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## **Elementary and Middle School Years -- Age 6 to 12**

Children go through different stages of development depending on the age group. This ebook contains information regarding children ages 6-12.

( <http://parentingclass.net/ebooks/EarlyChildhood.pdf> )

### **What are the middle years about?**

School is the important event at this stage. Children learn to make things, use tools, and acquire the skills to be a worker and a potential provider. They grow from having a home centered life to having a life outside the family unit.

Children need to discover pleasure and feel intellectually stimulated. Children need to feel productive, feel successful so that they develop a sense of competence. If a child does not feel successful they eventually develop a sense of inferiority.

In the early childhood stage, you taught your child to follow direction and to feel good about being able to follow direction. In the 6-12 year age group, it is time to start leading them into their own decision making.

Most children are learning to control their anger impulses and emotions. (Please read our eBook about teaching your child to control his anger).

<http://www.parentingclass.net/ebooks/ManagingAnger.pdf>

Children, at this stage perceive the parents as persons separate from themselves. The need for close proximity and physical contact is not as constant, although still very important.

You should begin to set up situations where the child can function well and feel successful. Make more demands on the child and start teaching him/her to respect others needs also.

How we teach our children to make decisions and choices depends on the child, but good guidelines to follow include:

- Encourage humor
- Encourage questions
- Make them feel safe to express their thoughts
- Acknowledge feelings
- Talk through the steps to solutions

### **Encourage humor**

Laugh with your child. Find something that can be an 'inside joke'. Something only the two of you share – and share it often.

Tell your child that you enjoy his/her sense of humor.

examples:

I like the way you laugh at things.

I'm glad you don't take life too seriously.

## **Encourage questions**

Many of us read this suggestion and immediately think: I don't have time for the type of questions that my child asks. I was a victim to this thought. When my child asked a question, my standard answer was "I don't know."

I didn't consciously find a solution to this. It happened without my realizing it. It seems that in a car, I was much more open to answering questions and having real one-on-one conversations.

I was shocked one day when my 6 year old asked if we could go for a ride. "Why?" I asked. "Just to talk", was the answer. As it turned out, he was having problems with one of his friends and didn't know what he was supposed to do. In a car, he was able to ask the questions – and get the encouragement that he needed.

Many people report that any activity that gets them away from the house opens the door to one-on-one questions and answers. Fishing, boating, walks in the park. Whatever activity you choose, look for an opportunity to develop rapport. Make your child feel safe and listened to when asking questions.

## **Make them feel safe to express their thoughts**

I'll never forget how I felt when my mother called me stupid. Although I can't remember what I said to make her tell me how stupid I was, I remember hearing those words every day.

In truth, I tested well above average on intelligence tests, but the tests meant nothing when I was convinced that I was stupid. Although teachers recognized my ability, I didn't. As a teenager, I was a rebel.

Do not judge your child. Never label them. Allow them to express their thoughts without fear of judgment or ridicule. Your child needs someone to rely on. Be that someone.

If you make your child feel incompetent or stupid, your child will find someone who tells them how smart or how pretty they are. That someone may **not** be the sort of person who will be looking out for the best interests of your child.

## **Acknowledge feelings**

Help your child feel safe to express their feelings by encouraging them to move through fear rather than letting fears freeze their actions. **Recognize** the feelings your children experience and **Respect** them as genuine. This validates what they feel without sympathizing, correcting or judging them.

## Choices

This age group requires that parents add choice to your child's life. First, the choices must be real and the options must be possible. Children learn many lessons by making choices.

They learn that every choice is connected to consequences.

If a child is offered a choice of grilled cheese or tuna sandwiches for lunch, there better be bread, cheese, and tuna available. Kids hate being given an option, selecting that option, then being told "Oops, sorry about that. You'll have to have the other." Don't offer too many choices in the beginning. It's confusing.

## Talk through the steps to solutions

The older your child is, the more problems they will encounter.

One mistake many people make is trying to fix the problem for the child. Even as early as age 6 we can begin to show the child how to find solutions to a problem.

Example:

Your six year old refuses to eat his supper. You started out pleading with him to eat, then you told him to eat, finally you demanded that he eat. He has not complied. It is a mistake to *force* a child to do something.

Let's examine the choices that we have as parents:

1. We can force the child to remain at the table until his meal is finished. The consequence might be that the child can hold out longer than us, and we end up 'losing the battle'.
2. We can allow the child to win the battle immediately by telling him that he doesn't have to eat the meal. And finding something else to eat.
3. We can use this as a *teaching tool*. We explain to the child that it is **his** choice to eat or not eat, but every choice has consequences. If he chooses to eat, he may not like it, but his tummy will be happy that it is not hungry. If he chooses to NOT eat, he most certainly will be hungry later and he will not have another meal until breakfast in the morning.

Most children will choose not to eat. This will result in hunger later. Skipping a meal will not harm the normal child (if your child has medical issues, you will want to discuss this with your doctor). Later, when the child is asking for a snack, remind him that it was HIS choice to not eat his meal. Explain that every choice we make in life has consequences. Guide him in learning how to accept the consequences of his choices.

Yes, since his tummy now hurts, he will cry and complain, but the lesson will stay in his head. **He** made the choice. **He** deals with the consequences. The next time he refuses to eat his meal you can remind him of the consequences and give him the same choices.

Your goal is to teach your child that he has choices. Your job is to teach him how to evaluate and determine which choice is best.

