**What to Expect During Middle School Years**

*We love middle school students, but they can be tough! Early adolescence is a time of unprecedented growth for young people. Parents often see major changes in their children and wonder if they will survive their child’s journey through puberty. Every child’s development is unique, but children typically develop through a predictable sequence of milestones. While we recognize that every child has their own timetable, below are some characteristics of the middle school student as a reference for knowing what to expect and better understand your child.*

**The 11- 12 year old (6th grade)**

**Physical**

Vast appetite for food, physical activity and talking.

Growth spurts! Typically occurs early for girls and can result in feeling awkward and clumsy. Boys may worry they will never grow.

There can be wide differences among individuals in rate of development

Increased need for personal hygiene – daily showers, deodorant and shaving.

Tiredness and increased need for sleep.

Curiosity about opposite sex (girls usually interested first)

**Social and Emotional**

Less overt affection and attention shown to parents, with occasional rudeness.

Impulsive, unaware.

Focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-concept.

Tendency to return to childish behavior, especially when stressed

Extremes in emotions

Inclusion/exclusion: the height of cliques and seeking social acceptance.

Experimentation with identity, behaviors, appearance and self-image.

Demand for privileges, but may avoid responsibilities

The feeling that their experience is unique, believing that no one has ever felt as they do.

**Intellectual**

Short term thinking; concerned about the present, not necessary long-term.

Intellectual interests expand

Development of ideals and selection of roles models

May experiments with dangerous risk-taking behaviors

Increased ability to think abstractly and from various perspectives.

Even if students can think abstractly, they learn best with active, hands-on and can relate to real-life.

Very concerned with fairness, rules and sense of justice; especially as it relates to themselves.

Do not distinguish between what they are thinking and what others may be thinking; they assume that everyone is as concerned with their behaviors and appearance as they are

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**The 12 -13 year old (7th grade)**

**Physical**

High energy, but a lot of need for rest

Growth spurts

Physical activity and sports are valued

Eating patterns may change, with an over concern for dieting

Increased need for personal hygiene

Feeling awkward and worried about their body

**Social/Emotional**

Struggle with sense of identity

Moodiness

Can be enthusiastic at sometimes; lethargic other times

Friendships with both sexes are important

Complaints that parents interfere with independence

More likely to express feelings through actions than words

Peer vocabulary (slang) important

Inclusion/exclusion; height of cliques, seeking to belong

Difficulty with decisions, but need to learn how to make decisions for themselves

Young people become more independent, but still want the safety and protection of being a child. They are pulled between wanting to grow-up and remain young.

The feeling that their experience is unique; no one has ever felt as they do; suffered so much, or been so misunderstood

**Intellectual**

Hormonal and physical demands of puberty may cause slowing rate of cognitive development

Increased ability to think abstractly

Very concerned with fairness, rules and sense of justice; especially as it relates to themselves.

Lack of understanding of cause and effect as well as feelings of omnipotence and invincibility ("That can't happen to me") can lead to risk-taking (smoking, drugs, drinking etc).

May show emerging skill in particular content area

Improved abilities to use speech for self-expression

High interest in current events, politics, social justice, pop culture and materialism

Idealistic; may offer "ideal" solutions to complex problems

Continued development of ideals and selection of role models

Questioning others’ beliefs; religious and political.

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**The 13-14 year old (8th grade)**

**Physical**

Wide differences in rate of physical growth; girls reach 95% of mature height; boys experience voice change and begin to develop upper-body strength

Skin problems and acne emerge

Eating patterns change

Worry about being "normal" physically

Uneven coordination

Most social/emotional/cognitive developments are directly related to physical changes

Short-term thinking predominate

High energy and need for exercise and snacks

**Social/Emotional**

Concerned about physical attractiveness to others

Loud

Peer pressure/peer relations (being cool)

Increased distractions from homework: sports, dress, social media, telephone, video games

One work answers to adult questions (minimal feedback)

Mirrors are best friends and worst enemies

Complain that parents interfere with independence

Desire for independence and autonomy increase, but still want to be cared for like a child at times

Test rules and limits of authority

Struggle with sense of identity

Music, materialism and pop culture role models can become a major preoccupation.

Like to do as much as they can - cram as much into the day as possible

More of their adult personality emerge

Embarrassed to be seen with parents; critical of parents dress, habits, ideas

Show-off qualities

Resent criticism and put-downs even though they use them themselves

**Intellectual**

Struggles with organization, executive functioning and memory.

Developing formal operational thinking, but also think in concrete terms

Interested in technology and how things work

Easily "bored"

Respond well to academic variety and change

Learn well in cooperative groups

More consistent evidence of conscience

Great experimental risk-taking time. Drinking, drugs, smoking and sexual experimentation it at highest level between 12 and 16 years

Idealistic; will offer ideal solutions to complex issues.

Underdeveloped understanding of cause and effect as well as feelings of omnipotence and invincibility ("That can't happen to me") can lead to inability to link behaviors to negative consequences and risk-taking (smoking, drugs, drinking etc).

Questioning others beliefs; religious and political.