



### The Middle Years: Developmental Overview

During the years from 6–12, children grow rapidly and experience huge social and intellectual changes. Children in this age group develop their ability to be logical thinkers and problem solvers. They experiment with what they have learned from home as they go into the outside world. They begin to compare their abilities and skills with those of their friends and classmates. Their self-esteem is tested daily as they explore new friendships and find out where they fit in.

The family remains the child's foundation during the middle years, but many children begin to question rules. How your family talks together and how you discipline your children become very important. When parents explain and set rules in a fair, consistent way, they are helping their child learn to act responsibly. This parenting approach also encourages children to use reason and negotiation to resolve differences. Parents exert a strong influence over their older child's healthy development in the following areas:

- *Friendships and peer relationships.* Helping your children develop healthy friendships is an important part of parenting. Parents can help by organizing informal activities with neighborhood children, or by supporting their child's participation in structured groups such as scouting, sports, or religious organizations.
- *Popular entertainment media.* The wide range of media, including TV, videos, music, video games, and computers, can have a significant impact on your child's healthy development. Parents can limit and monitor their child's overall "viewing time," making sure that the programs their children are watching are educational or entertaining and do not glorify aggression, violence, or other unhealthy behaviors.
- *After-school care and monitoring.* The time between school dismissal and dinner time is, for many children, an unsupervised time, when some children may be tempted to get involved in smoking, drinking, or shoplifting. Instead of unsupervised time, parents can monitor their child's activities at home, or support their participation in programs offered at the school or through the community.
- *Encouraging school success.* School success has been related to many aspects of a child's future development, including future academic success, healthy friendships, and decreased chances of getting involved in risky behaviors. When parents become partners with teachers by helping with homework, attending parent meetings, and alerting the teacher to academic problems, the child is more likely to have long-term school success.
- *Conflict management skills.* Most children need help learning how to handle anger, solve problems, and resolve conflicts without aggression. Parents and families are their children's first and best teachers when they set an example of handling disagreements using words, negotiation, and compromise.
- *Caring connections.* Neighborhoods and communities can be a unique network of support for children and families. Parents encourage their child's healthy development when they help their children connect to their neighborhood's youth activities, youth leaders, seniors, and mentors.

Of course, these are not all of the factors that influence your elementary-school-age children's development. However, these are areas where you have a significant amount of influence and control.

*The information contained in this summary is taken from the Middle Years chapter of the Violence Prevention Resource Guide for Parents by Peggy Patten and Anne S. Robertson (Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 2001).*

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