

TO THE PARENTS OF A NEW MIDDLE SCHOOLER

IT'S A BIG YEAR. Your kids leave the sunshine discussions of elementary school carpet circles and enter the challenging halls of middle school. In an instant they go from snack time and recess to combination lockers and social hierarchy. It's a lot, and it takes a massive amount of energy to grow up in a day, **SO GIVE THEM SOME GRACE** as they process it all.

Be open and willing to **TALK ABOUT THE NEW THINGS** they see and hear. Don't make them feel like they have to protect you from it. **THEY NEED A SAFE PLACE** and they want it to be you.

So put your phone down. Look them in the eye. **LISTEN. GIVE THEM HUGS** even when they act like they don't need them. You will need to stay involved, but **IT'S THEIR TURN TO TAKE THE REINS.**

You will be tempted to Mama-Bear at every turn. You will want to fight their battles, choose their friends, and micromanage every due date, **BUT THEY NEED YOU DIFFERENTLY.**

They need you to **REMIND THEM THEY ARE CAPABLE** of figuring things out. They need you to **TEACH AND MODEL** without inserting. They need you to follow up and hold them accountable. **THEY NEED YOU TO LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY.**

When drama is high, they will look to you **FOR STEADINESS.** When they decide everyone is prettier, smarter, and cooler than they are, you must remind them of **ALL THEIR GOODNESS.**

When people are unkind, they will need you to **ENCOURAGE THEM TO BE DIFFERENT.** When life is hard, they will need your **UNDERSTANDING** more than your advice.

Every middle schooler will feel insecure at some point. This will make them want to quit, hide, and lay low. **BUT THIS IS WHEN THEY NEED YOU MOST.** Give them a minute, but then help them **GET CREATIVE** to find things they love, a new purpose, ways to get involved, **PEOPLE TO CONNECT WITH.**

They will need you to require things of them and hold onto realistic expectations so it feels like **SOMEONE BELIEVES IN THEM.** They will need boundaries to push against so they know someone cares. This might make them mad in the moment, but grateful in the long run. They need someone to hold them accountable—desperately.

Even when you know you are doing the right thing, you will still question yourself all the time. You will look left and think you are way too strict and look right and think you allow too much.

THERE IS NO PERFECT WAY TO PARENT, so do what you think is best, and when you **KNOW BETTER, DO BETTER.** And don't forget to enjoy these years. Middle schoolers are so much fun! You can share clothes, shoes, memes, and inside jokes. You can watch the same shows, enjoy the same hobbies, and learn all the new slang you never thought you would understand.

Loosen up a bit. **LAUGH WITH THEM AND AT YOURSELF TOO.** This will help them lighten up and realize it's ok to not be perfect. **CELEBRATE THE SMALL WINS.** Get to know their friends. Be the one who can't wait to hear the details. There will be ups and downs but **THEY CAN HANDLE IT AND SO CAN YOU!**

You don't have to coast through middle school to be an incredible person. In fact, much of the **GRIT AND RESILIENCE** learned there **CREATES SOMEONE** really fantastic in the future. They are lucky to have you by their side.

SO HOLD ON TIGHT AND LOVE THEM HARD. You are about to start a wild, wonderful ride.

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