

THE PARENTING EDUCATION PROGRAM

MIDDLE SCHOOL AGES 6 - 12

Developmentally the childhood years from 6 through 12 involve the refinement and mastery of many skills children already possess. Skills that were learned in younger years are built upon and expanded. Their physical strength and agility increases. This makes it possible for children to become more accomplished with physical activities such as sports, athletics, and dance. Their mental or cognitive abilities mature and they become capable of concrete operational thought. With these new cognitive abilities, they can begin to understand that the physical world is logical, has order, and physical events are predictable. They also begin to get in touch with their artistic abilities. As their mental and physical abilities increase, their sense of independence increases and they become more involved in the social community.

At this age children learn valuable social skills through their friendships, school setting, and athletics and other group activities and team play. With team play, children learn to cooperate with others, make judgements, plan strategies, follow rules, and assess the strength and weakness of other players. Children learn to recognize and value the goals of their team and to withhold their own personal goals for the sake of the team. For example, children learn that their team goal is to win by scoring points and that they must cooperate with other team members. They learn that although they would like to catch every ball or bat every time that those personal goals must be suppressed so that they can participate as a team player. They also learn another valuable social skill called good sportsmanship. The qualities of being a team player are important attributes for children to learn since team play is an important part of life long activities. Most adult work situations require some degree of team play and sportsmanship.

Parents need to model these behaviors for their children. Although teachers, and coaches usually actively teach these skills to children, parents have a very strong influence on how their children adapt to team play. It is important for parents to recognize that team goals are different from individual goals. When participating in team play, parents need to be able to suppress their own personal goals for their children and respect the goals of the team. Many parents become critical of teachers and coaches when their child is not given special status. This does not help the child in learning to become a team player. Parents who do not model good sportsmanship by accepting losses and disappointments gracefully, pass their behaviors and attitudes on to their children.

Parents also need to recognize that these are learning opportunities for their children and others. Patience, cooperation, fair play, and acceptance of others are more important skills to learn than being first, winning, or being the center of attention. Parents can also strongly influence the attitudes of their children regarding winning, losing, competing, and having fun. Children who learn that they can have fun even when they lose are more prepared to handle the wins and losses of daily adult life. They are capable of enjoying and learning from both their successes and failures.

This also prepares a child to have a sense of endurance, and the ability to follow through with things they begin. When children are encouraged to finish things they begin, they have the opportunity to learn, that with continued effort most things become easier. Learning is a process. It does not happen instantly. Mistakes are part of the process of learning. It is important for parents and children to understand that a mistake is not a failure. A mistake is something that goes wrong and needs to be fixed. A wise saying states YOU NEVER FAIL UNTIL YOU STOP TRYING. Children need to be encouraged and to learn not to give up on tasks, projects, or themselves. Most often the results of our efforts and the evidence of what we have learned does not appear immediately. Children are often amazed and pleasantly surprised by their own results when they stick with a difficult or

seemingly unsuccessful task. Children experience a greater sense of accomplishment when they put more effort into the task.

Another aspect of learning to follow through is also learning to make good choices. If our attitude is one that suggests that if we start a project, we will stay with it until it is done, we learn to be more selective about the projects we start. We learn to consider how much time, effort, and energy we have and are willing to spend on a project. We learn to value our time, effort, and energy and make choices that are more likely to be rewarding for us and worth the cost. When they think about these things, children also learn to look ahead at what the realistic results might be for them. They are learning to analyze, plan and set goals for themselves.

Setting goals is an integral part of learning to live with purpose, meaning, and order and with the expectations of success and accomplishment. Goals represent personal and individual expressions of who we are now and who we hope to be in the future. Developing goals and working towards accomplishing them provides a framework for us to learn and grow. Children are required to accept goals which are set for them by their parents, teachers, and coaches. These assigned goals provide structure for children to acquire the knowledge and skills they need, to be independent and competent adults. Within this structure, children need the freedom to develop their own personal interests and style. This is reflective of the values in the democratic style of parenting discussed earlier.

