

What to Expect from Your Middle Schooler



Middle school students have been described as “the young and the restless” and “the least understood of any age group.” The physical, emotional and cognitive growth of students varies more in middle school than any other years. Students are emotionally, socially, physically and academically on a daily roller coaster ride between childhood and the teenage years. A quick glance into a sixth grade classroom reveals both muscular mature boys and boys who look as though they skipped fifth grade. The same variety is evident among girls and, girls who mature early may feel very uncomfortable with their changing body.

Unfortunately, when adolescents’ bodies begin to change, their body parts refuse to grow at the same time. You may notice large feet on many boys before they grow in height and girls or boys who look like they’re “all legs.” This, along with disproportionate changes in weight, skeletal and muscle development, is a reason why they’re constantly tripping over each other in the hall, can’t sit still and are always dropping their books. This clumsiness is difficult for the self concept of previously coordinated kids.

Middle school students struggle between independence and security. You may be feeling your sixth grader is beginning to break away from you, but this is the time they need you: your love, your limits and your ability to help them problem solve. “Please love me when I’m least lovable is appropriate at this time.”

Your sixth grader’s emotions may become very fragile. One event such as the loss of a friend or a low grade on a test can “ruin” a student’s life for several days. This age group does not have the experience to put things into perspective. Self concept is a continuous struggle. Stress level is high and self esteem is fragile because of real or imagined attitudes.

Sixth graders also develop a sense of fairness that manifests itself in excuses and indignation when they believe they have been treated unfairly. They don’t always practice fairness themselves as evidenced by the slightly changed stories they take home to parents, but they are quick to point out deficiencies between what adults say and what they actually practice.

Experts say that parents can begin to help the middle school child by putting themselves in their shoes. Imagine your body changing in ways you didn’t even know existed, experiencing feelings you never had before and don’t understand, a workload that has doubled, having to spend evening time doing work you think is not important and having a “boss” who is always on your case. Being a parent of a middle school child is a challenge, but you still have a great influence. Your actions have a strong impact on your child’s self esteem...even though you may not think they are listening, they are.

