



Middle and High School Transitions



PARENT RESOURCE GUIDE



Facts and Tips for Parents
Discussion Questions



Middle and High School Transitions

Ask parents who has the most influence over the decisions and behaviors of their teens, and most reply: their peers. Yet, research confirms that when teens are asked who has the most influence over their actions, they overwhelmingly reply: our parents.

Despite the eye-rolling and often-demonstrated (and totally natural) push for independence, middle and high school teens need you, their parent. Who better can provide the guidance, direction, care, love and sacrifice to guide them to adulthood?

The benefits of parent involvement are well documented—a demonstrated awareness of and involvement in schoolwork, communication with their educators, an understanding of the developmental emotional and social challenges, and the clear communication to their children of parental expectations and academic aspirations. Yet, a National Middle School Association study confirms that parental involvement too often declines during the crucial middle and high school years.

With a commitment to address all of the essentials to develop in our children the qualities that set in motion life-long success and resiliency, Sylvan Learning educators are committed to helping you reach your parenting potential. This guide is designed to help empower parents with the information and resources to help our children successfully navigate the natural, though challenging, academic and emotional transitions of the middle and high school years.

This guide is designed to accompany **Middle and High School Transitions** streaming video resources available online at the Sylvan Learning Parent Resource site:

www.sylvanlearning.com/learning_tips_for_parents_transitions.cfm.

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Facts and Tips for Parents

About Teenage Brain Development

WHAT WE KNOW

Brain research, using magnetic resonance imaging, or MRIs, allow scientists to observe and measure brain activity and changes that occur during different tasks as well as map out the structure of the brain. Researchers have learned that although 95 percent of the brain structures form by age 5 or 6, many changes in the structure of the brain occur much later—just before puberty and even during adolescence.

Recent studies by scientists at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), as well as McGill University, have discovered that the prefrontal cortex of the brain, which is also called the frontal lobe, finishes developing later than other parts. This is the part of the brain that is in charge of planning, working memory, organizing and controlling moods; moreover, it is responsible for our decision-making skills and controlling impulses. Knowing the frontal lobe is in the process of maturing throughout adolescence, researchers have new insight in understanding the teenage brain.

Further research by Dr. Deborah Yurgelin-Todd, the director of

neuropsychology and cognitive neuroimaging at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., shows that teenagers use more of the emotional regions of their brains in their general responses to the world. Her studies also showed that teenagers do not consistently interpret emotional expressions from others correctly. This study suggests that teens do not always consider the consequences of their actions and can misinterpret external visual cues.

Scientists do warn us that research in this area is young and we should not jump to conclusions about understanding teenage behavior based only on knowledge of brain development. External influences and other factors have to be considered in addition to brain structure and development.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Experts agree that even though these latest studies do not provide definitive information on teenage behavior, they do offer us some guidance in approaching teenage and preadolescent learning.

- Find ways to communicate clearly. Do not depend on a facial expression to convey information;



use carefully selected words and seek clarification of understanding. Ask a young person to repeat the instructions or tell you what he/she is thinking—and really listen to the answer.

- Set clear boundaries, limits and rules and make sure everyone understands them the same way.
- Provide opportunities to discuss certain behaviors and their consequences. Finding teachable moments in a day can be as easy as reflecting on news of the day.
- Find ways to teach and model planning skills.
- Provide opportunities to learn appropriate social behaviors and time to reflect on them.

- Never assume the message you intended was the message received—seek clarification and a statement of understanding.

RESOURCES

National Institute of Mental Health, "Teenage Brain: A Work in Progress," www.nimh.nih.gov

Frontline: Inside the Teenage Brain, "An Interview with Dr. Deborah Yurgelun-Todd"

Frontline: Inside the Teenage Brain, "Adolescent Brains are Works in Progress," by Sarah Spinks

How Stuff Works, "How Your Brain Works" by Craig C. Freudenrich, Ph.D.,

www.howstuffworks.com/brain.htm

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Facts and Tips for Parents

About Academic Challenges

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Literacy is defined as an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual and in society.

