

Your middle school student...

As your student moves into these middle school years you may notice new attitudes and reactions from your child. These qualities can be a natural part of growing up. Here are some typical middle school behaviors and tips on how to handle them.

Moody/Emotional

Your child is becoming an adolescent and you may notice he/she is more moody. They may be happy one minute and the next minute they're angry. These moods can be hard to predict and even harder to cope with.

Tips: As hard as it might be, the best approach is to ignore this unpredictable behavior as much as possible. Your child's hormone levels make it almost impossible for them to control their emotions. It's important to keep in mind that the moods have little to do with you – try not to take them personally. Also, try to ignore these moods as much as possible. If you don't give them attention, odds are they won't stick around long. Remember though, this moodiness does not give your child an excuse to walk all over you. Remind your child that they may be upset but they do not have the right to be upset at the whole household.

Private

It's natural for children to want more privacy as they grow older. They begin to see themselves as unique individuals and they need more space.

Tips: Provide your child with a private place to help them cool off and relax. If they slam their door and shout "Just leave me alone". Try taking their advice. Set out clear rules such as "knock before opening a closed door". Tell them you respect their need for privacy. However, privacy does not mean they have complete control over their room. Let them know your expectations for how the room should be kept.

Sensitive

As your child matures their body starts changing in uncontrollable ways (acne, growth spurts, facial hair, etc.). These changes can make them feel uncomfortable about their appearance.

Tips: If your child makes negative comments about their appearance, listen to what they say. Make comments that show them you are listening and are trying to understand how they are feeling ("That must be really tough", "I can understand that would make you feel bad"). This will encourage them to open up about their emotions. Show them old photos of yourself and talk about how you felt when you were this age. Try to help them understand that their friends probably are feeling the same way about their bodies and that the changes will be less noticeable as they get older.

Independent

At this point in their lives your child is beginning to form relationships outside the family. Your child may seem unhappy but when you ask them what is going on they reply "nothing". Then, they may spend hours on the phone or internet talking to a friend about their troubles. This can be hard on you. Try to remember it is part of growing up – relying less on parents to meet all of their needs.

Tips: This is a point in your child's life where they should be allowed to make more decisions about how and when they do things. Make it clear that this freedom has conditions. When trying to ask your child questions about their life try to remain as casual as possible. If the questions are too probing they may feel defensive.

Argumentative

You may notice that your child is starting to take the opposite side of your opinion. At this age, disagreeing allows them to use their brainpower. They are beginning to be able to reason, make decisions and understand abstract ideas. Also, this disagreement is their way of trying to separate themselves from you and prove they can do things their own way.

Tips: Try to remember that no matter what you say, chances are your child may hold a different opinion. They are learning to defend their thoughts and ideas and learning about what they like and dislike. Through their arguing they are also learning the thinking behind your rules. They are testing to see why you hold certain beliefs. Remind your child though that just because they disagree does not mean they have to be rude.

Taking all of this into account it is no wonder that parents feel frustrated by this time in their child's life. Try not to give up – research shows that children this age need their parents now more than ever.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS:

40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents

Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as Developmental Assets—that help young children grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

<http://www.search-institute.org/content/40-developmental-assets-adolescents-ages-12-18>

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Kids' Health

This website provides helpful information regarding children's health and development.

<http://kidshealth.org>

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health

This website provides information about various mental illnesses.

<http://www.macmh.org/publications/mental-health-fact-sheets/>



Rachel Vail
Author of 'Unfriended'

From "The Blog" on www.Huffingtonpost.com

Top 15 Things Your Middle School Kid Wishes You Knew

1. Respect me. I'm my own person, not just your kid. Sometimes I might have opinions that differ from yours. Sometimes I just want to be your baby. Respect me either way.
2. I still want to have fun with you, and feel like home is safe and happy. Smile at me.
3. I need to make some of my own choices, and maybe some of my own mistakes. Don't do my work for me or get me out of every jam. You don't need to be better than me at everything. Don't condescend; you don't need to impart your elderly wisdom on me if I have a problem. Please wait for me to ask for your help. If I don't ask for it, I might want to work it out for myself. Let me rant without offering advice. Sometimes that's all I really need, just to talk my way through something and for you to just listen to me.
4. Sometimes I'm going to be moody and annoyed and frustrated. You need to just let that happen (though you shouldn't let me be rude to you; that's weird and embarrassing). It might just be a mood or something might be going on that I'm not ready to talk about yet. If you hang around doing stuff near me and don't interrupt or try to solve it as soon as I start, I might feel comfortable talking with you about things.
5. Trust that I'll do my work. If I don't, you can help me manage my time, but wait until I'm not taking care of responsibilities to think I can't. Don't just assume I can't handle responsibility because of my age. Believe in me.
6. It feels really good when you ask me to teach you about what I'm learning or what I'm good at. You don't have to be awesome at computer programming to let me teach you some cool stuff, for instance. I have to be a beginner constantly. Show me it's OK to stay relaxed and present when you are struggling to learn something.
7. I don't like the drama either, and it surprises me as much as it does you. You think it's rough having this alien lunatic in your *house*? Try having it in your body, and you can't even get away.

