

Talking with Middle Schoolers

What can I expect from my middle schooler? They might

- Seek alone time over family time
- Show more concern about body image, looks, and clothes
- Focus on themselves; going back and forth between high expectations and lack of confidence
- Experience more moodiness
- Show more interest in and influence by peer group
- Express less affection toward parents; sometimes might seem rude or short-tempered
- Feel stress from more challenging school work
- Begin having more peer related discord at school as they learn to navigate peer relationships on their own
- Start understanding that issues are not just clear-cut and information might be interpreted different ways

How to communicate with your middle schooler

- **Do** facilitate open communication through reflective listening - read their body language and face as they talk and state what you see (e.g. you're sad that Susie is spreading rumors about you)
 - Avoid interview like questions and try to listen more than talk
 - Avoid trying to fix it, sometimes they just want to be heard (so hard as a parent!)
 - **Tip:** invite your middle schooler to 15-30 minutes of weekly special time where they pick the activity and you enter their world (challenge yourself not to ask questions!)
- **Do** get ready for tough questions before they arise
 - Think through hard topics that your middle schooler might ask
 - Prepare by practicing with a partner or a friend
 - Try to stay calm, early adolescents can often shut down if they perceive judgment from parents
- **Do** use age-appropriate limits when necessary that target acceptable alternatives while acknowledging their feeling or desire
 - Example: Sally wanted a new iPhone and begins yelling at you when you say she cannot have one. "Sally I know you're disappointed about the iPhone (feeling), but I'm not for shouting at (limit), you can choose to tell me how you're feeling or you can write it down in your journal"
 - Avoid power struggles with your early adolescent

Resources

- <https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/communicating-relationships/communicating/difficult-conversations-with-teens>
- <https://childmind.org/article/tips-communicating-with-teen/>
- <https://www.ahaparenting.com/ages-stages/teenagers/parent-teen-relationship>
- How to Talk so Teens will Listen, and Listen so Teens will talk by Faber & Mazlish
https://www.amazon.com/How-Talk-Teens-Will-Listen/dp/0060741260/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1548964373&sr=8-1&keywords=how+to+talk+so+teens+will+listen+and+listen+so+teens+will+talk
- Brainstorm by Daniel Siegel
https://www.amazon.com/Brainstorm-Power-Purpose-Teenage-Brain/dp/0399168834/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1548965300&sr=8-1&keywords=brainstorm+by+daniel+siegel