According to a study from the Carnegie Corporation, more than half of all high school freshmen in the top 35 cities in America can't read above a sixth-grade level. The National Center for Family Literacy provides the following facts about literacy and children:

- Those who watch less than three hours of television a day score better on reading and writing tests than those who watch more than three hours of television a day.
- Those who do well in reading are more likely to score well in mathematics than children who do not score well in reading.
- Those who have strong literacy skills can make connections between their lives and texts, films, previous school experiences and other experiences.
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It is important for every parent to remember that children with learning challenges can succeed in school and can become successful in their adult lives. Correct support services, and love and understanding at home make the difference.

Warning signs of learning difficulties, particularly in the middle school years, can include:

- Slow to learn reading strategies.
- Math problems are challenging to the point of frustration.
- Spells the same word differently in a single piece of writing.
- Avoids reading and writing.
- Has difficulty remembering or understanding what he or she just read.
- Has difficulty understanding and/or generalizing concepts.
- Misreads directions and information.

Why do many of our students give up their basic education? According to National Dropout Prevention Center/Network statistics, students give the following reasons for not attending school:

- Classes viewed as boring, irrelevant, and a waste of time.
- Did not have positive relationships with teachers.

- Did not have positive relationships with students.
- Was suspended too often.
- Did not feel safe at school.
- Could not keep up with schoolwork or was failing.
- Classes not challenging enough, students can miss class days and still receive credit.
- Couldn't work and go to school at the same time. (*Railsback, 2004*)
- At home, you can help your child in many ways:
- Talk about your child's learning challenges and accept them.
- Try to refer to challenges as learning differences; your child is smart, he/she just learns differently from other students.
- Foster your child's strengths, talents and interests. Give lots of praise and support your child's efforts.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Teach your children how to succeed in school. That means recognizing the importance of school attendance, actively supporting the goals of school, and encouraging/requiring school attendance. It sounds easy, but sometimes parents send mixed messages. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What kind of example do we set for our children at home and work?
- Do we arrive on time? Do we keep appointments?
- Are we responsible for completing assignments?
- Are we respectful of those in positions of importance?
- Do we work as team members?
- Do we strive for excellence in our work and try to improve?
- If we were to receive grades for effort, achievement and attitude, would we be proud enough to post them on the refrigerator door?
- Would we receive the award for perfect attendance?
- Middle and high school years are not the time for parents to keep an arm's length. Know what is going on in school and due dates concerning homework, projects, and other learning tasks. Talk with their teachers for guidance on ways to assist your child with storing information.
- Set a good example and turn off the television, computer or iPod, put down the phone—and read or write.
- Monitor your teen's progress and organize information relating to your child's education and possible learning challenges, including samples of your child's schoolwork, those where his/her learning challenge is evident and ones which show his/her strengths and successes.



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About Academic Challenges (*cont.*)

RESOURCES

National Center for Family Literacy,

www.famlit.org

LD OnLine,

www.LDonline.org

National Institute for Mental Health,

Learning Disabilities,

www.nimh.nih.gov

National Center for Learning

Disabilities,

www.ncl.org

Focus Adolescent Services,

www.focusas.com/Dropouts.html

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About Teen Internet Realities

WHAT WE KNOW

Teens can be exposed to screens all day, and sometimes all night, long. Consider the following statistics:

- 31% of teens have their own personal computer and more than 60% of American households have a computer. (*Kaiser Permanente, 2005*)
- Teens spend nearly 6.5 hours a day (45 hours per week) using media (*Kaiser Permanente, 2005*)
- Because they multi-task (using two or more forms of media simultaneously, such as texting while downloading on the Internet), teens are exposed to an average of 8.5 hours of media a day.
- Five million children are addicted to videogames. (*American Medical Association, 2007*)
- 19.6 % of young men ages 16 to 24 have gambled online. (*Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth, 2005*)
- 42% of Internet users between 10 and 17 years of age saw online pornography in the past year; only 2/3 of that number was unwanted. (*American Academy of Pediatrics, 2007*)

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Experts recommend the following early prevention steps to avoid screen addiction in your home.

- Talk regularly with your teens about use of the
- Internet as well as other screened devices.
- Speak with your children about Internet safety, appropriate online behavior and other issues involved with Internet use.
- Know the score and understand your kids' online world! Learn about Facebook, IM, YouTube, MySpace and the video games they play.
- Set a good example. What Internet sites do you visit? What video games do you play? What appears on your cell phone screen? What activities are you involved in? How often do you choose to speak on the cell phone instead of converse with your child? Remember the saying, "All things in moderation." Screened devices can be used appropriately and balanced with other activities.

