



Welcome to the first publication of Making the Middle School Years Work. The booklet that you have before you is the last phase of an interesting adventure that started with applying for a grant from the Needham Education Foundation, Inc. The original idea had been to offer a workshop to middle school students and their parents with the goal of getting them to look at issues regarding communication.

After completing pre-planning for the workshop, we realized that we needed more information to work with on the day of the workshop. Thus, the idea of creating a survey for all middle school students was born. With the supportive help of Pollard Middle School, we were able to survey the entire student body during the month of January. The survey focused upon life as a middle school student. We received some interesting information from the survey, used this data during the workshop that was offered on March 16th and have reprinted the highlights of the survey in this publication.

This booklet has three sections: one for youth, one for parents, and one for both. In the middle portion (on the color sheets of paper), you will find the common information for both youth and parents. Then, each of you has your “own side of the booklet” that is devoted to issues that pertain to parents or youth. As was mentioned, some of the information was taken directly from what youth and parents had to say at the workshop. Other information includes helpful articles, good websites to browse and resources. Even though the sections are geared towards either parents or youth, we encourage youth to read the parent side and parents to read the youth side...you might learn a thing or two.

We would like to thank the Needham Education Foundation, Inc. for allowing us the opportunity to offer this workshop and publication. As well, we would also like to extend thanks to Pollard Middle School for their assistance and input regarding the survey, the workshop and the publication.

For more information, please contact the Needham Youth Commission at 781-455-7518.

In the spring of 2002, forty parents and their middle school children participated in a four-hour workshop that focused on the middle school years. Below is a listing of the students' and parents' responses during an exercise which had them identify what are the:

Barriers to Effective Communication

- Use a negative tone of voice
- Make assumptions
- Lecture
- Be moody
- Accuse
- Yell
- Interrupt
- Tease
- Take off in a "huff"
- Roll your eyes
- Be rigid and inflexible
- Threaten
- Dismiss someone
- Be disrespectful
- Be sarcastic
- Put someone down
- Brush off someone's excitement

Ways to Promote Effective Communication

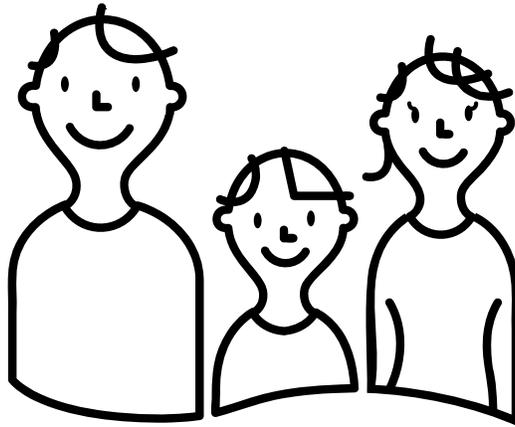
- Be respectful
- Be honest
- Be considerate
- Forgive
- Use humor
- Compromise
- Be empathetic
- Show patience
- Listen attentively
- Be available/ Put time aside to sit down and talk
- Stay calm
- Apologize when you should
- Use "I" statements
- Let someone talk first
- Treat other person as an equal partner in the exchange
- Make eye contact
- Acknowledge what someone says
- Offer guidance but encourage independent thinking and decision making

In January of 2002, students at Pollard Middle School participated in a survey which focused on the experiences of being a middle school student. The following is a summary of the survey. For further information about the survey and its results, please contact the Needham Youth Commission at 781-455-7518.

- The most significant stressor for middle school students is school work.
- School stress increases as students pass from 6th through 8th grade.
- 44% of the students report that they would talk to someone (i.e. parent, friend, etc.) if they were stressed.
- The likelihood of a student talking to someone when they are stressed decreases from 6th through 8th grade.
- 28% of students report they could talk to their parents about personal problems, 12% answered they could not and 60% said they could sometimes.
- Most students seem to think that the amount of time they spend with their family is just where they would like it to be.
- 79% of the students report spending time with family during dinner, 47% report doing so on weeknights, 58% on weekends, 33% while doing homework, 67% during family outings, 78% during trips, and 16% report other.
- By far, students report school issues as the biggest fear/challenge of middle school. These issues included having too much homework, difficult school work, pressure to do well in school and waking up to early/being tired.
- 65% of the students report school issues as their biggest fear/challenge: this percentage was twice as much as the next highest response.
- 27% of students want their parents to know that they have too much homework/school work.
- 15% of students want their parents to know that middle school is hard/stressful.
- 19% of students have no suggestions for their parents about how they could help improve things or think their parents are good parents.
- 14% of students want their parents to ask more questions or talk to/understand them more.

