

Skills for Good Parenting: Middle School - Introduction

Good parenting is all about parenting the child that you have. This means that you have to alter your approach as your child passes through the various developmental stages on his way to adulthood. The social and emotional stage of your child determines how he feels, thinks and interacts with others. As a parent, it is important to calibrate your words and actions based on the appropriate developmental stage. And don't forget that social and emotional development don't always synch up with intellectual development.

Since an approach that might work for a toddler would be totally ineffective when dealing with a middle schooler, we have taken the skills covered by COPE's Skills for Good Parenting parent workshop and broken them down based on four developmental levels. **Skills for Good Parenting: Middle School** is a look at parent skills that we hope will help you deal effectively with your child between the ages of 12 and 14. There are similar Skills for Good Parenting sequences for Early Childhood (ages 2-5), Elementary Ages (ages-11), and High School (ages 15 and up). We hope that this series will help you provide a happy and stable environment for your child to develop as an independent and resilient individual.

In the middle school years, children identify much more with their peers, while distancing themselves from their parents and families. They are hyper-aware of their appearance and are very self-conscious about it as social acceptance depends on conformity to the norms of their peer group. Their social status, of paramount importance to their self-esteem, is related to group membership. While they are beginning to be able to think abstractly and logically and are able to consider the consequences of thoughts and actions without experiencing them, they are not yet able to apply these mental processes to themselves.

Reasoning skills are the last part of brain development (often not completed until the mid to late 20s) to occur. This means that your middle schooler may behave in reactive or impulsive, since his brain decision-making structure is still under construction. They often cannot understand, much less explain, their own actions.

It may help to keep in mind that, just as boys' and girls' bodies develop differently and at a different pace, generally, boys' brains are more driven to understand how things work; girls' brains are more interested in how people feel. This is as much a function of socialization as biology.

*There is a worksheet that accompanies this series of articles, as well as a resource guide with links to further reading and additional material. You may want to print out the worksheet before reading further, so you can pause, reflect and take notes. The worksheet and resource guide are listed with the other "chapters" in the **Skills for Good Parenting: Middle School** list of topics.*

SDJ 8/13/18