



What to expect from the Middle School Years

A preview/review of what to expect



Introduction

- Adolescence as a distinct period of human growth
- Middle Schools seek to serve the unique needs of adolescent learners
- Students experience significant changes in:
 - Physical Development
 - Intellectual Development
 - Moral/Ethical Development
 - Emotional/Psychological Development
 - Social Development

Physical Development

Characteristics

- Body changes
- More development than any other time except first two years
- Coordination issues
- Physically vulnerable- poor habits, choices, behaviors
- Puberty- Different rates
- Brain undergoes remarkable development- executive function vacation

Implications

- Feed and water regularly
- Preoccupation with body image may distract/cause avoidance/make kids hesitant
- Minimize competition/comparison between early/late bloomers
- Practice executive function a lot
- Hands on learning

Intellectual Development

Characteristics

- Not as visible but just as intense
- Focus on things of interest and that are perceived as useful
- Highly curious
- Prefer active over passive learning
- Developing abstract reasoning process
- Learning to appreciate humor
- Inquisitive about adults and keen observers

Implications

- Do better in classrooms that engage in active learning
- Adults need to be role models because of strong desire to please positive authority figures
- Accommodate diversity of kids development (varied cognitive development)
- Engaging kids in intellectual work
- We're all "on" all the time

Moral/Ethical Development

Characteristics

- Increased capacity for analytical thought and reflection (Start to see shades of grey)
- Moving away from self-centeredness toward global perspective
- Keenly aware of flaws in others but don't see them in selves
- Expect detailed response/interaction from adults
- Starting to make own moral/value judgments

Implications

- Character Education becomes a critical component of student learning (moral/performance character)
- Need support in coping with complexity
- Give opportunities to learn to articulate opinions/values
- Discuss options and potential consequences (Rehearse ethical/moral dilemmas)
- Sounding like they “get it” doesn't mean they “totally get it” or that they can put it into practice

Emotional/Psychological Development

Characteristics

- Quest for greater independence
- Discovering/defining identity
- Adult acceptance v. peer approval
- Can be moody, erratic, irritable, inconsistent, self conscious
- Easily shaken
- Attuned to differences between individuals
- Believe their own experience to be unique

Implications

- Foster adult relationships beyond parents
- Supportive environment free of sarcasm/humiliation/criticism
- Remind them they are not alone
- Advisory opportunities to ensure everyone is known well by at least one adult
- Topical reading can be a powerful influence
- Practice monitoring/regulating emotions is critical

Social Development

Characteristics

- Group membership is critical
- Peer loyalty is powerful
- Families still have significant influence
- Social maturity lags behind physical/intellectual maturity

Implications

- Overreaction and embarrassment are common
- Adults are in competition for kids' attention (positive relationships are key)
- Cooperative learning and collaboration are important tools to develop kids

Conclusion/Questions

- Adolescents need experiences that are organized to address their unique needs
- Teachers, Parents, and other Adults who work with adolescents need to understand and respond to their needs
- Article available at:
<http://www.amle.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/DevelopmentalCharacteristics/tabid/1414/Default.aspx>
- Other great info at: www.amle.org