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PARENT INFORMATION



**Sponsored by the
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In the spring of 2002, forty parents and their middle school children participated in a workshop that focused on the middle school years. Below is a listing of the students' responses to the following questions:

The “Perfect” Parent would...

- Not yell
- Encourage you
- Not be into drugs
- Not be overprotective
- Not compare you to siblings
- Support your grades as long as you gave it all of your effort
- Not embarrass you
- Respect your privacy
- Not say stupid things about your friends
- Take you out to dinner
- Act calm
- Not watch over you like a little child
- Not be pushy
- Have fun

Write down something you want parents to know about what it's like to be in middle school...

- It is really difficult being in seventh grade. There is a lot of homework, stress and many different decisions.
- There is a lot of pressure to get good grades.
- Sometimes it is hard because there is a lot of work. It is fun but I have a lot to do in one day! Sometimes I don't want to talk about school.
- It is overwhelming because of homework and you have a lot of responsibility. It is also frustrating.
- It is not as easy as you think. It's much harder, much more homework and it's much more stressful. You think that it's just like, "It's just another grade up...big deal." Well, it is a big deal!

Supporting Your Adolescent

While there are no easy answers in parenting, the following strategies may help you support your child during adolescence:

- **Educate yourself about adolescent development.** Learn about the behaviors to expect, the effects of physical changes, and ways to help your child deal with change.
- **Remember your own adolescence.** Think about the changing feelings, anger at authority, fears and hopes. Put your child's behavior in this context to keep perspective.
- **Think about taking a course on good parenting.** Parenting is a learned skill. Training can help even experienced parents by giving them new tools for supporting their adolescent.
- **Listen more than talk.** Young people have spent at least a decade as listeners in most situations. During adolescence, they want and need the chance to share their feelings and ideas and to begin recasting family beliefs, stories, and traditions in light of their changing identity.
- **Teach your adolescent about the joys *and* troubles of life and ways to revel in the good times and cope with the bad.** The myths that life is always easy or fair or that one should always be happy can lead to frustration for young people dealing with the realities of life.
- **Use positive reinforcement for positive behavior whenever possible; it is far more effective than criticism or punishment for negative behavior.** The most useful tools in raising young people are love, compassion, sensitivity, praise, understanding, and communication. Words that belittle can hurt your adolescent's self-esteem.
- **Teach your adolescent that rights and responsibilities go hand in hand, and give your child increasing responsibility for his or her well-being and that of the family.** Provide your child opportunities to help around the house. Involve them in family decision-making discussions.
- **Help your adolescent move toward independence.** It is sometimes difficult for parents to give up control out of concern for their child's safety. Remember, though, that adolescents' skills in coping with increasing responsibility will be enhanced by parents' willingness to support them as they make choices and face new challenges.

- **Offer your child chances to become involved in the community.** Involving teens in developing solutions to community problems can shift their focus from themselves and help them to develop skills and feel empowered.
- **Spend quality *and* quantity time with your adolescent.** Adolescence is a time when young people naturally begin to pull away from the family and spend more time at school, with friends, or at a job. Still, time spent with caring parents is key to young people's ability to grow emotionally and socially. Take advantage of times that your adolescent is home to continue building your relationship.
- **Encourage other caring adults, including friends and relatives, to spend time with your adolescent.** Aunts and uncles or adult neighbors can offer your child further support, guidance, and attention.
- **Accept that you have feelings too.** You may feel frustrated, angry, discouraged, or sad during difficult times with your adolescent. Being a good parent doesn't mean being perfect. Model the ability to apologize when you feel that you let your emotions get the best of you.
- **Seek support and guidance for *yourself* in dealing with the changes in a child moving through adolescence.** Learn about the signs of crisis, and talk with other parents or professionals. By doing so, you can begin to tell the difference between adolescent behavior that indicates a crisis and the usual behavior associated with a life passage.
- **Remember that most youth have problems at some time.** Acting-out behavior can be a normal part of becoming an adult. Do not assume that your child's behavior always reflects on the quality of your parenting.
- **Continue to provide all of your children with positive feedback and opportunities to grow.** Reflect on what you wanted for your children during better times: health, happiness, and movement toward a promising future. Offer them chances to strengthen their skills and develop a sense of competence, usefulness, and belonging.