RESOURCES

American Academy of Pediatrics,
www.pediatrics.org



Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent
Medicine,

www.archpediatrics.com

Center for Internet Addiction
Recovery,

www.netaddiction.com

Common Sense Media,

www.common sense media.org

Computer Addiction Services,

www.computeraddiction.com

Healthy Place,

www.healthyplace.com

Intervention Center,

www.intervention.com

Internet Filter Review,

[www.internet-filter-](http://www.internet-filter-
review.toptenreviews.com)

[review.toptenreviews.com](http://www.internet-filter-
review.toptenreviews.com)

Kaiser Permanente,

www.kaiserpermanente.com

Media Awareness Network,

www.media-awareness.com

National Youth Violence Prevention

Resource Center,

www.safeyouth.org

Point Smart, Click Safe,

www.pointsmartclicksafe.org



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About Social Adjustments: Alcohol

WHAT WE KNOW

While many people believe that underage drinking is a “rite of passage,” it is not. In fact, alcohol can cause serious and irreversible damage to the growing adolescent brain.

- Youth who drink can have a significant reduction in their learning abilities, memory and development, due to damage to the brain’s hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex.
- The longer you can delay the onset of drinking, the more time you give the brain to grow and develop, and most likely lessen the impact alcohol has on the brain.
- Alcoholism is like any other disease—children are at a higher risk to inherit the disease because of their parents’ history.

According to a National Institute on Drug Abuse study entitled Monitoring the Future (MTF 2005):

- Three-fourths of 12th graders, more than two-thirds of 10th graders, and about two in every five 8th graders have consumed alcohol.
- When youth drink they tend to drink intensively, often consuming four to five drinks at one time. MTF data show that 11 percent of 8th

graders, 22 percent of 10th graders, and 29 percent of 12th graders had engaged in heavy episodic, or binge, drinking within the past two weeks.

- The gap between alcohol use by boys and girls has closed. Girls consume alcohol and binge drink at rates equal to boys.
- Forty percent of children who start drinking before the age of 15 will become alcoholics at some point in their lives. If the onset of drinking is delayed by 5 years, a child’s risk of serious alcohol problems is decreased by 50 percent.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

Know the warning signs of alcoholism, compiled by the American Academy for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

- Physical—fatigue, repeated health complaints, red and glazed eyes, a lasting cough.
- Emotional—personality change, sudden mood changes, irritability, irresponsible behavior, low self-esteem, poor judgment, depression, a general lack of interest.
- Family—starting arguments, breaking rules, withdrawing from the family.

- School—decreased interest, negative attitude, drop in grades, many absences, truancy, discipline problems.
- Social—problems with the law, new friends who are less interested in “standard” activities.
- Even if your teen is not exhibiting warning signs, consider establishing the following strategies to reduce the risk of teen drinking:
 - Establish an approachable, trusting relationship with your teen.
 - Talk with your teen about the facts regarding alcohol, reasons not to drink and ways to avoid drinking in different situations.
 - Keep track of your teen’s activities and join with other parents in making common policies about teen drinking.
 - Develop family standards about teen drinking and establish—and follow through—on consequences.
 - Set a good example when it comes to alcohol intake. If you have a problem with alcohol, sit down with your children and discuss how it has affected your life, and how it can affect theirs.

RESOURCES

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, www.niaaa.nih.gov

Journal of Adolescent Health: A Review of Psychological Risk Factors,

www.adolescenthealth.org

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention,

<http://prevention.samhsa.gov/>

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About Social Adjustments: Bullying

WHAT WE KNOW

Bullying is physical, verbal and/or emotional abuse, sexual harassment in person or online. In addition to physical abuse, bullies threaten, intimidate, tease, spread rumors and eliminate people from groups.

Bullies frequently torment their victims such that they feel helpless, defenseless and are often in real physical and emotional pain.