In the school setting, children are required to learn to read, write and do mathematics. They are also allowed and encouraged to develop their own style and interests. When they choose their own books and stories to read, decide what topic to write about, select the colors they want to use, or pick their lunch, they are expressing their own interests. At home, parents can encourage this same process within the structure of the home environment.

In the home environment, this can be done through the use of choices, and tasks or chores. Tasks at home teach children how to accomplish the necessary daily activities of life. Tasks also teach

them a sense of responsibility, cooperation, belongingness, order and consequence. With responsibility, children learn to judge what is expected of them and how to make decisions within themselves.

Cooperation teaches them how to be agreeable and get along with others. Belongingness teaches them that they have their own place within a group. Order is an important aspect of knowing how to arrange things so that things make sense. Consequence has to do with the results of our actions. Having choice allows children to express themselves in an acceptable manner. It also teaches them that their interests and desires are important and how to make choices for themselves.

Children do not learn how to be responsible overnight. This is a gradual learning process that also involves making mistakes, fixing them and trying again. Since it is a gradual process, it is wise to begin early in the child's life. They need to be slowly exposed to responsibilities within their capabilities and guided along the way. An ideal time to begin this process is in early childhood, even as toddlers. Toddlers can begin by learning to pick up their toys and their clothes. They also learn by being included and encouraged when they attempt to help with other household tasks. It is important that these attempts be met with encouragement and patience rather than discouragement. A young child wanting to help wash dishes, may not do such a good job, however their willingness to help needs to be appreciated. Telling them that they are helpful and letting them know you like it when they help are great ways to encourage cooperation. They need to be praised for what they are doing. While they are very young or just beginning a new type of task, it might be advisable to offer help and withhold criticism. Telling a child how impressed you are that they know how to get the dish really wet, or that they know how to use a dishcloth are good examples. If the dishes are not clean enough, perhaps rewashing them after the child has left and complimenting them for their efforts might be helpful. It allows the child to feel successful and appreciated rather than incompetent.

For there to be progress, children need to be gently and kindly shown how to do things properly. They need to watch each step and hear an explanation of why and what is done in each step. It is unrealistic to expect a child to be told and shown one time, and then for them to grasp how to do it.

Parents need to be very patient and realize that this process may need to be repeated several times. The child will need to practice a lot before they master a task. They also need parents to set a good example by doing a good job themselves.

As children grow older and more accomplished, their tasks should also become somewhat more complicated or challenging. Children need to be challenged in order to learn. They also need to be challenged in order to experience a sense of accomplishment. Challenges need to be moderated to fit the abilities and personality of the child. This does not mean that children will always like to be challenged. Just because a child complains that something is too hard or they do not understand it does not mean it is too challenging for them. They may need assistance, encouragement, practice, or even a break away from the task for awhile. Sometimes children just need to be required to stick with it. Parents need to get to know their children well and use their own judgement in these situations.

The ability and freedom to have some choices enhances a child's sense of individuality and worth. Parents can foster this growth by allowing and encouraging children to make their own choices whenever possible. Toddlers and young children can be given simple choices to make. When a toddler is being uncooperative and insisting on having things their way, they can often be won over by simply giving them some choice to make. For example if they are insistent on wearing shorts on a cold day, they might be offered to pick from two pairs of pants to wear instead. If they are extremely resistant, it might be wise to change the subject and return to a decision about the clothes a little later. They might at that time be given a choice of toys to take along with them, or snacks and then return to the choice about

clothing. This diverts the child away from the disagreement, allowing them time to cool down without being defeated. It also allows the child to have some power and to get their way to an acceptable degree. Parents remain in charge of the situation when they do not get caught in a battle of wills with their children. When parents set up a situation that avoids a battle and allows their child to still feel successful they remain in charge.

Parents need to set the limits with these choices and plan how to offer the choices to their child. It is not advisable to suggest that they go to the pantry and select something to eat without setting up some guidelines about what is acceptable in advance. This prevents another conflict from occurring when the child selects marshmallows for breakfast by first offering the child a choice between acceptable items.

