

**Development & Behavior**

Middle Adolescence continues with transitions and transformations in the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of your child. By this age your child should have a good feeling of self and their competency. As parents you can positively influence healthy development no matter what problems exist. Focus and praise your child's strengths, give them chances to become good at things, allow them to make independent decisions, and teach them how to do things for others. Adolescents are more likely to make healthy choices if they stay connected with family members and if clear rules are established. Children who feel good about themselves are better equipped to withstand negative peer pressure. Model the positive behaviors you want your adolescent to have.

Appearance becomes an important issue at this age. Peers become an important source of health information and play a role in developing behaviors that adolescents feel are appropriate. Teach your adolescent to be thoughtful about the potential hurtful effects on others in their social media posts and texting. Teach them to be true to their values of respect and kindness in all postings. Teach your child to avoid risky situations, how to walk away, and that they should confide in an adult if anyone bullies, stalks, or abuses them; threatens their safety or safety of others; or if they have other concerns. Teach your child conflict-resolution techniques and ensure they know they can call you if they need help. Teach your child about what bullying means and if they see someone else being bullied to tell an adult.

At this age adolescents enter a developmental period of the highest risk for mental health problems. The most common problems children at this age experience are depression, anxiety, learning disorders, attention-deficit disorders, and other behavioral disorders like conduct disorder. Skills your child may have learned previously may become insufficient or ineffective. The temptation to partake in risky behaviors is high and if the child lacks insight into the consequences, has poor negotiation skills, and has ample opportunity to experiment secondary to lack of supervision. Studies demonstrate the brain function that control impulses and decision making are still maturing during adolescence.

Mood swings and attempts at independence can trigger arguments and challenges to the rules. Research shows authoritative parenting in which parents are accepting, firm, and democratic have adolescents who are less depressed, enter into risk-taking behaviors at later ages, and are more academically successful. Authoritarian parenting, in which parents have strong control with low warmth and little input do not fare as well. The best recipe for a positive relationship is for authoritative parents to have a balanced approach, unconditional love, clear boundaries (family rules, limits, expectations), and consistent reinforcement of discipline. When possible, involve your child in the family decision-making process to give them experience with problem solving and decision-making. Encourage them to think through the solutions rather than giving the answers. It is important to spend time with your child, show affection, and praise their efforts and accomplishments. If you make a mistake, admit to the mistake, ask for forgiveness, and use it as a

teachable moment. If you are concerned about your child's behavior, mood, mental health, or substance use please discuss this with us.

This can be a difficult time for your child, and you should remain mindful to ensure your child is included in their social networks. Parental monitoring remains critical to ensure this age group remains safe while gradually becoming more independent. Provide opportunities for your child to engage in activities that truly interest them outside of academics. Know your child's friends and friends' parents as well as you can. Adequate adult supervision is still needed in this age group. Injury prevention should be emphasized at this age. Children at this age are already engaging in dangerous risk-taking behaviors such as dares, drinking, smoking, and inhaling. The amount of unsupervised time and the incidence of drug use are directly related. Be a positive ethical and behavioral role model.

### **Body image & Sexuality**

Your child's body image is influenced by emotional and physical features associated with changes of puberty. As your child gains weight and changes body shape it is a good time to start figuring out what combination of healthy eating and exercise works to keep their body strong and healthy. Support your adolescent's evolving self-image by focusing your comments on positive things they do rather than physical appearance.

Support from parents can make a positive difference for adolescents as they go through puberty and develop a sexual identity. Adolescents who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or who question their sexuality face unique challenges with family and mainstream culture and this may cause significant stress. Be open to listening to and discussing your child's sexuality. If your child's views differ from yours, your child's health care professional as well as community support systems are available. Studies show that family acceptance has the strongest overall influence on positive outcomes for those youth facing these issues.

### **School**

A child that arrives at school fed and rested is ready to learn and perform better. Give your child a healthy breakfast and establish bedtime routines to get at least 8 to 11 hours of sleep. Only a small percentage of adolescents receive the recommended amount of sleep. Lack of appropriate sleep can lead to decreased school performance, increase in depression and other mental health disorders, and health risk behaviors.

Talk with your child about their school day, which may include asking open-ended questions. Praise your child's efforts in school and show interest in their schoolwork. Encourage your adolescent to take responsibility for getting their homework done, getting to school on time, and for other school related issues. This is a good time to discuss college or other work plans. Be cautious not to over-schedule, allowing for some unstructured time. If your child has special needs, keep an active role in the IEP process. Stress, changes in family, loss in families, family violence, or bullying can contribute to poor performance. If you are experiencing these kinds of stressors, please let us know.

## **Diet**

As your child is becoming increasingly responsible for what they eat, ensure healthy foods in the home. Provide opportunities to participate in shopping and meal preparation. Eating family meals provides the family with the opportunity to model healthy eating and promotes communication. It is common for adolescents to skip meals and to snack frequently. Help them focus on choosing healthy foods. Examples of nutritious foods include: vegetables; fruits; whole grains; lean protein (lower fat meat, fish, poultry, eggs, legumes, nuts & seeds); and low-fat or non-fat dairy products. Limit food and drinks high in calories, fats, sugars and refined grains which are low in nutrients. Examples of low nutritious foods include: ice cream; baked goods; salty snacks; fast food; pizza; soda; Gatorade/power-aide; and other sweetened beverages. As your child grows it is very important your child gets adequate calcium and Vitamin D. 20–24 oz of low-fat or fat-free milk a day plus an additional serving of low-fat yogurt or cheese is recommended. If your child does not drink milk or other dairy products then aim for foods and beverages fortified with calcium and Vitamin D. Encourage your child to drink water throughout the day. Encourage water or low-fat milk over juice, fruit drinks, soda, vitamin waters, sports and energy drinks or caffeinated beverages.