8. If you don't like my friends, it feels like you don't trust my judgment or like I am stupid about choosing friends. Or both. Ask me what I like about them, or what we have fun doing together, or just to tell you about a new friend. Stay open-minded. Still, if you think my friends are being bad to me, I need you on my side that much more.

9. Sometimes I am completely overwhelmed and need to zone out for a while. I am not becoming a slug and will not stay in my room staring at a screen for the rest of my life. Maybe just for the rest of the afternoon.

10. I will fight you every step of the way if you make me do stuff I don't want to do (get some exercise, do my homework, write a thank-you note, practice piano, apologize to my sister, take a shower, wear deodorant... *so many things*), but you should probably make me do them anyway. I know I will feel better if I sweat and shower each day, and develop my study skills, and show up tomorrow prepared, and, and, and. I know! But please don't overwhelm me. I might not be able to do what I should right away. I might need reminders, later, which will annoy me completely. Remind me anyway.

11. Explain why I'm being criticized or punished. It feels scary if I don't understand anything beyond that you are mad at me. And sometimes what I need more than a scolding is a hug or a cuddle. Especially when I am more porcupine than puppy.

12. I need to have private jokes with my friends and not explain them to you. It's how we bond. You don't need to be involved in every aspect of my life to still be loved and needed by me.

13. If my social life gets to be too much, I may need you to force a little vacation from it on me. But most of time what I need is to work through how to navigate life online and with peers. Now is my chance to learn how to deal, *with your help*. Just shutting it down keeps me from learning how to build my life online with scaffolding provided by you. Stay calm and cool, let me explain what's going on, and talk things through with me. Ask more, tell less.

14. Especially if I've been feeling stressed, maybe you could just hang out with me. Go to the park or get an ice cream or have a catch, whatever; it feels good to just do something together without discussing or solving or teaching anything.

15. I like it when you think I'm funny. Or interesting. Or awesome. I actually do care what you think about me. Please find something specific you actually like about me because sometimes I can't find anything in myself to like at all. I might roll my eyes, but your words and judgments do matter to me, and I will remember them, the good and the bad. I will keep them with me like treasures even when I lose my keys and wallet and ID. Which I probably will. More than once. Sorry.

And bonus extra important thing you should know: The fact that my opinions on this and anything else might change tomorrow does not mean I don't feel them fiercely today. Keep up. I love you. Remind me you still love me, too.

TEEN TALK

A SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR PARENTS OF TEENAGERS

HAVE YOU TALKED WITH YOUR TEEN TODAY?

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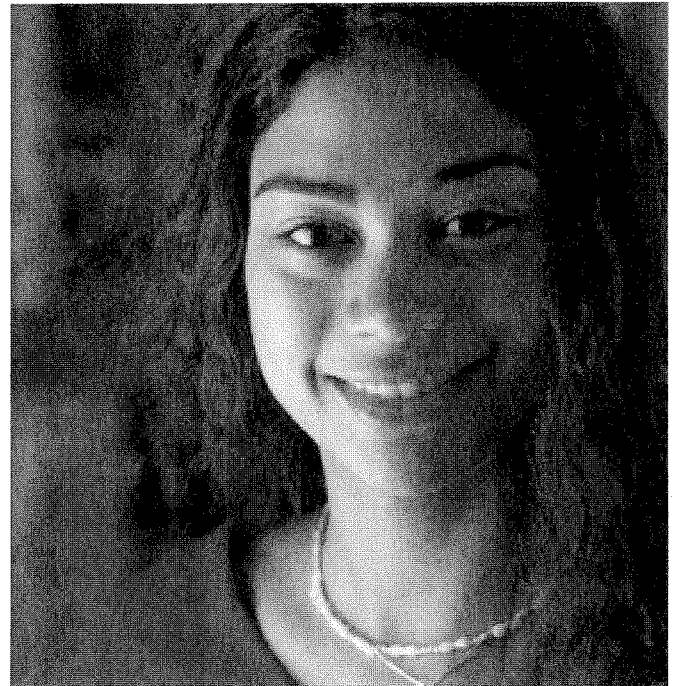
Does my child care what I think?

