

**DISTRICT  
204**

MENTAL HEALTH  
SYMPOSIUM



**SATURDAY, MARCH 4**

PRESENTED BY:



## **Supporting Your Middle School Child**

*presented by*

**Deb Kimminau**  
Indian Prairie School District



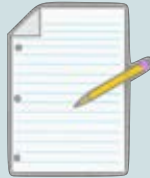


Please complete  
this quick →  
2-question survey  
while you wait.



2 questions

Also, in packet:  
**Parent Expectations Survey**



Welcome to

# Supporting Your Middle School Child

Slides:



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# Outline

1. The Challenges of Middle School Today
2. What's Normal? (Adolescent Brain)
3. When Should You Worry?
4. Issues of Identity
5. What Does Your Child Need? (How Can We Help Them?)
6. How Much Should You Check Up on Your Child Vs. Let Them Go?
7. Helping with Homework - What's Helpful? What's Not?
8. Maintaining Your Relationship for the Long-Term
9. Middle School Parent Involvement - What Does It Look Like?
10. Contact Information/Resources for You



# Parent Packet and Student Packet

Designed to help you:

- Continue; customize your approach
- **Communicate with your child**

Includes:

- Parent Expectations Survey (& Student)
- Parenting Goals Activity
- Messages to Share about Brain
- Readiness Activity (& Student)
- Strengthening Autonomy-Competence-Relatedness
- Parent/Adult Involvement (& Student)
- Parent-Child Discussion Questions (& Student)
- Back page: Ideas to take with you

## Supporting Your Middle School Child

### PROGRAM OUTLINE



- The Challenges of Middle School Today
- What's Normal? (Adolescent Brain)
- When Should You Worry?
- Issues of Identity
- What Does Your Child Need? (How Can We Help Them?)
- How Much Should You Check Up on Your Child Vs. Let Them Go?
- Helping with Homework - What's Helpful? What's Not?
- Maintaining Your Relationship for the Long-Term
- Middle School Parent Involvement - What Does It Look Like?

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# Middle School Looks Different from Elementary



Students



Teachers



Parents



# Challenges of Middle School Today

## Different from Elementary School!

- More classes & teachers
- More students in the school/halls; lockers!
- More options - classes, friends, extracurriculars
- New expectations - independence, self-advocacy, abstract thinking

## Kids are different too!

- Brain/body changes, hormones, emotions
- Identity issues become prominent
- Peer focus - social media, screen time



# But First: What Do You Want/Value?



What are some goals you have for your child before high school?

What do you value most?



What does your child  
think you value most?

# Common Goals *to Work Toward* in Middle School



- Independence: Increased responsibility/ownership
- Decision-Making: Better choices, more parent trust
- Self-Advocacy: Taking more initiative to obtain what they need
- Life Skills: Better time management and organizational skills
- Self-knowledge: Clearer sense of identity and interests
- Mindset: Increased belief in their own ability to grow and learn

Of course, these are works in progress, and each is huge.

Add to your own list as needed.



# The “Normal” Adolescent Brain

From Dahl, R.E. (2004). Adolescent brain development: A period of vulnerabilities and opportunities. *Annals of N.Y. Academy of Sciences*, 1021, 1-22. doi: 10.1196/annals.1308.001

## 2 Types of Maturational Changes:

- **Puberty-specific changes** (hormones, physical changes)
  - Intense emotions, passions, interests
  - Romantic motivation & sexual interest
  - Changes in sleeping/waking
  - Changes in appetite
  - Increased risk-taking & sensation-seeking
  - Greater risk of affective disorders (esp. females)
- **Brain maturation and cognitive development** (based on experience)
  - Many brain changes based on experience, not on puberty
  - These take time and continue well after puberty ends

← sooner



← later

*Note: WIDE variation in ages & responses!*

# Earlier Adolescence & the Brain



## “Starting the engine with an unskilled driver”

- Strong feelings (“turbo-charged” engine)
- Relatively unskilled cognitive abilities for self-control (“driving skills”)
- Skills often lag in planning, reasoning, problem solving, and understanding consequences (especially during “hot cognition”)

When you are exhausted, stressed, or upset, do you have more difficulty solving problems or responding with empathy?

