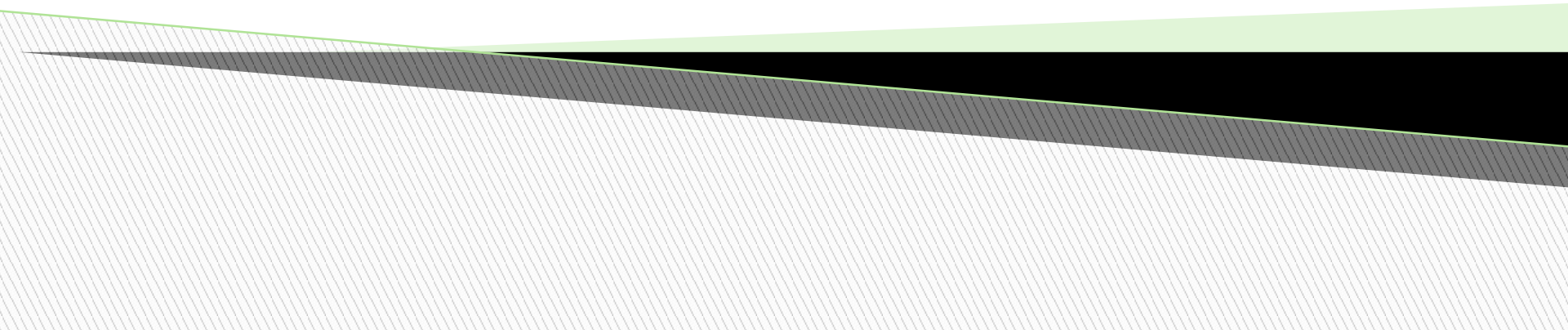


# **The Typical Middle School Student**

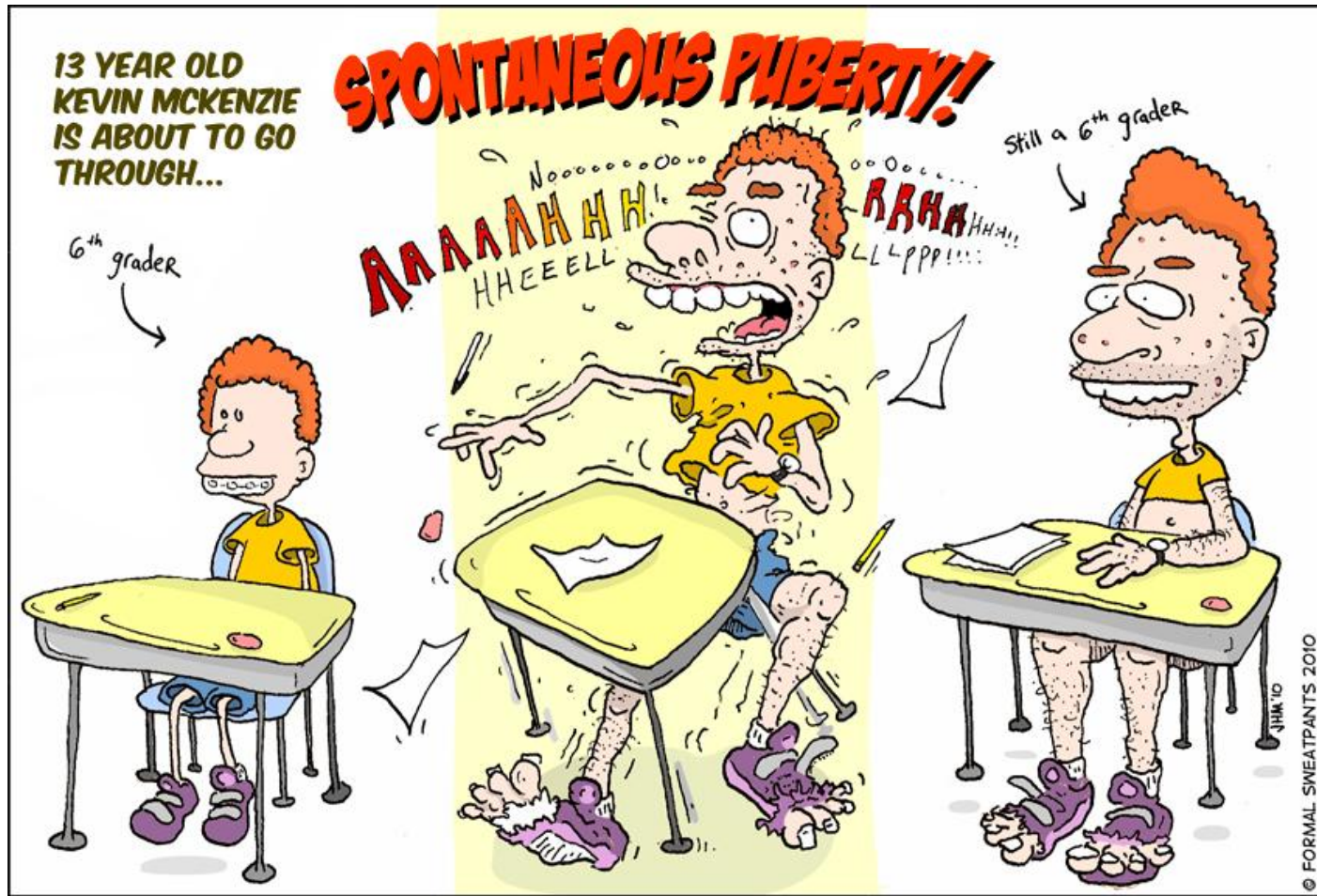
Heather L. Clark, CAGS, M.S. Ed.  
School Psychologist



