



Parent/Trusted Adult at Home Materials

Navigating Middle School Years

Greetings from Candor Health Education! We are happy to partner with you in keeping kids healthy, happy and safe!

Soon your child will be attending our *Navigating Middle School Years* program. This program is designed to highlight the uniqueness and the value of the middle school years, as well as reinforce valuable life skills that students can apply during middle school and beyond. In this program, students work together to think through several typical middle school scenarios and apply specific strategies and skills that could be used to navigate these situations.

This letter will provide you with an overview of the program content, the life skills that were discussed and applied during the class and ways that you can continue the conversation at home. We know that parents are the most influential people in a child's life, and we hope to provide you with the information and tools that you need to support your tween or teen.

Topics Addressed During the Program

- **Brain Development and Physical Changes Adolescence**
 - Most brain development other than ages 0-3 (pruning away unused/rarely used connections and fortifying connections that are used frequently)
 - Fully developed Limbic System by age 15 – This area of the brain controls emotions, which leads to craving excitement and risk-taking behaviors.
 - Prefrontal Cortex continues to develop until mid-twenties – This area of the brain controls decision-making and impulse control, which can also lead to more risk-taking behaviors.
 - Hormones are driving all of these physical changes of puberty, which can lead to emotional ups and downs during this time.
- **Shifting Friendships**
 - Common during middle school as students now have a larger pool of peers to choose from, have more freedom and start placing more emphasis on friendships (shifting from the family).
 - About 75% of middle school friendships only last from fall to spring (*A Kid's Guide to Making and Keeping Friends*).
- **Increased Academic Demand**
 - Greater workload, complex, multi-step projects and importance of time management and study skills
 - Increased independence and increased responsibility during Middle School
- **Communicating Respectfully and Advocating with Teachers and Other Adults**
 - Teaching students how to self-advocate is a part of increasing their independence
 - Need to learn how to communicate respectfully both on-line and face-to-face
- **Peer Pressure**
 - Young people can be easily influenced – help them find a positive, supportive peer group
 - Young people are learning how to manage both internal and external pressures
- **On-line Safety**
 - Young people need to know what to do if they receive an unwanted message or request on-line
 - Students learned how to verify the identity of those they are "friending" on-line



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- **Using Social Media Responsibly and Potential Consequences of On-line Behavior**
 - Students were taught the acronym **READY**
 - **Reasons to post** (Ask yourself, why am I posting this? If there really isn't a good reason, then maybe you want to think twice about doing it).
 - **Everyone's consent** (If there is someone else in a picture or if you are tagging other people, you should check with them first if it is okay).
 - **Appropriate for all** (If your grandmother, teacher, coach, pastor, younger sibling saw this post, would it be okay)?
 - **Does this hurt me or anyone else?** (Could this post come back and hurt you one day? Also, if this post could upset or hurt another person, it really shouldn't be online where it can be screenshot or forwarded to others).
 - **You can't take it back** (Once something is posted, it really is out there forever, even if you do take the post down. Even something that may seem harmless right now, may not be something you want to see pop back up a few years from now).

How Parents and Other Trusted Adults Can Help

- **Be approachable and initiate conversations** -Teens often become defensive when they think a lecture is coming. Listen to them without judgement. Talking while in the car can be a more comfortable place to talk.
- **Use news or stories as a way to start conversations**- When something is in the news use it as a way to start a conversation. Perhaps share a story about something that has happened to you or a friend or neighbor.
- **Build the Parent/Child Relationship** – Eat meals together when you can. Remove electronics from meals, bedrooms, and family activities. Take an interest in your child's interests.
- **Promote Healthy Activities** –Help your child get involved in physical activities, community activities, or arts.
- **Know Their Friends** – Pay attention to who your child is hanging out with both in-person and on-line and take the opportunity to introduce yourself to their parents.
- **Be their way out** – Let your child know that they can call or text you anytime to come get them or when in a peer pressure situation. Create a secret code word or phrase, so they can exit without embarrassment. They can use you as an excuse.

Helpful Resources for Parents and Other Trusted Adults:

[The Candor Health Education](#)

[Child Mind Institute](#)

[Children and Screens](#)

Middle School Matters – 10 Key Skills Kids Need to Thrive in Middle School and Beyond, by Phyllis L. Fagell, LCPC

If you are interested in staying up-to-date on health topics impacting youth and young adults, [register here](#) to receive the monthly Candor Health Education community newsletter. We look forward to partnering with you and encourage you to keep talking with your child...they are listening.

Sincerely,

The Candor Health Education Team