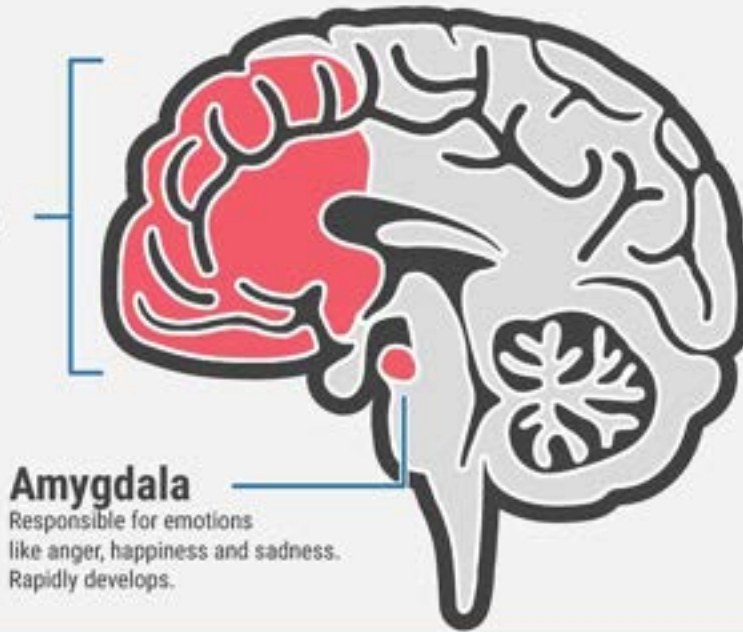
Delahooke: Body affects the brain.

(body budget & states; see *Brain-Body Parenting*)

# The teenage brain

## Prefrontal cortex

Responsible for thinking, reasoning and logic. Not fully developed.



## Amygdala

Responsible for emotions like anger, happiness and sadness. Rapidly develops.

The 'feeling part' of the teenage brain develops faster than the 'thinking part' making it difficult for them to regulate emotions and follow instructions

Intense emotions drive them to act.

Prefrontal cortex is not prepared to regulate them.

This may create a challenge for **EVERYONE!**

# Parent Support of the Brain



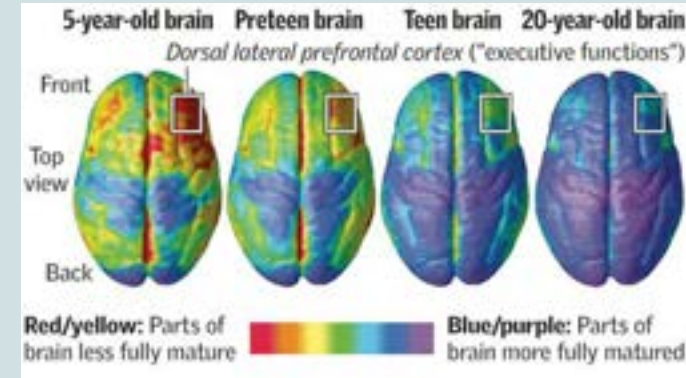
Adolescent kids NEED our help:

- Provide opportunities to channel intense interests/passions (risks?), such as sports, music, theater, martial arts, cooking, art, etc.
- Try to remain calm to model self-control, avoid escalation. Apologize if you lose it yourself (great modeling!).
- Guide self-regulation through co-regulation.  
Calm - connect - then correct together (Greene: CPS)
- Give gentle guidance on planning, decision-making, reflection, etc.
- Monitor behavior; reduce monitoring gradually; minimize danger.
- Provide validation and encouragement...

# Make sure your child knows...



- Their intense feelings are normal & will lessen in time.
- Though urges & impulses are normal, behavior has consequences.
- These feelings may interfere with their decision-making.
- We understand this is a challenging time.
- Their skills/knowledge/intelligence are NOT fixed.
- They need practice for their brain to grow/learn.
- We are there for them.



Jot down a few thoughts you'd like to share with your child.

# What's “Normal” at This Age?

This is a very challenging transitional age - and changes that are normal for one child may be a red flag for another.

