

# PARENTS: TOP 7 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MIDDLE SCHOOL

By Carol M. Green

Is this your first experience as a middle school parent? Middle school can be exciting and terror inducing. You might be surprised by all of the trials your youngster is facing. It can be very trying for parents, as well. Here are a few tips to help you along the way.

## 1. Organization

Middle school is often the first time students experience the challenge of staying organized. Changing classrooms, managing lockers, dressing down for PE, and increased homework assignments can be difficult for some, and completely overwhelming for other students. The black hole known as a locker seems to swallow assignments and gym shorts alike. Be patient. After all, don't you have a junk drawer at home?

## 2. Relationships

Relationships formed in elementary school begin to change in middle school. Preteens and young adolescents are beginning to exercise more discretion in their choice of friends and activities. Boys become interested in things other than playing football with their buddies during recess. Girls become interested in boys. Choices about how they spend their free time and who they spend it with can weigh heavily on a student's mind. Your daughter's BFF may steal her crush one week and enlist her help breaking up with the same crush the next.

## 3. Bodily changes

Middle school students come in all shapes and sizes and those can change very quickly. Students are acutely aware of how they stack up physically to others. A 65-pound sixth grade boy might be intimidated or even fearful of an eighth grader with facial hair and developing deltoid muscles. Girls are either anxious to become a woman or they dread any physical changes that may call attention. Involvement in athletics can help. Encourage your child to participate and then show up to cheer them on. Even a disappointing loss can be softened by the approval of a pleased parent.



## **4. Emotions**

Those bodily changes are accompanied by emotional challenges as well. Don't be surprised if your once even-tempered young lady cries over things you think shouldn't matter. Be patient. She probably doesn't understand why she is crying, either. Boys might find themselves reacting irrationally as well. Trying to determine where they fit socially, the middle school student may feel caught in the middle, "I am not a child in elementary, nor am I a young adult either." Their emotions are trying to catch up with their brains and changing bodies. One minute they need their parents, the next they can't stand them. It can be a very hard time for everyone.

## **5. Technology**

Youth today are faced with challenges their parents were not. They are curious and have access to lots of information. Some of it is valuable and some is incorrect. Be sure to communicate your values about sex, drugs and alcohol to your children. Be open enough that they can approach you with their concerns. Social media and chat rooms can be fun and entertaining, however, they are also a playground for bullies. Rumors that once took a few days to develop, spread at lightning speed over the Internet. Keep online access in an open area of your home to allow for monitoring, both to help your child with bullying situations and to monitor other activities such as music, videos, and potential predators. And make sure to disconnect your child from technology frequently, especially at night. Have a cut-off time in the evening where the technology is turned off and stored in an area where your child does not have access (like your bedroom, for example).

## **6. Home should be a haven**

If your home is not a safe haven, fix it. Your child is experiencing so many physical, emotional and social changes that they need something steady. A stable home environment where they can feel safe and sure might be the one thing that gets them through this challenging time.

## **7. Have fun**

At times it may feel as if you are all on a roller coaster, but roller coaster rides don't last for long, and they can be fun. Remember to take time to enjoy your youngster. This awkward, quirky stage won't last forever. He will soon be driving a car and moving closer to independence and further from your grasp.