

Social & Emotional Development in Middle Childhood

AGES 5–10 YEARS

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What to Expect & When to Seek Help

 A **Bright Futures** Developmental Tool for Families and Providers

What Parents Want to Know...

From kindergarten through middle school, every parent asks one question more than any other: *“How is my child doing?”*

All children have different strengths and abilities, and no other child will develop exactly like yours. Health, personality, and early experiences are important to your child’s development; family, community, and cultural traditions also play important roles. For example, children have fewer limits and become more independent at earlier ages in some cultures than in others.

Although each child is different, *all* children face social and emotional challenges in middle childhood, including:

- Developing self-esteem and growing more confident
- Making new friends and meeting new challenges at school
- Learning to take reasonable risks, to handle failure, and to “bounce back”

As parents, you are becoming experts at knowing and meeting your growing child’s needs. This tool can help by providing:

- A “snapshot” of what to expect as you and your child learn and grow together
- A way to identify your child’s strengths and your abilities as parents
- A starting point for talking with others about your child’s development
- Tips for when, where, and how to seek help

If you have questions or concerns about your child, “check it out.” Ask a trusted friend, family member, or member of your faith or cultural community; talk with your child’s health care or after-school care provider; or contact your child’s school or your local social service agency. Help is available in your community. See the last page to learn more about services and support for you, your child, and your family. Finding answers to your questions early will help your child develop in the healthiest way possible.



The Emerging Self

What to Expect

Child:

- Initiates own ideas and actions (“self-starter”)
- Works hard to learn new skills, feels proud and wants to show what he can do
- Masters skills for success in school (sorting, counting, language skills)
- Expresses own unique personality in relating to others, handling experiences
- Has more internal control over impulses, emotions, and behaviors
- Becomes more independent and responsible in making some choices on her own
- Shows growing awareness of good and bad (conscience)

Parents:

- Accept child’s unique personality
- Encourage healthy, balanced behavior (e.g., provide social experiences for shy child; calm, structured activities for impulsive or highly active child)
- Support child’s interests, ideas, and activities
- Model responsible behavior, help child take on new responsibilities
- Help child balance time for self and time for structured activities
- Are aware of child’s activities inside and outside the home
- Teach reasonable risks and safe limits
- Talk with child about the risks of experimenting with tobacco, alcohol, drugs (8-10 years)

When to Seek Help

If your child:

- Is often sad, worried, or afraid
- Clings to you or wants to stay home much of the time
- Seems very worried about failing or making mistakes
- Waits to be told what to do, does not express own interests or ideas
- Avoids new tasks, experiences, and challenges
- Often seems out-of-control, acts on impulse, makes unhealthy choices
- Takes unsafe risks (with bike, traffic, play, sports)
- Shows signs of tobacco, alcohol, or drug use (8-10 years)

Or if you, as parents:

- Find it hard to encourage independence yet set safe limits
- Are overly protective and afraid to let your child try new things



- Think your child is either too aggressive or too dependent (does whatever someone wants)
- Need ideas to help your child resist pressures to smoke, drink, or use drugs (8-10 years)

Growing and Changing

What to Expect

Child:

- Learns to care for her body (bathing, grooming, dressing; healthy foods; physical activity)
- Feels good about how she looks
- Has energy and a sense of well-being
- Takes pride and pleasure in mastering new physical skills
- Develops gender identity (by 5 years)
- Is aware of changes that will take place during puberty (8-10 years)

Parents:

- Encourage safe, healthy habits (healthy foods, physical activity, seat belts)
- Talk with child about sexuality and puberty; offer age-appropriate information, answer questions honestly
- Reassure child about the positive changes of puberty
- Talk together about changing body image and how to resist pressures to look “perfect” (shape, weight, height)

continued

*Growing and Changing Continued***When to Seek Help****If your child:**

- Wets the bed
- Has trouble sleeping or wants to sleep much of the time
- Lacks basic self-care habits (bathing, brushing teeth, dressing)
- Returns to baby-like or silly behaviors
- Shows signs of early sexual development (before age 9)
- Seems unaware or fearful of puberty and sexuality (ages 9-10)
- Has a distorted body image (thinks she's "fat" when she's not)
- Uses food to self-soothe or escape uncomfortable feelings

Or if you, as parents:

- Worry that your child sleeps or eats too much or too little
- Notice that your child can't keep up physically with others the same age
- Are concerned that your child does not speak clearly or communicate well with others
- Need tips for how to talk with your child about sex or puberty
- Think your child is overly concerned with weight or body image

Respecting Self & Others**What to Expect****Child:**

- Feels good about himself and his abilities
- Is able to get over or "bounce back" from disappointments
- Learns from mistakes or failures, tries again
- Respects the rights and feelings of others, has a sense of fairness
- Has growing ability to understand another person's viewpoint
- Solves conflicts or problems by talking, not fighting

Parents:

- Talk and listen to child with respect
- Are good role models (show understanding, kindness, patience)
- Teach child to accept and respect people's differences (ethnic, cultural, religious)
- Handle anger constructively

- Help child overcome fears and cope with stress
- Share own feelings and stories about facing fears and problems
- Respect child's growing need for privacy
- Limit exposure to media violence

When to Seek Help**If your child:**

- Feels that he lacks basic skills or abilities
- Often says negative things about self or others
- Has problems dealing with angry feelings
- Is preoccupied with violent movies, TV, computer games
- Is aggressive or tries to bully others

Or if you, as parents:

- Worry about how your child views himself
- Often find yourself criticizing and blaming your child
- Notice that your child seems preoccupied with violence
- Have concerns about your child's exposure to abuse (physical, verbal, sexual)
- Lack confidence or have doubts about your own abilities