Typically, you may see:

- Increased focus on self/image
- Increased questioning & pushing back
- Resistance to authority in different forms
- Reluctance to share details with parents, even some dishonesty
- Increased emotion and stress as they work through things
- Changing peer relationships/friendships, some drama (oxytocin)
- Spotlight effect: may change your child's style of interacting





# When Should You Worry - and Get Help?

Again, every child is different and you know your child best.

In general, these are concerning behaviors:

- Significant changes to eating or sleeping patterns
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Isolation, low interest in interacting with friends
- Sudden changes in grades or interest in school
- Hints of self-harm, substance use

Questions: Is the change disrupting function in some major area of life? Is there risk of harm?



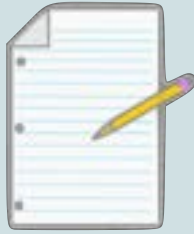
***If you see such disruption, you may need outside help.  
Reach out to guidance for additional support or resources.***

# Issues of Identity

- “Who am I?” is a question of adolescence, as kids try to picture themselves in the future.
- At these ages, kids try on new personas, images, behaviors.
- Some kids may explore the gender spectrum - masculine to feminine traits and behaviors.
- Identity explorations are critical at these ages but can be distressing for parents (and kids!).
- Support yourself - find other parents to talk to, activities to pursue.
- Support your child - allow freedom to explore (within safe limits).
- Accepting the child you have can be tough when they keep changing. It's tough for them, too. You can be the constant in their life. You may be their only truly safe space.



# How ready is your child for life?



## Readiness Activity (Parent and Child)

Use these results to guide your plans in guiding and providing opportunities for your child.

### Readiness Activity - Parent

How ready is your child for life? Rate your confidence in your child's ability to...

Make their own good decisions.	Low   Moderate   High
Manage their own time.	Low   Moderate   High
Ask for what they need.	Low   Moderate   High
Interact appropriately with others.	Low   Moderate   High
Care for self physically.	Low   Moderate   High
Care for self emotionally.	Low   Moderate   High
Handle unsafe situations or emergencies.	Low   Moderate   High
Basic life skills:	
Managing finances	Low   Moderate   High
Cleaning	Low   Moderate   High
Doing laundry	Low   Moderate   High
Shopping	Low   Moderate   High
Cooking (healthy meals?)	Low   Moderate   High
Cope with:	
Frustration	Low   Moderate   High
Disappointment	Low   Moderate   High
Anger	Low   Moderate   High
Rejection	Low   Moderate   High
Peer pressure	Low   Moderate   High

Circle any areas of concern to you or your child.

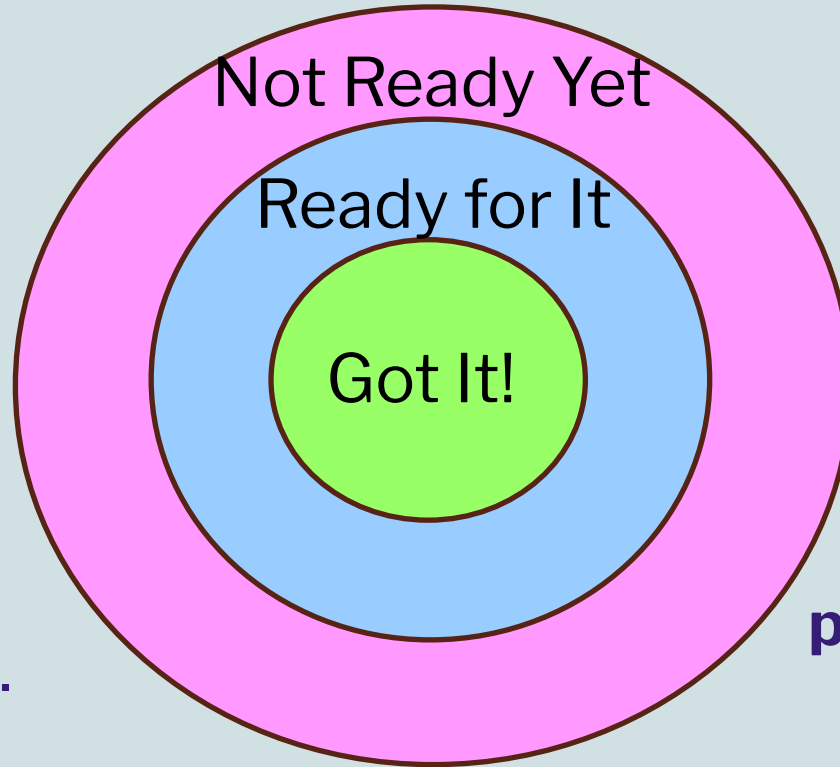
At home: Ask your child how he or she feels about each of these. Do you match?

