

WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU'RE EXPECTING A MIDDLE SCHOOLER

The transition from elementary to middle school is one of the biggest changes your child will navigate. In this season, just about everything will change for them- the way their brain processes information, the way they relate to others, the structure of their day, not to mention the ways their bodies change. While it can be awkward and disorienting for you and your child, it is also an incredible time of growth and discovery.

BIG QUESTIONS

Middle schoolers start to wrestle with big questions. As they start to differentiate themselves from their family, they start to ask:

Who am I? | Identity becomes a key piece of the middle school puzzle. Many kids will look to you and others to try to start answering this question. You may hear “I am a vegetarian” one day and “I love bacon” the next. Not because they’re trying to be difficult, but because they’re trying to figure out who they are.

Who likes me? | Acceptance is one of the biggest motivating factors for a middle school student. They want to know they belong somewhere- anywhere. As a parent, continually remind your child that you love them no matter what and be intentional about placing others (small group leaders, family, friends, etc.) around them who will do the same.

CHANGES

Your child will change in significant ways over the next year. Change is hard, so while you might be ready to pull your hair out, remember how volatile this season feels for them.

Your child will grow rapidly this year- not only physically, but also cognitively. Important brain development is occurring that will allow your child to exercise more abstract thought. They'll start to understand more complex emotions, empathy and more complicated ideas. Like anything, it takes practice to become good at using these new skills. Frustration or exhaustion is to be expected.

References and Resources

It's Just a Phase, So Don't Miss It by Reggie Joiner and Kristen Ivy ; What Every Middle School Worker Needs To Know, Mark Oestreicher (youthministryconsultants.org/resources);
3 Big Questions that Change Every Teenager by Kara Powell and Brad Griffin

FAITH

As your middle schooler grows in their ability to think abstractly, they'll be able to start understanding faith and God in a new way. Be ready for questions and curiosity as their black-and-white faith starts to come alive with more vibrant colors. Over time, your student will begin to develop a faith that's all their own. In this process, it's completely normal to hear some strange ideas about God, misinterpretations of scripture, or even challenging the faith you've instilled in them. As they start to wrestle with complex questions, it may prompt a faith crisis or two. No need for panic! Each of these gives space for a student to understand their faith personally. Don't ever forget- God is pursuing your child more than you know. As your child grows more independent in their faith, be intentional about putting other adults like small group leaders, pastors, and friends, who can speak into their lives and play a critical role in their faith formation.

SCHOOL

If your child attends a traditional school, they will experience tremendous change when it comes to the school experience. They will have a higher level of independence and personal responsibility. Instead of one class with the same teacher and students, they'll navigate exponentially more relationship dynamics, not to mention figuring out where they need to be and when throughout the day. This will be a stressful change for some. As a parent, you can support your student by encouraging good time management skills, slowly transferring responsibility to them, and more than anything providing a safe space for them to rest and be affirmed in the middle of all the new things they are experiencing.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

This transition may be a lot for all of you, but don't ever lose sight of how significant your role is in the life of your child. Even as your role shifts as they get older, you remain the primary influence in the life of your child. As you love and affirm them, pointing them to Jesus, you're making the biggest impact on their life- whether they want you to know it or not!



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