

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Middle School Age

Ages 6-12: Children in this age range are learning how to do well those things that society (family, school, church, and community) deems as valuable and important. If the child is successful in learning these values, the child goes on to be industrious and confident in his or her own ability.

Ages 12- 18: Children in this age no longer feel (or look) childlike, yet the adult world is not ready to accept them as an adult. Often teenagers will look to their friends to “reflect” who they may be. If they don’t feel the reflection “fits” they will move onto a new friendship. Cliques are powerful, as membership becomes important. While they are not sure who they are, they tend to define themselves by what they do, say and wear.

Developed from Erikson’s Eight Stages of Development

What Your Child Needs From You:

- **Be Available:** The middle school student is in the midst of many changing relationships. Although this is developmentally appropriate, it is stressful to the child. Be near your child so that they can *casually* bring up issues, or you can *casually* ask questions. If asked directly, they may say they don’t need assistance, but if you use film content, music content or friends situations they will be more comfortable talking about their views. Avoid lecturing.
- **Be Ready:** for many changes. Forgetting, irritability, and the need for independence to name a few. If family decisions were always “handed down” up until now, now is the time to begin negotiating and compromising with your child. Allow them to have opinions, and *where appropriate*, give a little. They are “betwixt and between”, and need to feel effective somewhere.
- **Be Active:** because of their developing selves, middle schoolers are very focused on themselves. As they become aware of their own preferences and place in society, they also become aware of others in society. This is a great time to develop a social conscience, or accentuate your child’s strengths. This has the benefit of being good for them to focus outside themselves, and also will help them to feel a stronger sense of identity. Get them involved!
- **Be A Good Example:** Even though much of their identity is reflected from their friends at this age, research shows that after all is said and done, young adults come back very close to the values their parents instilled. So, remember that they are watching and learning. If you are confronted with a moral or ethical decision, talk about it at dinner or in the car so that they hear your thinking and how you arrive at your decisions.
- **Know their Friends:** *Don’t* assume that your children are too old for you to check on them, or talk to their friends parents. Because they are coming to you less, you need to do the legwork to be certain they are in safe situations. They want you to know—they just don’t want to tell you. So find out.
- **Unconditional Love:** Explain to your children that you always love them, whether or not you approve of their behavior. Be clear about which behaviors are unacceptable, which are acceptable. Assure your children that you always accept them, separate from their behaviors.

Reference: H.E.L.P.—National Middle School Association

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