# ZPD – ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT (LEV VYGOTSKY)

Applies to:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Emotions

Practice is  
crucial to move  
to the next level.



**This is where  
parental judgment  
comes in!**

**What is your child ready for?**



# What Does *Your* Child Need?

We have no idea as every child is different.

But your child is becoming an adult, and *everyone* needs the following...



# SOME BACKGROUND: SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

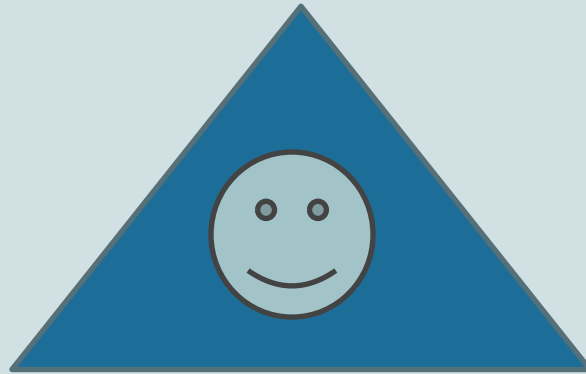
3 basic needs of all individuals, related to motivation & well-being:

**Autonomy**

Sense of personal control

**Competence**

Sense of effectiveness,  
confidence, self-efficacy

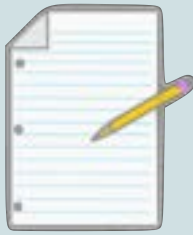


**Relatedness**

Sense of connection,  
belonging, love



# Some Ideas for the “Big Three”



## Relatedness

- Listen! Stay connected to your child.
- Be a sounding board; withhold judgment unless risky/dangerous.

## Autonomy

- Allow them to experiment and experience consequences.
- Encourage this important stage of cognitive & moral development.
- Give them some freedom to figure things out - with your guidance as needed!

## Competence

- Encourage them to develop diverse skills.
- What skills can they develop at home?



# Why I don't tell my parents about my problems...

- My parent(s) will blame/punish me for what happened, even when it's not my fault.
- My parent(s) will judge me and tell me what I did wrong. (I already know what I did wrong; they don't need to tell me!)
- My parent(s) will overreact, and then they will keep asking me about it, even when I'm done with it.
- My parent(s) will start yelling without giving me a chance to explain.
- My parents will interfere and not let me work it out myself.



# If your child brings a problem to you...



Be ecstatic that they've come to you with a problem. This speaks volumes about the trust in your relationship.

Before you respond, think: How can I respond in a way that will encourage them to come to me again with their next problem?

Try to understand:

Listen ***to understand*** (not to respond). Ask questions ***to understand***.

- Ask them what they think they could do to resolve the problem or make amends. Problems are *opportunities* for learning.
- Ask them what they might do differently in a similar situation.
- Ask them what they feel good about in how they behaved in the situation.

**Listen** earnestly to  
anything your  
**children** want to tell  
you, no matter what.  
If you don't listen  
eagerly to the *little stuff*  
*when they are little*  
they won't tell you the  
*big stuff* when they are  
*big*  
**because to them all**  
**of it has always**  
**been big stuff.**

[yourmodernfamily.com](http://yourmodernfamily.com)

Sometimes what they worry about may seem silly to you, but it's not silly to them. It may even feel huge and overwhelming. Do not diminish their worries if you want them to talk to you about them.

# Checking Up vs. Letting Go?

If the long-term goal is independence, some students have a long way to go.

Where is your child starting?

What is reasonable to accomplish this year?

If your child wants independence now, you can (if you choose):

- Monitor grades “from a distance” (if you need help - ask!).
- Intervene only if it's not going well.

Make expectations clear:

- They will eventually manage their work themselves.
- You are there to guide them until they can.





