

HELPING FAMILIES UNDERSTAND ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

It is common for parents and caregivers to feel overwhelmed, often wondering what happened to the sweet, chatty little child they once knew. Your knowledge of adolescent development can be an invaluable resource for these families.

This guidance can help ease their worries.



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle schoolers experience significant physical changes, including growth spurts and hormonal changes. These can affect their mood, behavior, and self-esteem.

- Because they grow so fast, they get less coordinated.
- They need more rest due to the energy used for growing.
- They might show uneven development in skills like agility, balance, strength, and flexibility.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Adolescents develop more advanced thinking skills, including abstract reasoning and problem-solving. This makes them become more curious. But teens also question the authority of their parents and teachers in new ways.

- They might question everything, not taking everything at face value.
- They can start to understand more complex concepts.
- They can start to think about the future.
- They can also begin developing a worldview and their own values.

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EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle schoolers often experience intense emotions and mood swings. They may struggle with self-identity and self-esteem.

- Adolescents do actually feel emotions stronger than we do. They aren't just "being dramatic."
- They are sensitive to other people's opinions or reactions.
- They are convinced that the whole world is watching them closely and cares as much as they do.
- One moment they can say something so profound, then turn around and do something with seemingly no thought

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Peer relationships become increasingly important. Middle schoolers may face peer pressure, bullying, and the desire to fit in.

- This is a time when bullying or cyberbullying can happen.
- They may test out new "personalities" or clothing to figure out where they fit in and what they like (let them explore!).
- They care deeply about what their friends and peers think/
- They want to fit in, but simultaneously want to be an individual.

Your expertise on middle school is valuable! You have watched hundreds of students start as confused sixth graders and go on to become more confident eighth graders. You know that many of the bumps of the first semester of sixth grade are forgotten by January. You can provide families with the hope and reassurance they need that their child (and the family!) is going to make it through middle school.