

# Yikes! My Middle School Child Is Becoming a Teenager!

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It's surprising how fast children grow, isn't it? Just yesterday, they were a chubby, little baby and today, they are a tall, lanky bean pole! Well, just because kids may be physically grown up, they may still be growing in their mental, emotional, and social capacity. Having taught middle schoolers for a number of years, here are some insights on how to keep the relationship with your soon-to-be teenager smooth during these growing-up years.

## Independence and Responsibility

Underneath their cool face or tough façade, teenagers are beginning to come to terms with two really intimidating facts of life – Independence and

Responsibility. Teenagers desperately want their independence and they may start exerting some power in this area. They may refuse or decline your ideas so that they can pursue their own ideals. For better or worse, they may even adopt some of their friends' ideas and habits. They are growing into their own person and it is wise to give them some freedom in this area.

## Understanding Their Fears

As soon as kids start exploring their independence, however, they are soon confronted with the fact that they will have to accept more responsibility. Independence and responsibility go hand-in-hand! For some kids, they understand this and take it in stride. They work hard to prove they are responsible and enjoy many of the freedoms that come with increased independence. For other kids, they absolutely dread taking on more responsibility. They may see it as requiring more effort than they are willing to give and may intentionally sabotage their prospects of gaining more independence. And for others, they may not have the skill or foresight to plan ahead so they give up even before they have a chance to succeed.

## Working Together

These teenage years serve as a time for you to gradually transfer more independence to your child as they mature into responsible adults. As parents, the best approach is to keep the lines of communication open with your child. If you see them being responsible and making a

step towards being more independent, acknowledge your child's efforts and accomplishments. Your words of affirmation will go a long way! For children who reject responsibility, gently show them that there are so many perks of independence as they grow into adulthood (choosing your own meals, going out with your friends, living in your own home, etc.). And for the child who has the right intention but lacks direction, create a plan together. Have your child list all their skills and past accomplishments, then have them write some personal or academic and professional goals. Together, form a plan with some action items to help guide them in the right course. Take it one step at a time!

Wishing you the best,

Jaime

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