

Typical Characteristics and Behaviors of Middle Schoolers

- Years of extraordinary change. Developmental and intellectual growth in these years will not be duplicated again in the child's lifetime.
- Peer group takes on increasing importance; influence of family (parents) diminishes.
- Increasing need for and ability to handle independence.
- Growing need for privacy, generally share less of school experience with parents.
- Organization (or lack of it) often a key issue.
- Testing of limits common, both at home and at school. Can manipulate with "half-truths." "You are the only parent who will not allow their child to"
- Can be years of overt cruelty and cliques, often defined by excluding others.
- Often highly sensitive, quick to feel slighted or left out.
- Fluctuations in friendships are common. Best friend today can become a "mortal enemy" tomorrow. At times students can have difficulty letting go of perceived negative actions from a classmate, sometimes for an action that occurred months (or even years) ago.
- An informal yet nevertheless clear "social hierarchy" can develop within a class. There is typically a "cool group" in each grade level. Some children spend great energy wishing/trying to be part of this group, even if it is a poor match for the child.
- Many students reach out to an adult at school to share concerns, successes, and just to be around. See if you can find out who this person is for your child.
- Growing awareness that issues are not "black or white," but have various shades of gray complicating decision-making.
- Self-conscious of body.
- Growing interest in opposite gender.
- Highly emotional. Reactions are extreme - total elation or depression.
- High energy. If we could only bottle it!
- At the same time, this energy can dissipate quickly. Mental and emotional exhaustion can appear suddenly.
- Academically competitive.
- Academically engaged. Middle schoolers want to know and understand their world.

- Technologically savvy.
- Being connected through technology is often of prime importance. The latest text must be answered now! It can be difficult to set limits on using technology for social connections.
- Expect to be talked to like adults.
- Are often keen to negotiate anything, from homework expectations at school to limits and structures in place at home.
- Intellectually these are years of developing abstract reasoning ability.
- Growing enjoyment of being “intellectual,” discussing global issues.
- Enjoys wrestling with and discussing moral issues.
- Enjoy making inferences by eighth grade.
- Begin to see the “adult person” emerge.
- Extraordinary sense of humor.
- Often will see times of true elation and enjoyment of life. This positive energy is contagious!
- Begin to develop the ability to self-assess.
- Begin to develop the ability to self-advocate.
- Begin to be able to set realistic goals for the future.
- Begin to see true empathy emerge.
- Increasing ability to think critically.
- Often develop a passion for supporting charitable organizations or ideas, i.e. children in the hospital, political injustices abroad, natural calamities.
- Years of tremendous growth in achievement levels.
- The ability to handle multiple tasks and academic demands grow almost daily.
- Middle schoolers are fun!