen in making some judgment calls. Remember this is not a character flaw, but a normal developmental stage.
- 6 Middle-schoolers need and expect a curfew.** Be smart about this. The younger the teenager, the earlier the curfew. Do not give young teens privileges or freedom for which they are not ready. Teens need boundaries and rules; your role in establishing and maintaining them is essential. Respond to broken rules with logical consequences.
- 7 Make sure you know where your teenager is after school, in the evenings and on the weekends.** Check things out. Call ahead. It's not a good idea to leave young teens home alone without an adult present. Most high-risk behavior occurs on weekends, and weekdays between 3pm and 7pm.
- 8 Give teens all the responsibility they can handle.** Teenagers often feel powerless, and this impacts their behavior. By helping your teen feel powerful and responsible, you are promoting healthy growth and development. Monitor your teen's behavior; reward and encourage your teen for accepting more responsibility.
- 9 Nurture curiosity; model the pursuit of ideas, knowledge, and reading.** Parents can't expect the schools to do all the teaching. Parents, schools, and communities must work together to teach young people and prepare them for adulthood. Model a love of learning and curiosity about the world.
- 10 Be cautious about your assumptions; double check situations and ask good questions.** Don't assume your teenager will be safe at any event without adult supervision. Gradually grant teens the opportunity to go places once you are certain they know how to behave, how to contact you, and that the environment is safe. Be aware that not all supervision is adequate, even in homes with parents present. Introduce yourself to the parents in charge and ask thoughtful questions. Help with the supervision or offer alternative activities if you're at all in doubt.

Parenting Through Middle School is a short, easy-to-use tool kit for parents with middle school aged children. We use helpful video clips, audio interviews, focused articles and downloadable tools so you, as parents, can learn what to expect, what you need to know, and how you can best support your changing child.

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