# Helping with Homework - What Helps?

After you help with homework, ask yourself:

***Is your child more prepared to do it on their own next time?***

Some guidelines:

- Provide a quiet place and regular time for homework.
- Check in about how it's going; brainstorm if problems; repeat (they own!).
- Help by asking questions rather than explaining.
  - Ask them to explain what they know, what comes next, etc.
- Start where they are; guide them toward increased ownership.
- Focus on understanding, confidence, self-reliance; NOT grades, "done"
- Kids learn best through struggle and figuring it out themselves, within ZPD.
- Why? It's how the brain works: each component of new knowledge must be integrated into existing knowledge. That process feels like a struggle (and many resist), but it provides the only real learning.



# What About Your Relationship?

- What kind of relationship do you want with your child when they are an adult?
- You're laying the foundation of your adult relationship now.
- Your child may not share problems if they fear judgement or punishment.
- If most of your interactions are guiding/correcting, your child may feel continuously judged.
- Spend some time together just listening, having fun, without critique - so they'll be more likely to talk when it matters. Or learn from them!
- Notice the positive! Use specific and targeted praise on a regular basis.
- Be a safe place for your child during this time of exploration and potential upheaval. (Think toddlers!)



# Parent Involvement in Middle School

- Parent involvement **positively** affects students':
  - Academic performance
  - Attitude toward school
  - Behavior
  - Self-esteem
  - Social skills
  - Absenteeism
  - Motivation
- Parent involvement will **look different** in middle school.



# Parent Involvement in Middle School (cont'd)

- Middle schoolers **want & need** their parents involved!
- Your child may be busier than ever but your involvement remains **important**.
- Children begin to connect more with **peers** (maybe more than you at times) - but they still need YOU!
- **Parent time** spent at school events may even **increase**.



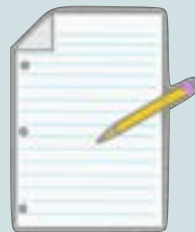
# What is Parent Involvement in Middle School?

- Participation opportunities vary by school and classroom.
- Most important: be involved by communicating with your child - but not only about grades & discipline.
- You may ask how you can be involved in your school and your child's classrooms/library.
- Consider sharing a passion via extra-curricular activities.
- PTA/PTSA/PTO membership and participation in other organizations/committees is important.
- Attend events with your child.
- Strike a healthy balance.



# Parent Involvement is Evolving in Some Areas

- Over the course of middle school and high school, several areas of parent/adult involvement will change significantly.
- Your packet has a Parent Survey: Parent/Adult Involvement.
- These are areas where you may currently be helping a lot, but will reduce your help over the coming years.
- What do you feel is important to develop in middle school?



# Summary

- Trust your instincts and knowledge of your child, but remember that they are changing.
- Stay involved in ways that work for you and your child.
- Monitor as needed, from a distance.
- Listen more and talk less (watch judgement).
- Encourage autonomy and ownership ***as they are ready***.
- Don't over-help (with homework or anything else).
- Support yourself - take a break, phone a friend, meditate.



TO TAKE CHILDREN SERIOUSLY IS TO VALUE  
THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE RIGHT NOW  
RATHER THAN ADULTS-IN-THE-MAKING.

**ALFIE KOHN**

**Love the child you have; know they will change.  
The most important thing: *ENJOY YOUR CHILD!***

# Upcoming Parent Support



**March Wednesdays: New Approach to Discipline Support Group**

3 Wednesday evenings: March 8, 15, and 22

**March 6: Organization and Time Management**

**March 9: Building Resilience through Growth Mindset**

**March 14: Helping Your Child with Homework**

**April 20 or 26: To High School and Beyond**



***Additional information on paper flyer***

## **Contact Information: Parent & Community Engagement Specialists**

**Deb Kimminau:** Fischer Middle School  
deb\_kimminau@ipsd.org; 630-635-6164

**Naomi Krodel:** Hill Middle School  
naomi\_krodel@ipsd.org; 630-428-6333

**Peggy Smid:** Granger Middle School  
margaret\_smid@ipsd.org; 630-428-3421

# Math/Homework Resources

Math Specific:

- [Glory in the Struggle](#) by Audrey Weeks
- [Helping Your Child with Math Homework](#) by Deb Kimminau and IPSD teachers