According to recent studies:

- One out of every four students is bullied.
- 30% of students in sixth through tenth grades have admitted to being involved in bullying as a bully, victim, or both.
- Most bullying happens on school grounds, not at home or on the way to school, although online cyberbullying is a new concern.
- Every seven minutes, a child is bullied.
- 85% of the time, peers are present and nobody intervenes.
- Signs your child is being bullied can include:
- Clothes, books or possessions are ripped, excessively dirty, damaged or missing.

- Unexplained cuts, bruises or scratches.
- A lack of friends or sense of belonging to any groups at school.
- Frequent headaches, stomach aches or other physical complaints.
- Suffering from bad dreams or bad sleep patterns.
- High anxiety and/or low self-esteem.
- Signs your child is a bully can include these tendencies:
- Dominant personalities with quick tempers.
- Easily frustrated, even at the simplest of tasks.
- Lack of empathy for others.
- Difficulty in following rules.
- Seems to enjoy violence.
- Has a high sense of self-esteem.
- Hangs out with other bullies or peers who enjoy violence.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

First and foremost, talk with your teens in ways that encourage the sharing of information. Let them know that you are concerned and want to help, but most of all let them know it is not their fault if they are being bullied. Never



approve of retaliation, which often escalates the problem.

Schools and homes must establish clear rules about bullying behaviors that will not be tolerated.

Consequences must be outlined and enforced. If your child is being bullied, talk with administrators and teachers to discuss your concerns and develop a plan of action. You should expect the bullying to stop.

Talk with your teens about how to stand up for others who are being bullied. Help them to understand that getting involved and seeking help is not "tattling" but an important solution to the problem. Make sure your home is a safe haven.

RESOURCES

Kids Health, www.kidshealth.org

Love Our Children, USA,
www.loveourchildren.org

Med Line Plus,
www.medlineplus.gov

National Institute of Mental Health,
www.nimh.nih.gov

Safe Youth,
www.safeyouth.org

Stop Bullying Now!,
www.stopbullyingnow.com

Youth Crime Watch,
www.ycwa.org

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Discussion Questions for Parents and Teens

- What are the special challenges of the middle school/high school years?
- Discuss with your teen what worries you, as the parent, most about the middle school/high school years. Ask your teen what are his or her biggest concerns?
- Parents, think about what kind of middle school/high school experience you had. How have the challenges changed? How are they the same? How much did you talk with your parents?
- How many adults—and kids, as well—tend to give up when they face challenges... the “I stink at math” syndrome? Why is that approach not OK?
- Are your children willing to ask for help when it comes to academics? Are they too stubborn or embarrassed?
- Parents, how can you know how things are really going at school? Discuss with your teens how best to strike a balance between involvement and independence in the teen years.
- When it comes to homework, what are your family’s homework rules? If you do, in fact, have homework rules, are they “enforced?” How should parents be involved in their middle and high school student’s homework load? How much help should/can parents really offer?
- Parents, what do you do when your middle or high school teen has an emotional temper tantrum?
- How do you react? Teens, what would you like your parents to do?
- High school parents, have you talked to your kids about what colleges are looking for?
- How much stress does your child express or feel about getting into college?
- Have you talked with your kids about the risks of the teen years, especially drugs and alcohol?
- Where do you think teens are getting the drugs and alcohol?

- What do you tell your kids if they are bullied—or if they witness bullying?
- How might their own online behavior (the messages and photos they post) constitute bullying?
- Have you heard of the concept of “social norming?” What behaviors can you discuss with your teen that they may think “everyone is doing,” although the behaviors are really NOT normal—and acceptable?



Tran-si-tion (tran·si·tion)

N: passage from one form, state, style, or place to another. For teens and parents today, this passage through middle and high school years can present particular challenges—and joys.

Middle and High School Transitions

Despite the eye-rolling and often-demonstrated (and totally natural) push for independence, middle and high school teens desperately need their parents. Who better can provide the guidance, direction, care, love and sacrifice to guide them to adulthood? The benefits of parent involvement at every phase of child development are well documented. Yet, a National Middle School Association study confirms that parental involvement too often declines during the crucial middle and high school years.

With a commitment to address all of the essentials to develop in our children the qualities that set in motion life-long success and resiliency, Sylvan Learning educators are committed to helping parents reach their parenting potential. Empowering parents with information and resources can help our children successfully navigate the natural, though challenging, academic and emotional transitions of the middle and high school years.