As children get older, they are capable of making more complicated choices and can be given opportunities to do so within limits. Older children can be offered the opportunity to make many of their own choices without creating difficulty for their parents. For example, they can decide how their room is arranged, select new clothing, and pick their own hair style, all within limits and budget restraints set by their parents. In allowing children to select new clothing, parents might establish some limits by telling the child how much money parents are willing to spend at that time. They might also explain other limitations such as; the clothes must be warm enough for winter and within school guidelines.

In setting up situations where children can express their individual preferences within guidelines, parents prepare children to function independently and competently as adults. Throughout our adult lives we have the opportunity to make choices and yet we still are restricted in our choices. The laws of our communities, policies of work places, and rules of our families all set guidelines for acceptable behavior. A valuable skill in running our lives is to be able to exercise our right to make choices and stay within the limits

that govern us. Practice in making choices reinforces the importance of and need to respect limits. It also helps children learn how to make good choices for themselves. For one child, it may be more important to have a certain style of clothes even if that means that they can only have only one or two items. Another child may want more variety and select less expensive items in order to have more items. These are important discoveries for children to make about their own preferences. They learn about themselves and about the consequences of their choices and behaviors from these experiences.

Children learn to modify their choices through experiencing the results of their choices. The child who selects several, more expensive items of clothing, might get tired of wearing the same things repeatedly and make different choices next time. The child who selected many less expensive items might regret not having picked a particular item because of its price when they really liked it. When a child is left to experience the joys and regrets of their choices, they learn the value of their choices and to make choices wisely. Parents can help children with making choices by offering advice based on their experience and their knowledge.

Parents need to offer their advice to their children, rather than force their own preferences on their children. Parents can do this by telling their children about their own experience with a similar situation without telling the child what choice to make. A parent might tell their child about choices they made and how that worked out for them, or what they learned from their choices. For example, a parent might tell about their own decision to buy a green shirt because most of their friends were buying green shirts. They could explain that they regretted their choice because they really hated green and only wore the shirt twice. This is different from telling the child what to pick or not pick.

Parents need to keep in mind that their children are different people from themselves and have a right to have their own preferences. Parents can help their children learn about choices by allowing

children to make choices, respecting their children's preferences, setting guidelines for choices and offering children the benefit of their advice.

STUDY QUESTIONS - STUDY GUIDE FIVE
MIDDLE SCHOOL AGES 6 - 12

1. With the increased mental and physical abilities and independence of middle school age children, they become more involved in:
 - a) themselves
 - b) their families
 - c) playing
 - d) the social community

2. With team play, children learn to recognize and value the goal of their team and _____.
 - a) to withhold their own personal goals for the sake of the team
 - b) learn that winning is most important of all
 - c) that their own goals are more important than the team
 - d) how to be the star of the team at all times

3. Another important social skill children learn from team play is:
 - a) being the most important team member
 - b) only the best players count on a team
 - c) sportsmanship
 - d) the only thing important in competition is winning

4. Most adult work situations require some degree of:
 - a) competition and scoring points
 - b) team play and sportsmanship
 - c) team play and winning
 - d) sportsmanship and logic

5. Parents who do not model good sportsmanship by accepting losses and disappointments gracefully, _____.
 - a) teach their children how important winning is
 - b) use reverse psychology in teaching their children
 - c) pass their behaviors and attitudes on to their children
 - d) believe their own goals are more important than the teams goals

6. Children who learn that they can have fun even when they lose are:
 - a) losers at heart
 - b) never good at competition
 - c) don't understand about the importance of team play
 - d) are capable of enjoying and learning from both their successes and failures

7. When children are encouraged to finish things they begin, they:
 - a) have the opportunity to learn that with continued effort, most things become easier.
 - b) success is always long and hard
 - c) learn not to begin projects in the first place

