



Foster Parenting a Middle Schooler

The middle school years can be challenging for both students and their caregivers. It's a period when children are developing physically and emotionally by leaps and bounds, and often much faster than they understand. Kids in this age range yearn to be more independent, yet they're not really sure of who they are and how to handle the choices and opportunities they're facing.

The experience can be unsettling for any parent, and even more so if you're a foster parent of a child in this stage.

Try some of these suggestions to strengthen the bond between you and the middle schooler in your care:

- * **Respect** their boundaries, but remain in control.
- * **Talk** to them often and ask about their friends and activities, but try not to pry.
- * **Understand** that some children ages 11 to 14 experience moodiness that has nothing to do with you. It's developmentally appropriate as their bodies change and grow.
- * Dispense hugs, if appropriate and comfortable, and **compliment** their positive actions and attitudes. Even if they push you away, the fact that you made an effort reminds the child that he or she is special and valued.
- * **Seek support** from your foster care liaison and from other parents or foster parents with children in this age range.
- * Remember that you are making a **positive difference**. The deposits of love, patience and care you make today will give your foster child a better chance for a great future.