Adapted from: www.ncfy.com/supporti.htm

Homework Stress-How to Deal with It

The word homework often provokes stress and anxiety both in children and their parents. **Homework is the child's responsibility and not that of the parents.** Basically children will get homework from kindergarten on. They have to get the homework done and it is a fact of life that starts early on. The parent's role is to know the homework requirements and make sure they are done on time. It is best to get to know the pattern of homework assignments. Actually, parents have to find the right balance between not doing the homework for their children, and helping only when needed. This is easier said than done. The more a parent is familiar with the child's and teacher's homework patterns, the easier the parent can adapt an approach. Again the main point is that the homework is the child's responsibility.

Homework wars, when they occur are quite disruptive of course and should be avoided. By forming good habits from the beginning, homework can be done routinely and smoothly. Also, as children are different, try to find out what works best for your child's specific needs and situation. What works for another child may not work for yours. Here are some tips and suggestions to help develop and maintain good homework habits:

- Schedule homework in as any other activity.
- Maintain common interests or activities (cultural or athletic) outside of school.
- Set up a proper study area. This may be the kitchen table or another quiet area.
- Establish a daily homework time and reinforce it. Parents at work should call to make sure that the homework is done. By doing so it shows children their parents actually care even though they are at work.
- Children should do homework independently, but seek help when needed.
- In the early grades, parents need to know what the child has for homework, so that they can explain to their child what the homework task requires.

- If parents do not understand the homework assignments, having the child call a classmate to clarify may help. This promotes networking which is a necessary life skill anyway!
- Consistently praise your child's effort.
- Use reasonable incentives if necessary especially in children who have difficulties. For example, a child can go out play when homework is completed.
- Parents should be firm if a child refuses to complete their homework, making it clear that they are capable of doing their homework and that their teacher believes they are able too.
- Reviewing homework progress is also a good idea. For example parents can say: “start your homework now and then show me what you have done in fifteen minutes.”

If problems persist despite best efforts, parents should contact the school teacher. Homework conflicts can often be settled by the teacher. By understanding the homework battle situation, the teacher may have some suggestions and can collaborate with parents to help with the difficulties. Most teachers want to be part of a team approach.

Adapted from: www.drpaul.com/behaviour/schoolhomework.html



All people need to feel secure and confident, and adolescents are no different (in fact, they might need more of this). Parents cannot ever give too much praise – as long as it is not false praise. Below are suggestions of 101 different ways of showing your positive feelings towards a child.

101 Ways to Praise a Child

wow • way to go • super • you're special • outstanding • excellent • great • good • neat • well done • remarkable • I knew you could do it • I'm proud of you • fantastic • super star • nice work • looking good • you're on top of it • beautiful • now you're flying • you're catching on • now you've got it • you're incredible • bravo • you're fantastic • spectacular • hurray for you • you're on target • you're on your way • how nice • how smart • good job • that's incredible • hot dog • dynamite • you're beautiful • you're unique • nothing can stop you • good for you • I like you • you're a winner • remarkable job • beautiful work • you're spectacular • you're darling • you're precious • great discovery • you've discovered the secret • you figured it out • fantastic job • hip, hip hurray • bingo • magnificent • marvelous • terrific • you're important • phenomenal • you're sensational • super work • creative job • super job • fantastic job • exceptional performance • you're a real trooper • you are responsible • you are exciting • you learned it right • what an imagination • what a good listener • you're fun • you're growing up • you tried hard • you care • beautiful sharing • outstanding performance • you're a good friend • I trust you • you're important • you mean a lot to me • you make me happy • you belong • you've got a friend • you make me laugh • you brighten my day • I respect you • you mean the world to me • that's correct • you're a joy • you're a treasure • you're wonderful • you're perfect • awesome • A+ job • you're a-ok my buddy • you made my day • that's the best • a big hug • a big kiss • say I love you! • p.s. remember, a smile is worth 1000 words!

