

Getting Over The Middle



So you have an 11-14 year old in your household. The next few years will be filled with concerns about the most rambunctious, loving, self-absorbed, scared and scary group of kids around. They love to eat your food but complain about your cooking. They crave your attention yet complain that you are watching them too closely. They must have a certain jacket or a pair of shoes and when you have struggled to buy them they abandon them in the lunchroom, or at the corner store or under the bed.

Sometimes you may find yourself asking, “What happened?” Just when everything seemed so manageable, your child turns into this moody, forgetful, impolite ball of energy. Getting over this stage in life will not only be difficult for your child, it will be challenging for everybody who lives in the house. Middle School is not just a time of change for students; it is also a time of transition for parents. If parents are not prepared, dealing with the ever changing moods, emerging personality and new desire for independence of a teenager can be a hair raising experience. Here are some questions parents often ask about middle school aged children.

Q. Why are middle school children so different?

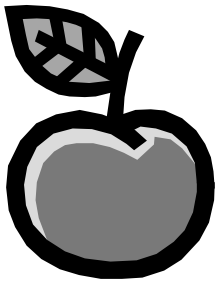
A. Adolescence is a time in human development when a child moves from childhood to adulthood. Children go through many physical, psychological and emotional changes that help them mature. As a result their world and the world of all who live with them seem to be turned upside down.

- They have a high level of emotional and physical energy combined with long periods of “hanging out” and doing nothing productive by adult standards.
- They indulge in risk taking behavior yet their feelings can be easily hurt.
- They want to be more independent from families at the same time they need to be nurtured and protected. They are self-absorbed and crave privacy, together with having great concern about being accepted by the group.
- They may demand privileges but avoid responsibility, at the same time they are developing a deep concern about social issues and other people.

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Q. Since they have different needs, do middle schools need to be different?

A. Yes, and the people who run the school make the difference. A good middle school is made up of people not buildings. The building is not as important as the knowledge and commitment of the staff. The following are some good characteristics of good middle schools:



- Each student has a teacher advisor.
- Scheduling is flexible.
- Children learn in groups.
- Parent involvement is emphasized.
- All students have the same basic course of study.
- Students of differing ability and achievement levels learn together.
- Students have opportunities for community service.
- Special programs are available for English Language Learners.

- The school building is safe.
- Staff and students enjoy being at school.
- The teachers and administrators have background and experience with middle school students.

Q. I've heard that middle school children hangout in cliques. What are cliques?

A. A clique is a small social group of teens that deliberately excludes others. Members of the clique tend to have common interests or be a lot alike. They share personal information and belongings. They support each other and usually have the same likes, dislikes and beliefs. This group or clique is the teenager's first substitute for the family. Acceptance into the clique is very important. Kids who cannot get into a clique may feel lonely or awkward. They may behave in a rebellious or angry way because they have been excluded. After a year or two of being in a clique, boys and girls become more willing to socialize in larger groups with

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each other.

saying?”

Share with your child what your experiences and challenges were as a teen.

Q. How can parents be involved in middle schools when kids don't want them around?

A. Even if you do not spend a great deal of time at your child's school you can still help them do well. Parents can create a home setting that is orderly, purposeful and positive. This means paying attention to the small things like sharing meals, having a daily routine and just staying in touch. Even though it may seem like you can't relate, it is most important to talk to your middle school child. The following tips will help you have better communication:

- Talk together every day
- Be a good listener
- Don't start with a challenge or a criticism avoid judging your child
- Ask questions that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no"
- Don't lecture or argue
- Ask yourself "What is my child feeling that she is not

- Offer praise and extend help
- Be honest—support your child's school but also share any concerns

Q. What about Family Values?

It seems that my child just doesn't think like the rest of us.

A. Early adolescents are trying to find their own values, separate from those held by their families. This doesn't necessarily mean conflict; however it often means a testing of boundaries.

Q. What kind of environment is best for middle school students? What should a school and home environment be like?

A. The qualities of effective schools and successful families are similar. School and home environments should have the following:

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1. Strong leadership
2. High expectations of children
3. A clear sense of purpose and an orderly climate
4. Frequent checking on student progress

of the house were clear and consistent. Families had regular routines especially bed times and meal times. The members of the family valued learning and strongly encouraged reading and homework. At the beginning of school, parents

Q. How can I stay involved in my child's learning... time is so limited and many times they don't want to do the things that I plan for them.

A. Create a home that is orderly, purposeful and positive. This means paying a lot of attention to the small things like sharing meals, having a daily routine staying in touch with each other. Planning menus for the week and even watching TV together are important for middle school kids. Studies show that these daily routines were more connected to success in school than cultural activities like visiting museums or going to concerts.

In homes of high achievers it was found that parents and children talk to each other all the time. Limits were placed on behavior for all members of the family, not just for the kids. In these homes, the rules

visited with teachers and made it clear they expected their children to do well. Then they kept it up throughout the year.



Q. How can I help my child with homework? Some of the things he is working on are too difficult for me understand.

A. By middle school your child may be covering things that you never covered in school. Sometimes all they need is help getting organized or getting started. Asking these questions will help solve about 80% of their homework

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