

It's Just A Phase . . . So Don't Miss It

To enhance the conversation, here are a few activities your family can try:

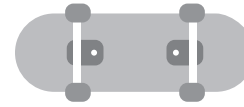
Draw Up a Sweat – Write out five or more exercises on separate slips of paper (burpees, situps, pushups, etc). Fold and place in a cup. Then write the numbers 10-20 on separate slips of paper, and place in another cup. Pick a silly word that if any family member says during the week, they are required to pick one slip of paper from each cup and do the exercise (ex: 10 jumping jacks, 15 squats). Whoever does the most exercises that week gets a prize. You may even want to let them come up with the next week's exercise motivation.

Taste Test – Grab a muffin tin, a blindfold, and several snacks (including a few healthy choices your child has never or rarely tried), and a score sheet. Place a portion of each snack in one section of the muffin tin. Have your middle schooler put on the blindfold and try each sample. On the score sheet, they have to describe how each snack tasted, and score them in order of most-to-least tasty. You can play along too and add some things you've never tried.

Family Adventure – As a family, write a dream list of adventurous or unique physical activities you want to do together: Hike to a scenic spot and have a picnic, go skydiving or take a dancing class, go rollerskating or to the golf driving range. Be on the look out for coupons and plan a half day once a month where you will commit to checking off one of those activities off your list.

Photo Flashback – Pull out photos of you as a middle schooler. Describe how awkward you may have felt or how differently you dressed. Talk about the things that seemed like a big deal then that aren't now that you're an adult. For fun, Google yearbook photos of famous people or look at photos from middle or high school of family members.

This guide is based on research from The Phase Project, a collaborative, ongoing effort, assembling classic and innovative research with practical application. To discover more ways to help your middle schooler develop healthy habits, check out <http://PhaseGuides.com>.



Middle School

HEALTH

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

Health. We don't have to tell you that the Middle School phase is wrought with dramatic change. Changing friends. Changing schools. Changing hormone levels. And, yes, changing bodies. During these (sometimes-awkward) transitional years, it's more important than ever to help your middle schooler learn how to become responsible for their health. In the Middle School phase, your role is to . . .

Develop
POSITIVE ROUTINES



So your child will . . .
**VALUE THEIR CHANGING BODY
AND MAINTAIN GOOD HYGIENE.**

This guide is designed to help you connect with your middle school student in the phase they are in, giving you some words to say as you navigate the critical issue of health. As the conversation progresses through the phases, always keep this end goal in mind:

HEALTHY HABITS

**Learning to strengthen my body through exercise, nutrition,
and self-advocacy**

TO SIXTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"Don't forget to wash with soap . . . and to put on deodorant after!"

"It's normal to feel weird or awkward at this age—everyone feels that way."
(Normalize puberty.)

"What would you like for dinner this week?" (Let them help plan dinner and eat together whenever possible.)

"Let's go on a run together a couple of times a week."

"When was the last time you drank some water?"
(Middle schoolers sometimes forget to hydrate.)

TO SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADERS, SAY THINGS LIKE:

"What do you know about anorexia, cutting, or protein supplements?" (Talk about body image.)

"I know you tried out for soccer but there might be other sports you are interested in. Do you have any others you'd like to try?" (Help put failure into perspective.)

"What are you learning in health class?"

"How can I help you feel less stressed?" (Help them regulate their own emotional health.)

"What do your friends say about alcohol? (Talk about drugs and alcohol.)

"It's time to turn it off and go to bed."
(Teens still need 9-11 hours of sleep.)

"These are my health goals for this year. What are some of yours? Are there any we can work on together?"

JUST REMEMBER

Every phase is a timeframe in a kid's life when you can leverage distinctive opportunities to influence their future. Middle school is the coming-of-age phase. You can provide stability in your child's ever-changing landscape by listening more than you talk, creating safe opportunities for them to experiment, and helping them create healthy community. This is the perfect time for you to reinforce the idea that you're a safe person to talk to and that you respect and affirm their personal journey.