Websites:

www.parentingadolescents.com - gives free and extended responses to questions from parents and teens.

www.parentingteens.com - provides information, insight and support for parents of teens.

www.parent.net - provides a variety information on parenting.

www.canadianparents.com - provides a variety of information on parenting teens.

www.sleepfoundation.org/publications.html - a variety of publications by the National Sleep Foundation.

www.ncfy.com - website for the National Clearing House on Families & Youth.

www.cmcsb.com/articles.htm - provides informational articles for parents on many teen related topics.

www.saferchild.org - Safer Child, Inc. provides accurate links to websites regarding health and safety.

www.teen-survival.com/index.html - provides information for both teens and their parents.

www.aacap.org/web/aacap/publications/factsfam/index.htm - website for the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.

www.kidshealth.org/index2.html - provides a variety of information for teens, kids and parents.

Town and School Resources for Middle School Youth and Parents:

Needham Youth Commission

Phone: 781-455-7518

Web site: www.town.needham.ma.us/youth

E-Mail: Needhamyouthcommission@town.needham.ma.us

- Individual, group and family counseling
- Substance Abuse Awareness Program
- Employment and Volunteer Programs
- Active Parenting of Teens
- Parent Dialogue Meetings
- Needham Unplugged
- Books & Bridges
- Information on issues such as drugs/alcohol, bullying, harassment, loss and other mental health issues

Needham Public School Guidance Department

Bruce Palombo, Director of Guidance 781-455-0800 x1130

Pollard Middle School

6th grade Guidance Office

7th grade Guidance Office

8th grade Guidance Office

781-455-0480

extension 295

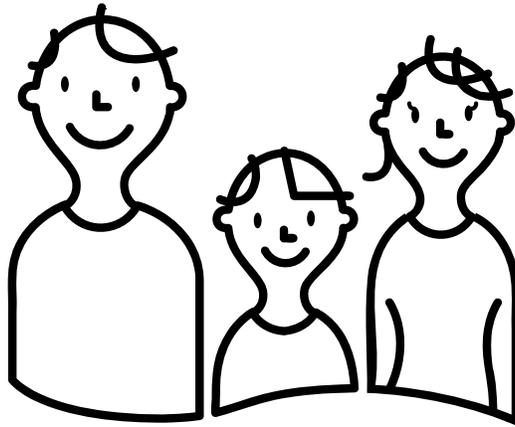
extension 325

extension 235

- Individual, group and crisis counseling
- Information and referrals
- Student advocacy
- Peer conflict resolution
- Parent meetings
- Parent information nights
- Process all academic schedule alterations

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**YOUTH
INFORMATION**



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Help! I Don't Understand My Parents

Being a teenager is a difficult challenge. You frequently bounce between childhood and adulthood, being irresponsible and responsible, testing parental authority and then depending on it. Parents often do not know what to expect. Many often find it difficult to understand your growing need for independent action, and even for rebellion.

Some adults view adolescence as a period of friction, change and problems. For you, it may be a time of concern about acne, weight problems, menstruation, late development, early development, sexual arousal, school pressures, girlfriends, boyfriends, boredom, parental hassles, peer pressures and your future.

It's easy to understand why many find this a difficult time. But once it's over, you realize that most of your parents' "irritating" behavior was motivated by feelings of love and concern. Yes, adolescence can be a trying time. But if you and your parents communicate and try to understand each other, this period will be less trying and more fun for everyone.

Here are a few tips to improve the communication you have with your parents: be honest with your feelings; don't get defensive; don't yell; calmly tell your parents what's on your mind; avoid "you" statements like, "You don't give me enough freedom" and instead use "I" statements such as "When I go out with my friends, your early curfew makes me feel as if you don't trust me"; and listen to what your parents have to say.