There will be times that your child makes a mistake. Use mistakes as learning tools. Teach your child that mistakes have consequences, but they are not the end of the world. A six year old should not have to opportunity to make too many choices, but as he gets older it is important to find more and more opportunities to let the child make choices.

## **Morality**

In addition to teaching our children how to make choices, the middle years are a time to teach our children morality.

The traits of strong character such as caring, respect, self-control, sharing, empathy, tolerance, perseverance, giving, comforting and fairness are all learned.

There are many tools to teach morality. Watching a show or movie gives us many opportunities to teach morality. Remember, we are looking for ways to point out demonstrations of:

- caring
- respect
- self-control
- sharing
- empathy
- tolerance
- perseverance
- giving
- comforting
- fairness

## **Discipline**

Many parents make the mistake of sending the following message to their kids:  
“When we catch you being bad, we will punish you.”

Instead of encouraging a child to behave appropriately, this message offers the lesson, "Don't get caught."

As your child grows older, teaching them self discipline and self control will benefit them – and society.

How can we teach them self control?

## **Discuss others' behaviors**

When a child tells you about another person's misbehavior, or you see an example on television, take the time to discuss it in detail.

“Do you think the child was justified in his behavior?”

“What were the consequences?”

“What do you think you would do if you were in that situation?”

Talking about these issues gives your child practice in determining the right thing to do. It will show your child that behavior is not "black and white," and will encourage him to think before he acts.

### **Let children live with the consequences of their decisions**

For every situation in life, there is a choice. You can choose to be happy, or choose to be sad. You choose to get angry. You choose to go to work every day.

Choices are not always easy, and therefore many of us ignore their importance. When we allow our children to practice self-discipline, we need to be prepared to let them suffer the consequences of their actions.

This is often a painful lesson for parents, but a powerful one for children.

### **Have children determine consequences**

Enlist your child's help when determining consequences. Children can be very thoughtful when it comes to deciding on a discipline for inappropriate behavior. Ask them what they did wrong, and what they think their form of discipline should be.

A good question to ask an older child is, "If you were in my position, what would you do?" If they give you a sarcastic answer, encourage them to seriously consider it, or offer suggestions. They will eventually suggest something they feel is appropriate for the behavior.

### **Replace time-outs with a Control Room**

Like a time out, a control room removes your child from the situation. It allows yourself and your child an opportunity to remove yourselves from a bad situation.

Discuss the feelings associated with the bad behavior and explain they will need to go to the Control Room to calm down and think about their behavior. This makes the child aware of his emotions and gives him the opportunity to control the situation.

You may also use a control room for yourself. When things are not falling into place for me and I find myself on the verge of losing my temper, I often head for my "Control Room".

I announce that I need a few minutes in my Control Room. I go to my bedroom and shut the door. Usually I am back out in 5 minutes ready to face the problem.

My children recognize what I am doing, and they have started to head to their control room without being told. They remove themselves from the situation by going to their room for a couple of minutes. When they return, they are more prepared to behave rationally.

This has completely eliminated the tug-of-war that used to exist in my house. By removing themselves from the problem long enough to allow their emotions to settle, they are able to reenter the situation in a calmer state of mind and are certainly much easier to deal with.

### **Love and Respect**

Your child needs to know that you love and respect him. There are plenty of things you can do to make your child feel special regardless of his or her age.

Help your child to recognize what makes her unique and special. Make a point of acknowledging his good traits, such as courage, insight, honesty, and creativity.

Be generous with your praise—but make sure that it is sincere. If your child shows you a picture that he drew, tell him: “I love the colors that you chose for this. It shows that you have a flair for color.”

### **Make them feel valued**

Children feel valued if you are genuinely interested in whatever news they care to share about what is happening at school or with friends.

### **Celebrate regularly**

Don't hold out for major achievements or milestones. Celebrate little things.

### **Be there**

Let your child know that you will be there for him in both good times and in bad and that you will do whatever you can to help them get through the rough times.

### **Share yourself**

Tell him or her about the time you failed your PE test or had a fight with your mother. Admit it if you've made a mistake particularly if that mistake affects your child.

Nobody is perfect. We all make mistakes. When I realize that I've made a mistake with my child, I simply stop and say: “Wait! Back up! I'll start over.”

### **Independence**

Talk about independence issues using explanations and reasoning – practice good communication and reflective listening. Communication is vital in the school age years as there is so much to discuss and negotiate when children are seeking new freedoms.

Maintain a balance between independence and safety.

## **Parenting Quick Tips**

No matter how old your children are: know *where* they are, *who* they are with, and *what* they are doing. This prevents problems and shows your kids that you care about them.

Never use spanking or other forms of physical punishment with your child. An occasional swat on the rear end is okay as an attention-getter, but it should never be the punishment.

You can criticize a child's behavior, but *never* criticize the child.

Never verbally put down your child. There's a difference between correcting your child and attacking your child.

No one else can discipline with the same love, affection, and concern as a parent. When kids know where the limits are, they feel safe.

When parents have standards for appropriate and inappropriate behavior, children will test the limits. Such testing is neither pleasant nor harmonious. When faced with limits, children may react with hostility. They will be temporarily frustrated, angry, and mad at parents.

## **Conclusion**

As your child grows older their world expands. This makes parenting more demanding as the child grows up. Please note that I said 'more demanding' – not harder.

If you have nurtured your child through the Early Years and consistent in the Middle Years, parenting can keep you on your toes, but it can be an enjoyable ride for both you and your child.