# Who is a Middle School Student?

- ? Middle school students are generally in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.
  - Here, middle school enrollment is for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students.
- ? Generally, these students are between 12 – 15 years of age.

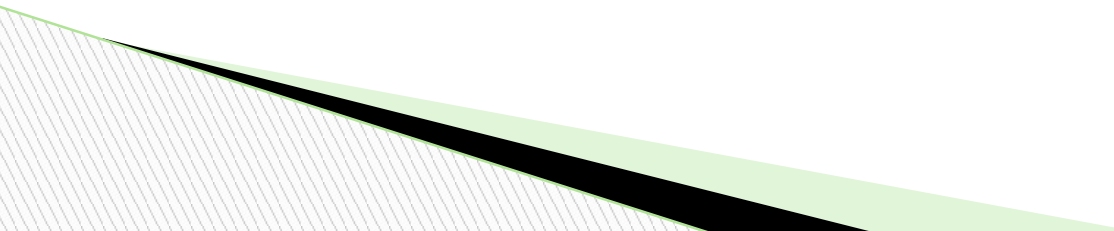
# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student



# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students are generally starting puberty.
  - This is marked by rapid skeletal and sexual maturation.
  - The biggest “growth spurt” for boys happens at about 13 years of age for boys, and at 11 years of age for girls.
  - In a study by Nottelmann et al (1987) boys with higher testosterone and who started puberty early were more likely to be found to be more socially competent and accepted by peers. Early puberty in boys is related to popularity (steady results dating from the 1960’s to today.)

# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student

- However, girls who start puberty early are more likely to have increased aggression, most likely caused by high estrogen levels.
  - Girls who begin puberty earlier than their peers are more likely to have some difficulty in school and with body image (Brooks, Gunn & Paikoff, 1993; Sarigiani & Peterson, 2000.)
  - We need to be empathetic as adults and remember that girls are very sensitive when it comes to their physical development.
- 

# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students become preoccupied with their body image
  - During this time, students are more likely to be dissatisfied with their body than another time in their life.
  - As boys move through puberty, they become more satisfied with their body.
  - Girls, however, continue to struggle with their body image (Gross, 1994.)

# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students are moving from “asexual childhood” into “sexual adulthood” (Feldman, 1999.)
- Students are beginning to incorporate sexuality into their everyday lives and their identity.

# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student

- According to the Allan Guttmacher Institute:
  - After the age of 15, the likelihood of teenagers engaging in sexual activity increases; but most middle school students are NOT sexually active.



# The Physical Development of a Middle School Student

? Somethings to consider:

- How does your child's development affect their behavior in school. How does this affect how you may relate to your child?