Give your child a healthy breakfast every day. Studies have shown that eating breakfast improves academic performance and children who eat breakfast have a lower BMI (healthy weight for height). Help your child recognize and respond to hunger and fullness cues. Advise against them snacking in front of a TV or device.

## **Media**

Inappropriate or excessive media use has been associated with attention problems, impaired sleep, school difficulties, vision changes, and obesity. Any media exposure should be limited to 90 minutes per day and be of good quality. Check out [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org) for recommendations. Do not use TV, phone or iPad as a substitute for interaction with your child. Turn off devices during meals. Provide parental supervision and monitoring to ensure they are not exposed to inappropriate material. Be clear that you will be monitoring the devices they use as well as any social media. Use internet safety tools and filtering to limit access to appropriate material. Talk to your child about internet safety and cyber-bullying. Stress that there are times in which it is inappropriate or dangerous to use smartphones or handheld devices, such as while walking and especially driving. Make sure to model this behavior yourself by refraining from using your smartphone while driving. Current recommendations are for children this age to be physically active for 60 minutes per day.

Do not let your child sleep with any electronic device in their bedroom. In order to balance your child's sleep, physical activity, after school activities and unplugged time, consider making a family media plan. Visit [www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan](http://www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan). Be a role model in your use of electronics as your children will model your behavior.

## **Oral health**

Use a soft toothbrush with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste twice a day. Aim for 2 minutes per day with flossing once a day. Your child should be following with a dentist and have fluoride applied every 6 months. Limit your child's consumption of sweetened beverages and snacks

with sugar. Discuss the importance of taking care of their teeth. If your child is playing contact sports, have them wear a mouthguard.

## **Safety**

Keep firearms stored unloaded and locked in a safe with ammunition separate. Do not show your child where you have stored the firearm, ammunition, or key. Firearms should be removed from the homes of adolescents who have a history of aggressive or violent behaviors, suicide attempts, or depression. The presence of a firearm in the home increases the risk of suicide and homicide.

Exposure to secondhand smoke greatly increases the risk of heart and lung diseases in your child. For your health as well as your child's health, please stop smoking. Vapor from e-cigarettes may also be harmful, so avoid secondhand exposure by not smoking around your child or in the car. If you are interested in quitting speak with us, your physician, or a toll-free smoking helpline (1-800-QUIT-NOW). Discuss the dangers of smoking tobacco, including e-cigarettes.

Children are exposed to drinking, smoking, and drug use behaviors through TV, movies, and other media. Tell your child in clear messages that substance use is substance misuse. If alcohol is in the home, your use around you child should be appropriate and discussed that it is not appropriate for them to drink. Lock and/or monitor your prescription medications and your liquor cabinet. Praise your child for not using tobacco, e-cigarettes, alcohol or other drugs.

Children in this age group may be involved in romantic relationships, and some may start to be sexually active. Some youths do not have the information they need to make healthy decisions, so parents should start this discussion now. Encourage abstinence from sexual activity. If your adolescent is already sexually active encourage a return to abstinence. Help your child make a plan to resist pressures to have sex and be there for them when they need support or help. Discuss sexually transmitted infections, how they are spread, as well as prevention of pregnancy with use of condoms and safe sex practices. Plan how to avoid risky situations and avoidance of drugs and alcohol as these can raise the risk of unwanted sex and other risky behaviors. Be open and non-judgmental but be honest about your personal views.

The CDC recommends avoiding or limiting exposure to excessively loud sounds to protect hearing. This includes turning down the volume of music systems, moving away for sources of loud sounds when possible, and using hearing protection devices. Encourage your adolescent to keep the volume at a reasonable level when using earbuds, usually so that he can hear conversations.

Your child should be wearing a seat belt while in the car. A helmet is recommended for bikes, skates, skateboards, scooters, motorcycles, and ATV's. Learning to drive is an important step for many adolescents and a reflection of their growing independence. Parents should be involved with their adolescent's driver education by practicing together, establishing rules that foster safe and responsible driving behaviors. For more information on how to keep your adolescent safe visit: [\*\*www.saftercar.gov/parents\*\*](http://www.saftercar.gov/parents). Your own safe driving behaviors are important as well. Use a seat belt, do not put the car in drive until everyone is buckled in, do not drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and do not text or use mobile devices while driving. Teach your adolescent not to ride in a vehicle with someone who has been using drugs or alcohol.

Continue to stress the importance of sun protection. This can be accomplished by limiting sun exposure, using sunscreen, and wearing sun protective clothing including sunglasses and hats. About ¼ of a person's exposure to the sun occurs before 18 years. Discourage tanning parlors, which increase skin cancer risk. US Coast Guard– approved life jackets should be used if engaged in water sports.

### **What to expect at this visit**

A depression and substance abuse screen should be completed by your child before this visit. We ask parents to complete a screening for social determinants of health form to provide the best care for your child. Please let us know of any family history of high cholesterol, diabetes, or heart disease. If these conditions are present, we may want to check for the risk of these conditions in your child. If your child is a vegetarian, vegan, or has other limitations of iron in their diet please let us know so we can perform a blood test to check for anemia. At this age we typically will ask parents to leave the room to have a private discussion with your child.

HPV vaccine will be given if not already and the Meningococcal vaccination booster will be given at 16 years old. Meningococcal B vaccination may be given at 17 for those heading off to college or military if desired. The HPV vaccination has been associated with dizziness, please ensure you child has eaten and is well hydrated before the visit. We will watch your child for 10 minutes after the vaccination to monitor for symptoms. Flu and COVID vaccinations may also be given at this visit, if in season.

Meningococcal ACWY	Meningococcal B	HPV	Influenza Injection	Nasal Influenza	COVID
					