When you're talking to your parents, if they say something you disagree with, don't immediately overreact. Give them a chance to express their feelings and then calmly explain why you may disagree with them. Try to identify what you need from them and tell them (they may not know).

Adapted from <http://www.teengrowth.com>

In the spring of 2002, forty parents and their middle school children participated in a four-hour workshop focusing on the middle school years. Below is a listing of parents' responses to the question:

Write down a stressor or strain of parenting a middle school student:

- Wanting to know why your child did or said something but he/she refuses to say why.
- Trying to figure out how to act around him/her (and their friends) without embarrassing him/her.
- The feeling of not knowing how I should parent my child, when to be strict and when to be flexible, how to help and when not to, how much to give and how much is enough giving.
- Having little idea what my child is dealing with in his/her mind – so how do I approach conversations to facilitate more openness?
- It's hard to know how much freedom and independence to permit a child; also how much to allow a child to express feelings (such as slamming doors, saying "I hate you", etc.). It's hard to trust that a young person always knows the right thing to do and to admit they're growing up and away.
- The challenge/fear of growing independence. Watching my child seek independence has been thrilling to see, and I want to help and promote that independence, but I'm afraid that I don't have the parenting skills to do it "right"!
- Battle of control (who has the power?) – does it need to be a battle of control?
- Stressors of parenting: doing the right thing; not modeling the behavior I desire my child to learn.
- I worry about you.
- I want you to do your very best at school, but I'm not sure the best way to help you with it.
- Worry that I don't make myself available enough to be of help when my middle-schooler needs or wants help. If I'm too busy or stressed myself, I might not see that help is needed or my child might not feel he/she can ask. I wish I knew how and when to help more.

How to Talk To Your Parents

Sometimes it can be tough to talk to your parents. Whether it is that you are having trouble relating to them or need to talk to them about something difficult, it's not always easy.

Here's How:

- Find a time that you and your parents can be comfortable and relaxed together.
- Make sure no one is focusing on something else while you're together (paying bills, playing Playstation, making dinner, watching TV).
- Getting parents to relax and focus on talking might take some effort and patience. Be persistent!
- If you just want to shoot the breeze, try to bring up something they're interested in. Ask them questions about their day (parents love this!).
- If you have something specific you want to talk about, let them know what it is.
- If they react strongly to what you tell them, simply listen to them. Don't react back!
- Let them finish and don't interrupt. Ask them to do the same for you.
- When you feel like you've told them what you wanted to, thank them for listening.
- Show them respect by focusing your attention on the conversation, looking them in the eyes, and by not being sarcastic or rolling your eyes.
- Be honest. Honesty builds trust. And life is good when your parents trust you.
- Stay cool. If you can stay calm if things get heated up, you're showing them maturity.

If you feel like there are still things that need to be talked about, set up a time with them to talk about it another day.

Adapted from: <http://teenadvice.about.com>

Most parents and children have spent years developing trust, yet in the adolescent years, new issues and challenges require the construction of new trusts and agreements. Below is a list of ideas to consider as parents and their teens nurture new trusts.

Trust

- Trust is a two way street; you get it if you give it. For example: if you want your parents to trust you, try trusting them with the truth about what is going on in your life.
- Parents will usually give trust freely until you do something to break it. If this isn't the case in your family and you really can't see why your parents don't trust you, just come right out and ask them for an explanation.
- Sometimes people don't trust you because of the actions of another person: often, the behavior of older siblings or friends causes parents and teachers to doubt you. Accept that this is what is happening, don't fight it, and work at proving that in spite of other's actions **you** can be trusted.
- Sometimes trust has to be earned. If you had trust but did something to break it, it is possible to fix things. However, remember that as the trust breaker you don't get to set the expectations, terms or time frame for earning that trust back.
- In order to fix broken trust both sides have to want the trust back. You can never force a person to trust you.
- Your parents want to trust you! What you see as mistrust of you could really be fear, mistrust of those around you and/or their natural protective instincts at work.
- Some people have been so badly hurt in the past that they have great difficulty trusting others. If you have a person like this in your life, accept that there may always be an element of mistrust in your relationship and be prepared to work overtime to prove that **you** can be trusted.
- Trust is an essential part of **ALL** successful relationships be they academic, romantic, friendly or familial.
- Trust is a gift - you give it and you receive it. It should never be taken for granted.