- d) how to be successful in competition
8. _____ are a part of the process of learning.
- a) failures
 - b) mistakes
 - c) skills
 - d) team players
9. A mistake is _____?
- a) a failure
 - b) a good sign of self-worth
 - c) indication that someone is not trying hard enough
 - d) something that goes wrong and needs to be fixed
10. Children experience a greater sense of accomplishment:
- a) when they put more effort into the task
 - b) when they are given lots of help with a task
 - c) when they are not challenged with a task
 - d) only when they succeed with a task
11. When we consider the time, effort, and _____ required for a project we are more likely to make a good choice.
- a) money
 - b) encouragement
 - c) energy
 - d) accomplishment
12. Setting goals is an integral part of learning to live with purpose, meaning, and order and _____.
- a) with good and realistic choices for ourselves
 - b) not be disappointed with ourselves
 - c) insuring a successful life
 - d) with the expectations of success and accomplishment
13. Developing goals and working towards accomplishing them:
- a) is too difficult for most children
 - b) provides a framework for us to learn and grow
 - c) are the jobs of teacher, parents, and coaches
 - d) may result in children who feel frustrated
14. It is important for children to develop their own personal interests and style within a structure.
- a) true
 - b) false
15. _____ teach children how to accomplish the necessary daily activities of life.
- a) choices
 - b) goals
 - c) tasks at home

d) school activities

16. When children develop a sense of responsibility, they learn what is expected of them and:
- a) not to make mistakes
 - b) how to make decisions within themselves
 - c) how to be agreeable with others
 - d) how to accomplish success
17. _____ teaches children that they have their own place within a group.
- a) cooperation
 - b) responsibility
 - c) belongingness
 - d) consequence
18. Learning responsibility is a gradual process that involves:
- a) making mistakes, fixing them and trying again
 - b) learning not to make mistakes
 - c) learning that mistakes are not failures
 - d) accepting that nothing is accomplished without work
19. The process of showing children how to do things requires patience and:
- a) may not be successful in teaching children
 - b) may need to be repeated several times
 - c) should only be done once
 - d) should be done without explaining why things are done
20. Children need to be _____ in order to learn.
- a) criticized
 - b) controlled
 - c) accomplished
 - d) challenged
21. Children also need to be _____ in order to experience a sense of accomplishment.
- a) challenged
 - b) criticized
 - c) controlled
 - d) assisted
22. The freedom and opportunity to have choices:
- a) should not be given to children until age 13
 - b) encourages a child to be rebellious
 - c) enhances a child's sense of individuality and worth
 - d) puts too much responsibility on a child
23. When a toddler is being uncooperative and insisting on having their way, they can often be won over by:
- a) being spanked
 - b) being put on restriction
 - c) reasoned with
 - d) giving them some choice to make

24. Parents remain in charge of the situation when:
- a) they force a child to behave
 - b) they do not get caught in a battle of wills with their children
 - c) they stay in control of their children
 - d) children seem to be agreeable
25. As children get older, they are capable of making more complicated choices and:
- a) should be given the opportunity to do so within limits
 - b) should be given the opportunity to do so without limits
 - c) know themselves what choices they can make
 - d) those choices should be made only with their parents close assistance
26. Which is an appropriate guideline or limit parents might use in allowing an older child to choose clothing?
- a) to pick colors that parents like on the child
 - b) clothing must be within school guidelines
 - c) clothing must not be the latest fad
 - d) clothing should be like the other kids wear
27. Throughout our adult lives, we have the opportunity to make choices and:
- a) live in total freedom
 - b) and always select our own individual preferences
 - c) yet we still are restricted in our choices
 - d) that is an advantage children don't have
28. A valuable skill in running our lives is to be able to exercise our right to make choices and:
- a) stay within the limits that govern us
 - b) avoid the consequences of our choices
 - c) set our own guidelines for acceptable behavior
 - d) not make any mistakes
29. When a child is left to experience the joys and regrets of their own choices, they learn:
- a) to always rely on others to help them with choices
 - b) to be afraid of making choices and mistakes
 - c) the value of their choices and to make wise choices
 - d) to always stay within the limits on their choices
30. Parents need to offer their advice to their children:
- a) and expect them to take it
 - b) rather than force their own preference on their children
 - c) and tell them what the correct choice is
 - d) parents should not offer advice to their children