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# Middle Schoolers and Us

— How we can best support our  
students (and ourselves) —

Kyle Miller, LCPC, CCTP

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# Questions

We keep talking about when “things return to normal”, but what are ways we can safely convey that this world now is the new normal, to quell expectations of “getting back to normal” ?

The need for some enforcement of punishment for bad behavior.

I have heard from my student that fights are a regular occurrence. What is the school doing to prevent them? Why are they so frequent? How can this be addressed to stop the disruption to the school environment?

How do you help your child not get so angry when asked to do something or if they do not succeed the first time at a task?

How do you overcome covid anxiety and can it be for a specific place due to a traumatic experience that's happened after an encounter?

What are we doing to teach our children about being good citizens (both in school and the community) and how are we inspiring them (beyond the typical workings of a typical school day)?

How do we deal with kids general dislike of going to school, because when they get there other kids misbehavior makes school life difficult and overwhelming?

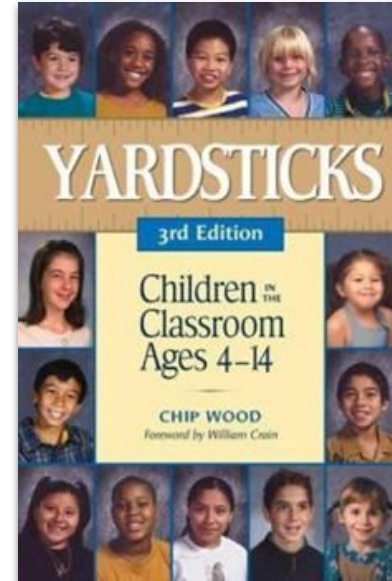
Healthy transitions -Navigating social media relationships-Holding to your values and ideals in a world that is rapidly changing.

Social media how to regulate or talk about the dangers without feeling like the bully parent.

# Yardsticks by Chip Wood (Copyright 2007)

Key Points:

- Ages 4-14
- Growth Patterns
- In the Classroom
- Curriculum



# Middle School Students - physical growth patterns

11 YO	12 YO	13 YO	14 YO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restless and very Energetic</li> <li>• Need lots of food, physical activity, and sleep</li> <li>• Experience more colds, flu, ear infections, etc.</li> <li>• Many girls experience a growth spurt and sexual maturation, some boys begin to grow rapidly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need lots of physical activity, sleep, and food (including in-school snacks)</li> <li>• Enjoy PE and sports</li> <li>• All kids have growth spurts</li> <li>• Girls show signs of puberty; most are menstruating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lots of physical energy</li> <li>• Skin problems and hygiene issues</li> <li>• Most girls have reached almost full physical development</li> <li>• Most boys are showing signs of puberty, physically awkward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very energetic, generally healthy</li> <li>• Need lots of exercise, sleep, and snacks</li> <li>• Growth spurts in boys; upper body strength</li> <li>• Most are interested in sex; some sexually active</li> </ul>



# Middle School Students - SEL growth patterns

11 YO	12 YO	13 YO	14 YO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moody, self absorbed, and sensitive</li> <li>Challenge rules, argue, test limits- may be cruel or aggressive</li> <li>Worry about who's "In" or "Out"</li> <li>Need lots of time talking with peers</li> <li>Impulsive- Talk before thinking</li> <li>Behave best away from home</li> <li>Trouble making decisions</li> <li>Need adult empathy to cope with rapid changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult personality starts to emerge</li> <li>Capable of reason, insight, and empathy; more tolerant than 11yo</li> <li>Enthusiastic and uninhibited; appear secure</li> <li>Care more about peers than adults</li> <li>Initiate own activities without adult prompting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal appearance, not neatness of environment</li> <li>Often quieter than 12yo</li> <li>Like to be alone at home</li> <li>Moody, sensitive, anger flare ups</li> <li>Hurt easily and hurt others easily</li> <li>Girls focus on close relationships; Boys travel in groups</li> <li>Girls interested in older relationships</li> <li>Spend hours on phone or screens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crave adult connection, assert identity</li> <li>Embarrassed by and critical of parents</li> <li>Adult personality cont develop</li> <li>Like packed days</li> <li>Loud and rambunctious</li> <li>"Know it all", don't respond well to lectures- mind readers</li> <li>Rites of passage can be important</li> <li>Can be pain at home, star at school</li> </ul>

# Middle School Students - SEL in the Classroom

11 YO	12 YO	13 YO	14 YO
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desire to test limits and rules</li> <li>• Like competition; prefer team sports</li> <li>• Inclusion/exclusion issues</li> <li>• “Saving face” is important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership qualities abound</li> <li>• Want to share suggestions for change in routines</li> <li>• Appreciate ceremonies and rituals (want to help plan) that mark turning points to adulthood</li> <li>• Need access to significant adults, other than parents and teachers, to process serious issues</li> <li>• Want to make money doing jobs at home or in neighborhood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not do well in cooperative groups; complain about fairness</li> <li>• Prefer solitary or single partner work on projects</li> <li>• “Why do we have to do this?”</li> <li>• Judgemental of teachers negatively/positively, like to discuss with peers</li> <li>• Problematic bus behaviors, esp boys</li> <li>• PE/hygiene can be embarrassing, silly/rude</li> <li>• Social justice minded, but mean to each other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer pressure to see school as “uncool”</li> <li>• Group activities can lead to first career interest</li> <li>• Develop sense of humor; can be funny and creative</li> <li>• Normally loud</li> </ul>