General Study Info:

- [Marshall Memo - study strategies that work](#)

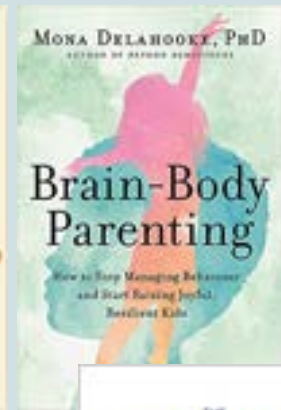
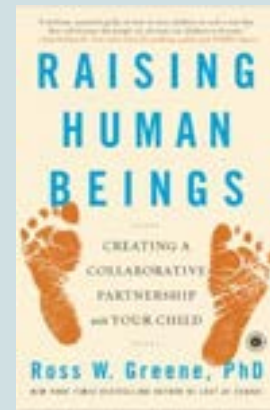
## Brain Development Paper

[Dahl, R.E. \(2004\). Adolescent brain development: A period of vulnerabilities and opportunities. \*Annals of N.Y. Academy of Sciences\*, 1021, 1-22. doi: 10.1196/annals.1308.001](#)

# Resources

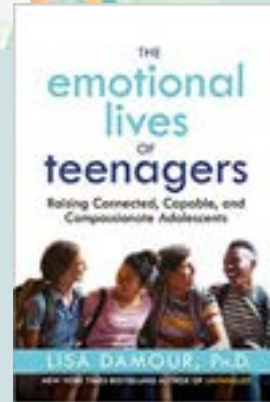
## Organizations:

- 360 Youth Services - <https://360youthservices.org/>
- KidsMatter - <https://kidsmatter2us.org/>
- Alive Center - <https://www.alivecenter.org/>
- [Mental Health Resources in DuPage & Will Counties](#)



## Websites:

- ReferralGPS treatment resources: [referralgps.com/find-help/IPSD204](https://referralgps.com/find-help/IPSD204)
- Parent support from Ross Greene: <https://livesinthebalance.org/parents-and-families/>
- Teen-specific parent support: <https://www.parentteenconnect.org/>

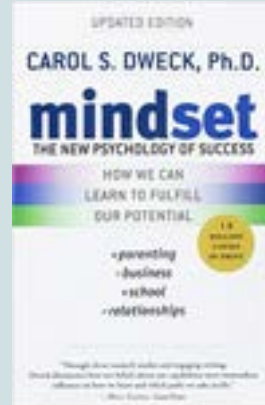


## Books:

- ***Raising Human Beings*** by Ross Greene - parenting through collaboration
- ***Kids are Worth It*** by Barbara Coloroso - excellent timeless parenting advice
- ***Brain-Body Parenting*** by Mona Delahooke - using co-regulation to develop skills
- ***Raising Your Spirited Child*** by Mary Sheedy-Kurcinka - parenting temperaments
- ***The Emotional Lives of Teenagers*** by Lisa Damour - helping teens w/ emotions

# Other Book Resources

- **Establishing limits, building a close relationship**
  - *Getting to Calm* by Laura S. Kastner
- **Behavior explanations based on brain science**
  - *Why Do They Act That Way?* by David Walsh
- **Parenting guide based on brain science**
  - *The Teenage Brain* by Frances Jensen with Amy Nutt
- **Social Comparisons – social media adds to problems; “duck syndrome”**
  - *iGen: Why today’s super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood* by Jean Twenge
- **And never feeling “good enough” – especially for girls**
  - *Enough As She Is* by Rachel Simmons
- **Attitudes toward intelligence, hard work, failure, perseverance**
  - *Mindset* by Carol Dweck and *Grit* by Angela Duckworth
- **Students have less control over their lives**
  - *The Self-Driven Child* by William Sixtrud and Ned Johnson
- **Student stress is higher – coping skills often underdeveloped**
  - *Unwritten Rules: Real Strategies to Parent Your Child into a Successful Adult* by Adam Russo
- **Parent stress is higher – more limits on time (& money)**
  - *Pressured Parents, Stressed-Out Kids* by Wendy Grolnick and Kathy Seal



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**Thank you for attending!**