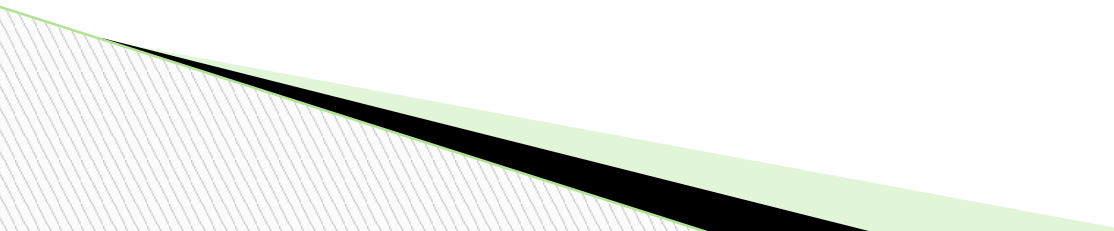
# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student



# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- ? According to Vygotsky, all students learn through social interactions with skilled individuals.
  - Students learn through a “I do,” “we do,” “you do” development – this is known as working in the child’s zone of proximal development and scaffolding lessons for the students.

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- ? What is happening in terms of thinking?
    - Even today, Piaget's theory of cognitive development is still relevant to understanding how children think and respond.
    - Students at the middle school level are in the early stages of developing what is known as operational thoughts.
    - They are building upon and changing from being concrete thinkers to understanding and relating to higher-level concepts.
    - Operational thoughts are the highest level of thinking. It is marked by being able to process abstract information and think about thinking, otherwise known as metacognition.
- 

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Students in middle school are beginning to think about why they believe what they believe, think what they think, and feel what they feel.
  - This is why middle school students begin to “rebel.” They are beginning to question themselves, their beliefs, their culture, and pretty much everything they are told.

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- These thought processes begin to allow the student to compare and contrast themselves to others. They want to be accepted by peers. They want to be a part of a social circle.
- This is why middle school students, or at least sub-groups of students, may dress alike, talk alike, and listen to the exact same music as their peers.

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

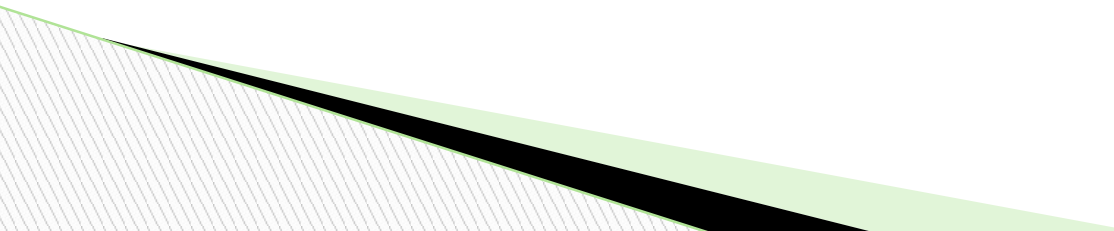
- Middle school students are beginning to form hypothetical – deductive reasoning.
  - This is the concept that students are beginning to form and develop hypotheses about the ways in order to best solve a problem or a frustrating situation.
  - Since this skill is so new, the middle school student does not have the capacity to always solve problems effectively. They have not had the practice at effectively solving complex social situations.
  - In order to grow and be successful problem solvers, they need practice, they need to make mistakes, and they need guidance.

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students also display what is referred to as adolescent egocentrism. This is the height of self-consciousness. They really do believe everyone is staring at them.



# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Adolescent egocentrism is classified with having an imaginary audience. Middle school students truly believe that everyone else is as interested in them as they are in themselves. Everyone, they really believe, is looking at them and judging them.
  - Adolescent egocentrism is also marked by having personal fables. These are the beliefs that they are completely unique and individual. Middle school students really believe that they are the only ones to have ever felt what they felt.
  - This is why the phrase of “you just don’t understand me” is so popular among middle school students when talking to adults. They truly think that they are the first person to have whatever thought or feeling they are experiencing.
- 

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Not all students develop and master these thought processes. According to several studies, only 1/3 of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students can be considered to have all of the markings of operational thought.

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Brain development
  - People's brains are developing until adolescence is over.
    - The average age that the brain is fully grown is approximately 22 years of age.
    - This means that the middle school student's brain is not fully and completely developed yet (Delis, 2002.)

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students can remember about 5 to 7 pieces of information at a time, as compared to an adult who can remember 7 – 9 pieces of information at a time.
  - “The more engaged and ‘rich’ the new information, the more likely it is that the new information will be retained.
  - The short-term memory maintains information until it moves into another area of the brain (long-term memory) or until more, new information is introduced. At this point the short-term memory ignores the new information in favor of the previous information, or discards the previous information in order to deal with the new” (Rosenfeld, 2002.)