# Yardsticks: Ages 11-14 Themes

- Lots of energy
- Growth spurts
- Puberty
- More concerned about peers than adults
- Sensitive and moody
- Loud and impulsive
- Increased phone and screen usage



# Yardsticks: Ages 11-14 Needs

- Food, physical activity, sleep
- Empathy, light-heartedness
- Adults to listen and discuss important issues
- Ability to negotiate rules and requirements
- Understand the “why”
- Benefit from rites of passage
- Space to process



# What's going on in the Tween/Teen Brain?



# Understanding Trauma

Big T trauma	Little t trauma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Major events where your life or body feel threatened, universally recognized as traumatic</li><li>● Experience gets stuck in your mind and body, including emotions, thoughts, sensations</li><li>● Serious accidents</li><li>● Natural disasters</li><li>● Robbery, rape, violence</li><li>● Major surgery or life-threatening illness</li><li>● Chronic, repetitive experiences: Childhood abuse or neglect</li><li>● War, combat - witness or experience</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Overwhelming but not universally viewed as trauma</li><li>● Experience gets stuck in your mind and body, including emotions, thoughts, sensations</li><li>● Interpersonal conflicts</li><li>● Shame / ridicule / feeling left out / bullying</li><li>● Abrupt or extended relocation</li><li>● Financial insecurity</li><li>● Extended period of uncertainty / lack of safety</li></ul>
Major indicator of possible PTSD diagnosis - A situation where your life or bodily integrity are threatened	May cause trauma responses including increased distress and decreased quality of life

# The Mental Health Impact of COVID

- **changes in mood** that are not usual for your child, such as ongoing irritability, feelings of hopelessness or rage, and frequent conflicts with friends and family
- changes in behavior, such as stepping back from personal relationships
- a **loss of interest** in activities previously enjoyed
- a hard time falling or staying asleep, or starting to **sleep** all the time
- **changes in appetite**, weight or eating patterns, such as never being hungry or eating all the time
- problems with memory, thinking, or **concentration**
- **less interest in schoolwork** and drop in academic effort
- changes in **appearance**, such as lack of basic personal **hygiene**
- an increase in **risky or reckless behaviors**, such as using
- thoughts about death or **suicide**, or talking about it

Source: [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org)



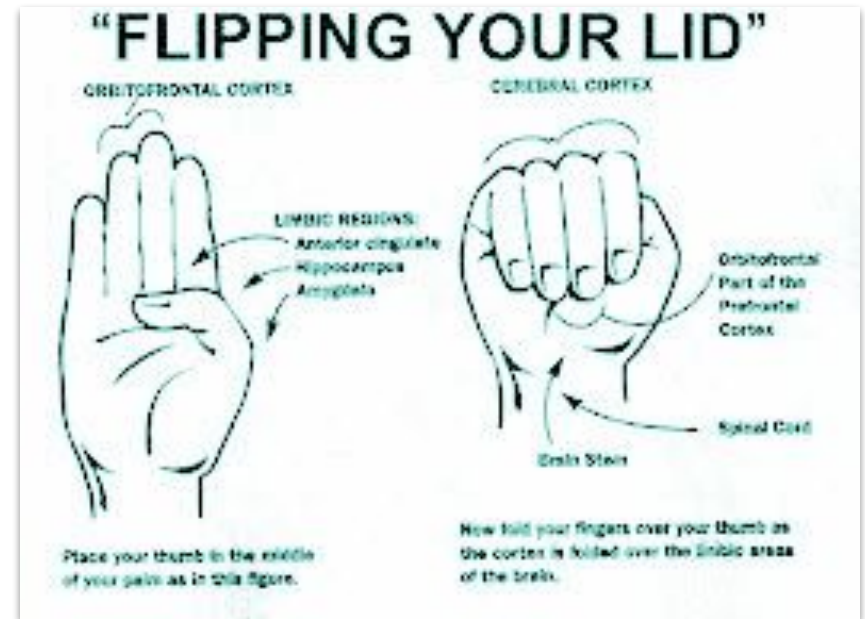
# The Impact of Trauma on Learning and Development

- Trauma can impact school performance
  - Decreased reading ability
  - Lower GPA
  - High rate of school absence
  - Increased school drop out
  - More suspensions and expulsions
  - Decreased reading ability
- Impairs cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships
- Struggle to calm body in order to learn
- Develop coping strategies that are not productive and are problematic



# Emotional Regulation

- Diaphragmatic breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Using imagery and senses
- Challenging irrational thoughts



# Parenting and Teaching Middle Schoolers (KEEP IT REAL)

- Adults first
- It's hard!
- We are struggling too!
- We have to handle our own stuff so we can best support students with their stuff
- Change is a process that involves relapses
- The system needs to change



# Parenting and Teaching Middle Schoolers

- Be explicit and teach skills up front
- Firm boundaries with validation and empathy
- Promote what you want, not what you don't
- Focus on natural consequences
- Problem solving



**In a family system,  
a parent has two main jobs:**

- 1 Set Boundaries** around any unsafe behaviors.
- 2 Show Validation and Empathy** for all feelings.