Adapted from <http://teenadvice.about.com>

Communicating With Parents

You might be asking "How do I deal with my parents when they can be so different than I want them to be? How can I tolerate them when they refuse to treat me my age?" The answer is simple: talk to them. OK, talking isn't always easy but it is effective.

"I" statements are the best weapon any time that you are trying to communicate your feelings with parents. What are "I" statements you ask? "I" statements are brief statements in which you explain what it is you are feeling, when you feel that way and why you feel that way. The formula is simply this: I feel _____, when _____, because _____. An example might be: "Mom, I feel really embarrassed when you remind me to do things in front of my friends, because it makes me look like a little kid."

"I" statements never start with the word "you". For instance, the following is not an appropriate "I" statement: "You are trying to make me mad when you tease me because you don't respect me." This is a "you" statement and will only elicit defensiveness and argument from the parent. "I" statements should never be an attempt to attack or blame the parent.

"I" statements give you power in a conflict. This is a way for you to express your feelings and your needs so that your parents can understand what it is about the interaction you don't want them to do anymore. They may not always comply, but at least you have taken ownership of your life and let them know that you are an independent person with rights and feelings.

Get into the habit of using "I" statements. Practice them with friends, teachers and even strangers until they become a habit. You will find that you will relieve your anger and explode less often. And you will also feel good about yourself for standing up for yourself and getting your needs met.

Adapted from: www.clh.com.my/sekolah/Team185/counselling.htm

Family vs. Friends

It's Saturday afternoon and you and your friends are planning to go to the movies and then spend the night together. Just as you start to get ready, your dad reminds you it's your aunt's birthday party and the whole family is going out to dinner to celebrate. How can this possibly end without a huge argument?

One of the greatest sources of tension between teenagers and their families is the struggle to balance individual wants with family expectations. As you struggle to become more independent and more interested in being with your friends, your family is trying to figure out how to deal with the changes in you and your interests. Where you once spent most of your free time with your family, you may find yourself wanting to spend more of it with your friends. Parents may get their feelings hurt or feel as if they are losing control of the family during this period. And you might feel angry that so many family demands are placed on you. There are a few things you can try to make it a little easier to ease the tension.

- Make your plans in advance and ask your parents if there is anything else planned at that time.
- When something with your friends interferes with a family event, try to figure out if there is any way you could do both. In other words, could you spend a little time with each group? Or could you go to the family event and ask if next time you could choose to be with your friends? Or could you invite a friend to also join in the family event?
- Suggest something you would really like to do with your family. Sometimes parents feel better just knowing their teenager wants to spend time with them.

There are sure to be times when you won't be happy with the outcome because you've either disappointed your parents or had to miss out being with your friends. You can diffuse a lot of the anger and tension if you show consideration for the feelings of your family as well as those of yourself and your friends.

Adapted from: www.teengrowth.com

Websites:

www.saferchild.org - Safer Child, Inc. provides accurate links to websites regarding health and safety.

www.teen-survival.com/index.html - provides information for both teens and their parents.

www.teengrowth.com/- provides teens with a variety of health information on topics such as body, emotions, health, friends, sports, danger, school, family and sex.

http://teenadvice.about.com/c/ht/How_index.htm - provides a variety of how to's for teens.

www.sleepfoundation.org/publications.html - provides a variety of publications by the National Sleep Foundation.

www.ncfy.com – website for the National Clearing House on Families & Youth.

www.parentingadolescents.com – gives free and extended responses to questions from parents and teens.

www.kidshealth.org/index2.html - provides a variety of information for teens, kids and parents.



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- Individual, group and family counseling
- Peer Tutor Program
- Substance Abuse Awareness Program
- Employment and Volunteer Programs
- Extreme Looks
- Project VAN (Volunteers Around Needham)
- PEEPS (Positive Education for Experiencing Peer Stress)
- Picture Perfect
- Books & Bridges
- Babysitting Training Seminars

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