Family**What to Expect****Child:**

- Feels loved, accepted and valued in the family
- Shares feelings and experiences with family members
- Gets along with brothers and sisters most of the time
- Shares or takes turns (games, toys, TV, computer)
- Enjoys being part of the family and doing fun things together
- Helps out with simple chores, follows family rules

Parents:

- Show love, affection, and respect
- Set aside time each day to talk and play with child
- Support and supervise child's activities
- Praise good behavior, efforts, and accomplishments
- Have family meals together as often as possible
- Arrange fun family activities
- Set reasonable rules and consequences
- Help child learn how to solve problems with brothers and sisters
- Teach child to value and celebrate family heritage

continued

*Family Continued***When to Seek Help****If your child:**

- Is often silent or unwilling to share feelings with family
- Does not want to join in family activities
- Stays in her room most of the time; often seems sad or sullen
- Acts angry or disrespectful with family members
- Refuses to help with chores or follow family routines (bedtime, mealtime)

Or if you, as parents:

- Find it hard to talk with your child or spend time together
- Often feel upset or angry with your child
- Feel that your child's personality does not "fit in" with the family
- Need help resolving conflicts in your family
- Are facing major family changes or stresses (divorce, job loss, substance use)

Building Friendships**What to Expect****Child:**

- Has playmates and friends, feels accepted by peers
- Gets along well with others, enjoys spending time with friends
- Shares well, takes turns
- Brings friends home to play, is invited to friends' homes
- Stands up for self when hurt by peers; copes with teasing or taunting

Parents:

- Support healthy friendships (know child's friends and their families, invite friends home)
- Supervise child's activities
- Talk with child about friends, school, interests
- Encourage child's social activities, limit TV time
- Help child find ways to solve conflicts with friends or playmates
- Teach child how to be safe near strangers (home, neighborhood, cars, playgrounds)
- Teach skills to resist peer pressures and to cope with teasing

**When to Seek Help****If your child:**

- Does not have playmates or friends
- Is not willing to share or take turns with others
- Seems very nervous or shy with others, chooses to be alone much of the time
- Is aggressive or bullies other children (hits, taunts, calls names)
- Feels pressured by others to do things he does not want to do
- Is easily hurt by peers

Or if you, as parents:

- Worry that your child does not get along with others or has trouble keeping friends
- Notice that your child seems withdrawn or alone much of the time
- Get calls from other parents or neighbors about your child's behavior
- Need tips to help your child build good social skills
- Worry about the types of friends and activities your child chooses
- Observe that your child seems fearful with familiar adults, or too friendly with strangers

School Relationships

What to Expect

Child:

- Feels good about school
- Is accepted by classmates and teachers
- Is included in group activities
- Joins school clubs, teams, or other school activities
- Cooperates with school rules and routines
- Responds positively to guidance from teachers
- Seeks help when needed

Parents:

- Help child feel confident about school (visit classroom, meet teachers before school starts)
- Have expectations that match child's abilities
- Provide help or guidance with school tasks
- Encourage child's interests in school activities
- Become involved at school (field trips, PTA)
- Talk with child's teachers regularly
- Encourage child to invite classmates home to play

When to Seek Help

If your child:

- Is worried or fearful about school; refuses to go to school
- Often has headaches or stomach pains on school mornings
- Has problems with classmates, teachers, or school work
- Feels "different," rejected, or left out
- Acts out in class or on the playground
- Likes to "hang out" with classmates who get into trouble
- Gets "picked on" or bullied at school or play
- Refuses to follow school rules and routines
- Loses interest in school (grades, friends, activities)

Or if you, as parents:

- Observe that your child does not have friends or playmates at school
- Get calls or reports from teachers with concerns about your child's behavior
- Expect your child to achieve more than she seems able to do
- Notice a change in your child's school performance, such as a drop in grades



Where to Seek Help

If you have questions or concerns about your child or your parenting, “check it out.” You may want to talk with your child’s health care provider, after-school provider, or school counselor. Or check with a close friend or a member of your family or faith community. You can also “open doors” by locating resources and services in your own community. The toll-free numbers and Web sites listed below are a starting point. Or you can ask for help at your local library or call your local health department, school district, or social services agency listed in the county government section of your phone book.

Your Questions and Concerns: _____

National Toll-Free Numbers & Web Sites

Health & Wellness (Health Provider; Clinic)

Maternal and Child Health Bureau Hotline
 (800) 311-2229 • (800) 504-7081 (Español)

Parenting Education

Medline Plus
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/parenting.html
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/spanish/parenting.html (Español)

Education & Developmental Services

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)
 (800) 695-0285 (voice or TDD) • www.nichcy.org

Mental Health (Community Mental Health Center)

National Mental Health Information Center
 (800) 789-2647 (voice) or (866) 889-2647 (TDD)
www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

Family Support

In addition to the resources listed above, you can locate local social services, financial support, or faith-based programs:

Dial 2-1-1 (*a telephone network offering community-based information and referrals for services in most states*)
www.GovBenefits.gov


Your Own Contact List

For more resources, see “Locating Community-Based Services to Support Children and Families” at www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_community.html.


NAME _____ AGE _____


Cite as: Mayer R, Anastasi JM, Clark EM. 2006. *What to Expect & When to Seek Help: A Bright Futures Tool to Promote Social and Emotional Development in Middle Childhood*. Washington, DC: National Technical Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, in collaboration with the National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health.

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With funding from:
 Child, Adolescent and Family Branch
 Center for Mental Health Services
 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration





Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development