Some behaviors get a No.  
All feelings get a Yes.



@drbeckyatgoodinside



# Parenting & Teaching Middle Schoolers

- View behavior as information
- Each child/student is different and has different needs
- Engage in problem solving - involve the student
- Use natural consequences
- Move away from reward and punishment
- Create behavior contract (with them)
- Remove privileges if needed
- Pre-Teach the way you want things



# Parenting & Teaching Middle Schoolers

- Prioritize connection
- Avoid labeling (good / bad)
- Explain your expectations ahead of time
- Share reasons behind rules
- Monitor daily activities
- Give them some freedom and independence
- Teach anger management and mindfulness
- Make it clear that everyone makes mistakes, and it's important to take accountability and repair



# Solving Circle - dapted from Dr. William Glasser

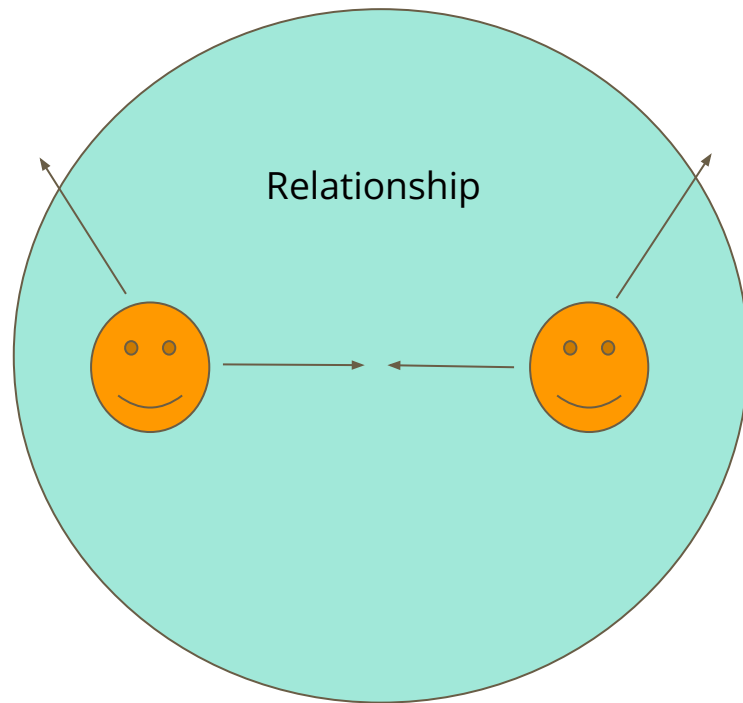
Collaborative problem solving

Bring the offender and victim(s) together (if appropriate)

Discuss the situation and the impact on each person

Display empathy and validate feelings

Facilitate a repair



# Solving Circle - Adapted from Dr. William Glasser

Collaborative problem solving

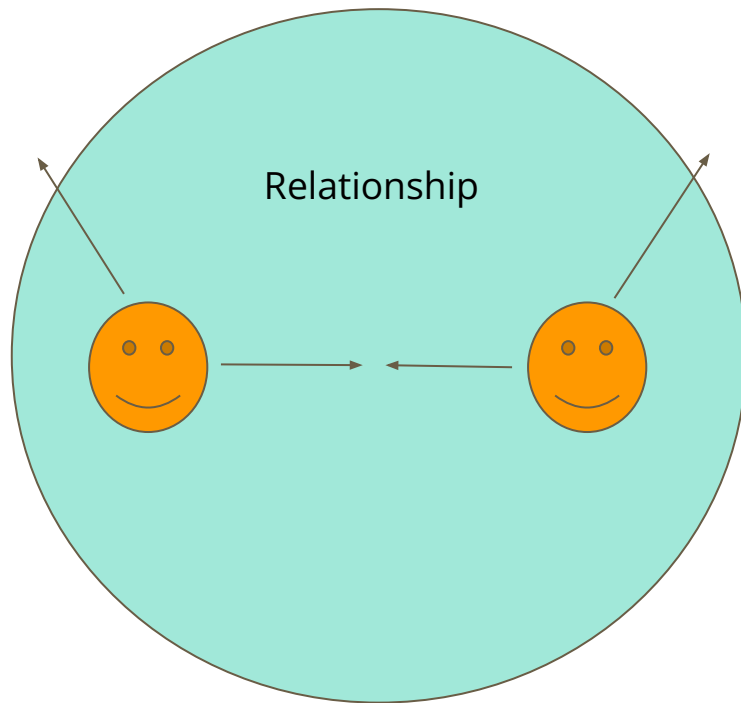
**Am I willing to work on solving the problem?**

**Whose behavior can I control?**

**How do I see the problem? How am I experiencing the problem?**

**What's the impact of my behaviors on myself and others?**

**What am I willing to do different to make a positive change?**



# Q & A - Closure

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