

# 11 Things Your Middle School Student Needs From You

**By Heather Stoll**

Middle School. What an appropriate name for a season of life that stuck in the middle of everything else. It's like the middle seat on an airplane. As a middle school student, they are too old to score the window seat for entertainment, yet they can't be trusted to keep their feet out of the aisle. So they relegate to the middle seat with no armrests, no personal space, and no freedom. It's a no man's land of awkwardness, insecurity, and survival of the fittest. They just have to endure it.

It doesn't have to be that way!

Middle School provides an amazing opportunity to cultivate a relationship with your student to sustain them (and you) for the next eight to twelve years. It's a chance to erect the foundations of your "teenage parenting experience," so you can continue to build on it through high school and beyond. It doesn't come without some effort, though.

As a parent, you need to do your part. With that in mind, below are eleven things your middle school student needs from you as they head back to school.

## **STRUCTURE**

Everything changes for your student when they enter middle school. Their body, their brain, their friends, their interests, their clothes, and even their hair. While everything around them changes, they need to know that some things stay the same. Family dinner, bedtime routine, family worship attendance, chores, and technology limits all create a structure that provides a steady framework for their life.

## **CONSISTENCY**

In a world marked by extremes—and extreme busyness—consistency is a difficult standard to maintain. However, consistency is not about managing your schedule or waking up earlier to get everything done. Consistency comes from the inside, rooted in the center of who you are and how you parent. It is a steadiness that refuses to over-react to middle school emotions and peer parent pressure and holds to the values, goals, and priorities of your family.

## **AFFIRMATION**

Everyone wants to feel (and be told) they are loved and valued. Middle school students need it more than anyone and in every way. Affirmation is verbal confirmation that your child is loved, smart, creative, helpful, kind, hard-working, and pretty (or handsome). Don't neglect affirmation of their appearance.

Although your emphasis should be on their inner self, middle school students struggle deeply with how they look and appear to others. They need to be affirmed in this area as it can be the most significant source of insecurity during these years.

## **ENCOURAGEMENT**

Encouragement applies affirmation to everyday life. It builds on their identity and propels them to action. Encouragement tells your student to try something new, join a club or sport, work towards an academic goal, or embrace a new friend.

Encouragement says to them to keep trying when things get hard, provide comfort when they encounter failure, and cheer on the sideline whether they win or lose.

## **POSITIVITY**

Whether your student exudes pure sunshine or charges money for every smile, negativity often colors their perceptions and perspective in middle school. They will be devastated because they wore jeans when everyone else wore shorts, brought a sports drink when others brought a soda, or didn't receive an invitation and everyone else did.

Positivity becomes a necessary countermeasure in these moments. Positivity doesn't discount the struggle or hurt feelings, but instead shines a light on another perspective, reassures them it will work out and reminds them of the blessings in their life.

## **VISION**

Vision takes the focus off the events of today (or this week or even this year) and points to the bigger picture and purpose of their life. By casting vision for your student, you teach them to approach their challenges with confidence, their failures with faith, and new experiences with expectation.

## **ENGAGEMENT**

Engaged parents pay attention. They notice behaviors, eating habits, clothing choices, grades, friend groups, and technology use. They ask specific questions and listen to the answers. Engagement is NOT management. It is participating in a relationship with your student in which you invest time and attention. Engagement communicates interest and requires time and creativity. It usually does not involve technology.





## **INVOLVEMENT**

Involvement puts feet to engagement. Involvement means you show up. Your student will tell you that you don't have to come or it doesn't matter if you attend or someone else's parent can drive them. Involvement matters. There is no substitute for being there. It communicates that you care about them and what they do is important to you.

## **PRIORITY**

Intentionality is a popular concept in parenting—and it is great to be intentional. However, it is possible to be intentional by scheduling time with your student each month yet miss every family dinner or sporting event. You can be intentional to lead a family devotion each morning, but not make time for an impromptu ice cream date.

Your calendar, bank account, and the to-do list is a reflection of your priorities. Does your middle school student have a place there?

## **A SAFE PLACE**

Today's world is a tough place. Home needs to be a safe place--physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. It needs to provide a reprieve from the scrutiny and pressure, offering a space to express and decompress. Don't be afraid to give them some extra space or occasionally let their chores slide or turn up the music and dance in the living room.

## **PRAYER**

Prayer is not the last thing your middle school student needs from you. In fact, it should be one of the priorities in the morning, and one of the last things you do before you close your eyes to sleep. Prayer is one of the over-arching themes of your entire middle school parenting journey.

Unlike you, God sees all and knows all and hears all. When your student faces intense peer pressure, God can supply courage. When your student is anxious about a test, God can provide comfort and peace. When they are struggling with feelings or fears that they have not even shared or recognized, God can minister to their hurting hearts. And when you are feeling overwhelmed, unequipped, and heartbroken, God can give you wisdom and remind you that nothing is impossible for Him. You see, prayer is not just something your middle school student needs from you. It is something you need, too.

*Heather Stoll has more than 20 years of ministry experience, predominantly in the area of communications and media. She has served churches in South Carolina, Florida, and Tennessee, alongside her husband, Jeff. Together, they have two children, and they currently reside in Saint Augustine, FL.*