



Who Is the Parent?

By the National Middle School Association

Keeping the Adult Perspective when Raising Young Adolescents

As young adolescents (10 to 15-year-olds) demonstrate moments of adult thinking and behavior, parents must remember that their children are still children. Young adolescents need, more than ever,

for the adults in their lives to provide guidance and set limits that help them continue to develop in healthy ways. They need parents to be parents, not friends.

Suggestions from the National Middle School Association:

- **Wait for her questions.** It may be tempting to talk with your daughter about complex issues and sensitive subjects such as political concerns, complicated relationships, or financial problems, but it's important to wait for her questions. Don't share too much information if she's only ready to process the answers to the questions she asks. Questions like "Why are you mad at Dad?" most likely need only be answered with an explanation of the immediate incident, not a long account of previous problems leading to this moment.
- **Remember, developmentally he is still a concrete thinker.** Your son has the ability to understand abstract concepts at times, but he is still a concrete thinker. Be sure to support abstract ideas with concrete descriptions that relate to your child's everyday experience. Having your son give up a month's allowance or go without a favorite food for a month may be a better way to help him begin to understand poverty and hunger than engaging him in philosophical discussions.
- **It's OK for them to be angry with you.** Setting limits or saying "no" is often an unpopular thing to do. It's reasonable for your young adolescent to be unhappy that you won't buy her the latest brand-name jeans that "everyone else in school has," but don't let her make you think you are making her unpopular. You are really helping her learn discipline and the difference between "need" and "want"—a very important lesson for young adolescents.
- **Help them avoid stereotyping.** The tendency at this age is to generalize a peer's behavior to all members of a particular group. Help avoid such stereotyping by encouraging your young adolescent to look at individual situations and causes of behavior rather than agreeing with global judgments. Ask, "What do you think has happened in Joe's life to make him brag about how well he plays soccer?" rather than accepting that "All the kids from that middle school seem to have a bad attitude." Your job is to encourage the broader view, not to just agree with your young adolescents as a way to bond with them.

Most importantly, early adolescence is a time when children need the guidance and wisdom of parents to help them put values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, caring, and justice solidly in place. This is not a time to be concerned about being popular with your child. They will love you for the limits—in a few years!

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