Your child probably cares a great deal about what you think. You play an important role in shaping your teenager's behavior. Teens who say their parents warned them about drug use and set clear rules are less likely to use drugs. Parents' and teenagers' morals, future aspirations, and self-control are typically quite similar. Talking encourages family togetherness and increases the likelihood teens will share parents' values.

What kinds of things do teenagers want to talk about?

Generally, teenagers are interested in the following conversations:

- Family issues** Teens want to participate in decisions and be told about family problems.
- Controversial issues** Teens have questions like "What does sex feel like?" or "What does it mean to get high?"
- Emotional concerns** Teens want to know how you really feel about things.
- The big whys** Teens begin to have philosophical questions about issues like war and religion.
- The future** Teens are curious and concerned about what they can expect from the future.
- Current events** Teens have questions about what is going on in the world and in their community.
- Personal interests** Teens really want you to show interest in their activities, music, sports, and friends.
- Parents' lives** Teens are curious about what things were like when you were their age, including emotions you had and mistakes you made.



How can I talk with my teen?

All she wants to do is go out with her friends and spend time alone in her room. How can I talk with my teen?

- Don't lecture, talk for hours, or ambush your teen.
- If your teen tells you a secret, keep it.
- Listen carefully to her concerns and feelings, and respect her views. Teens are often afraid of being lectured, punished, or not understood.
- Stress that your teenager can and should make choices about his behaviors, and is responsible for these decisions.
- Offer praise. Make a date to spend one-on-one time with your teen. Find something you both like to do.
- Tell your teen you love him. With all the changes he's going through, he needs to hear it now more than ever.

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Are you *really* listening to your teen?

Your messages to your teen may not be as clear as you think. To make sure you and your child are having the same conversation, communication should be interactive. Ask your teen what she wants to talk about. Teenagers often feel their parents aren't listening and dominate conversations. Many parents believe they are talking to their kids about drugs; unfortunately, the majority of kids don't remember these conversations. Parents need to be ready to talk when teens are, and not just when it is convenient for them.

Choose your battles.

Research shows only about 1 in 15 families have serious conflict that is harmful to the parent-teenager relationship. Typically, parents and teenagers argue over chores, curfew, and appearance -- issues that are really not that important. Parents need to choose their battles and decide what is worth fighting about. What would really happen if your child didn't make his bed one morning? Wouldn't your energy be better directed towards issues like school, sex, drugs, or alcohol?

I know all parents and teens fight. How can we resolve these conflicts?

Your goal as a parent should be to solve conflict in a positive way. Teens are more agreeable when they think you are considering their needs and when they are part of the resolution process. Here are some tips for good problem solving:

- Establish ground rules so it's a fair fight.
- Agree to treat each other with respect and listen to each other's point of view.
- Reach a mutual understanding. You should both have the opportunity to say what you think. Make sure the other person really gets what you're saying.

Be polite and clear. Use I statements, such as "I feel _____ when you _____."

- Brainstorm together as many possible solutions as you can.
- Pick the options you like best, see where your interests coincide, and negotiate a solution you both think is acceptable.
- Keep in mind that arguments are very common in families with teens. However, most studies show that teens love their parents and value these relationships.

Where you can go for more information:

Families with Teens – University of Minnesota Extension
www.extension.umn.edu/familieswithteens/

Children, Youth & Family Consortium – University of Minnesota
www.cyfc.umn.edu

Kids Health
<http://kidshealth.org>

Talking with Kids About Tough Issues
www.talkwithkids.org

You may also want to look at:

Elkind, D. (1998). *All grown up and no place to go: Teenagers in crisis*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Schaefer, C. E., & DiGeronimo, T. F. (1999). *How to talk to teens about really important things: Specific questions and answers and useful things to say*. San Francisco: Wiley.

Steinberg, L. (2011). *You and your adolescent: The essential guide for ages 10-25*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Adapted from University of Illinois Extension fact sheets written by the author.