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students, according to neuropsychologist Jay Giedd, have brain growth almost as rapid as a toddler. They are soaking in a lot of information all at once. They are developing skills in deductive reasoning, problem solving, and generalizing.

# The Cognitive Functions of a Middle School Student

- The last part of the brain to develop is the frontal lobe, or the part of the brain near the forehead.
  - This accounts for executive functioning. Executive functioning is our ability to attend, inhibit, reason, induce, and complete several tasks simultaneously.
  - Middle school students, then, are only learning now how to reason and take in more than one piece of information at a time. They are only now learning how to disengage from distractions, whether it be their peers or stress at home.
    - When stressed, they will show great difficulty with concentration.

# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle

## DEFINITIONS OF LOVE BY AGE

### children

(n.) -icky gross ew ew ew  
*-see cooties.*

### teenager

(n.) -perfect, amazing, beautiful, just plain awesome, the tears on your pillow, the outbursts of laughter in the middle of class, friendship set on fire, like a war between your head and heart, both your enemy and your best friend, what makes you keep going back to him, pain and happiness at the same time, you. you you you.

### adult

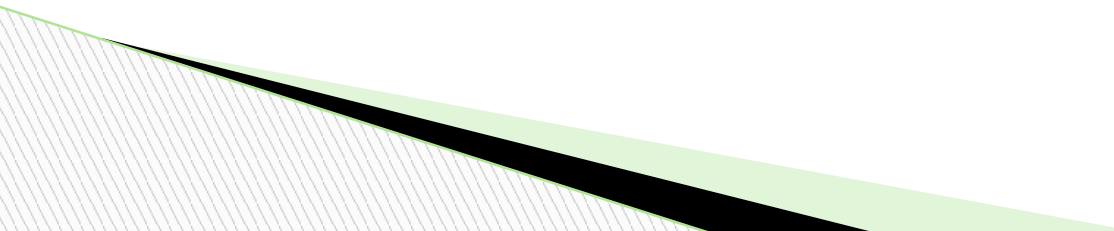
(n.) -a strong emotional and physical attraction towards another person.

# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

- During the middle school years, emotional “highs” and “lows” are more prevalent and are more intense than at any other time in life (Santrock, 2001.)
- Because their brain is still developing and so are social skills, middle school students experience a lot of emotions that they may not be able to identify or label correctly.
  - This leads to anger outbursts and sulking.



# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

- Many times, middle school students are upset and cannot pinpoint why because they do not yet have the skills needed in order to label and express why and at what situation/person they are upset. This leads to them “displacing” their emotions, or expressing their emotions towards someone who is not the actual target of the anger (Steinberg & Levine, 1997.).
  - In fact, middle school students are most likely to lash out and displace their anger on people who they believe are “stable” and will be consistently “there” for them.
  - When students lash out at you, then, it’s most likely because they are mad at something else and see you as a stable individual in their lives. You won’t leave them.
- 

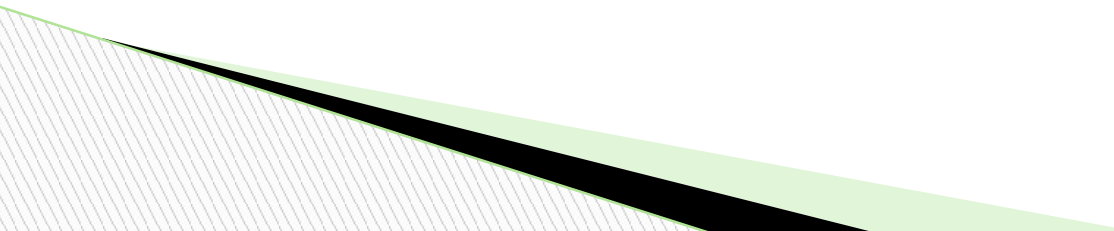
# **Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student**

- They are very likely to become preoccupied with understanding themselves, defining themselves, and labeling themselves.
  - This is why middle school students become more introspective. However, this introspection is not always done in isolation. This is partly why middle schoolers compare and contrast themselves with other students.

# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

- They are also more likely to see themselves idealistically.
  - This means that middle school students are not the best reporters for their own behavior. They see themselves as they want to be, not as they actually are.
- They are more likely to begin labeling themselves in respect to their relationships with others.
  - They will start labeling themselves in terms of the relationships they have with others (e.g. friend, daughter, boyfriend, etc.)

# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

- Middle school students do not have a stable view of themselves. They struggle with labeling who they are, due to the high emotional waves they experience. This is typically referred to as the “barometric self” (Rosenberg, 1986.)
  - It is important to note that middle school students are most likely NOT aware that they have displaced feelings and that not all thought is complete conscious.
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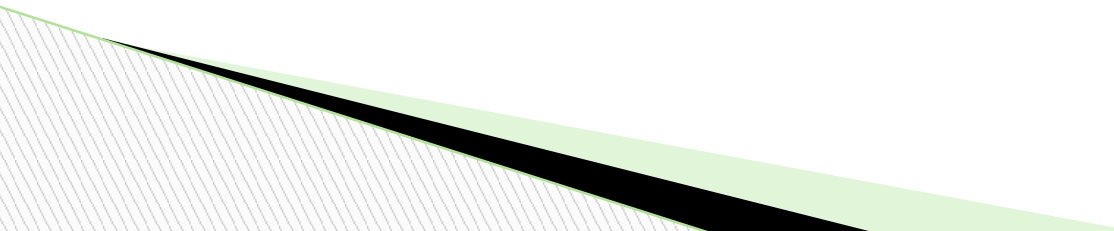
# **Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student**

- Peers are an extremely important part of all middle school students lives.
- Stable and healthy peer relationships indicate good mental health.
  - When students are reflected by peers or are bullied, they are more at risk for depression.
  - When students are more aggressive, they are more likely to drop out of school (Coie, 1999; Lad, 2009.)

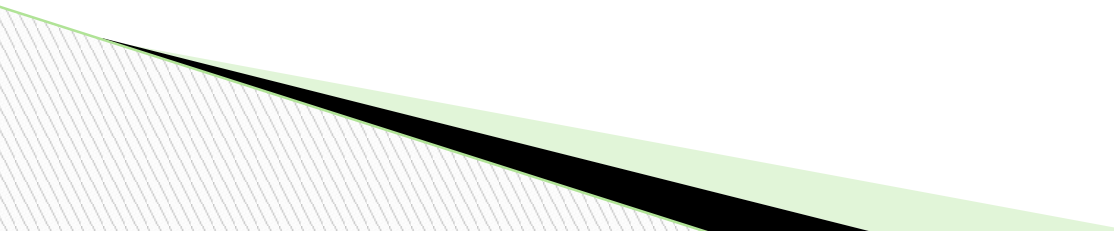
# **Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student**

- Perspective taking is an important skill in peer relationships.
  - When middle school students show good perspective taking skills, they are more able to understand the other person's point of view and empathize with them.
  - Perspective taking allows a student to gain “social knowledge” – or the ability to know how to sustain friendships over time.

# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

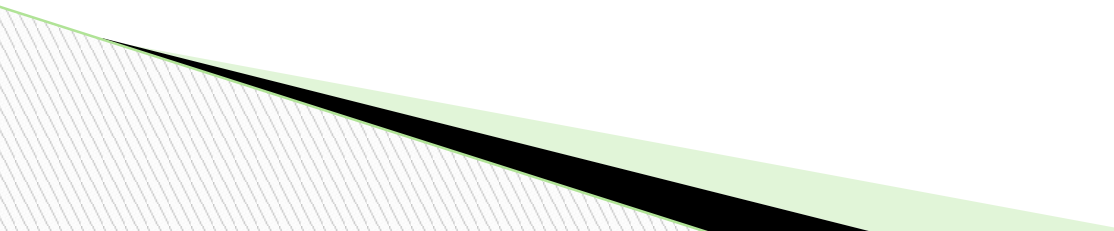
- ❑ FACT: The average adolescent spends 103 per day in meaningful , face-to-face interactions with friends and only 28 minutes with parents.
  - ❑ FACT: Our students, if they have a computer in the home, spend between 1.6 – 2.5 hours per day on social media.
- 

# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

- For all children, friendship has been found to serve 6 functions (Gottman & Parker, 1987.)
    - Companionship – Familiarity with those willing to spend time with them
    - Stimulation – Keeping up interests
    - Physical support – Assistance and physical touch
    - Ego support – Development and checking of how one defines oneself
    - Social Comparison – Information about where one stands in contrast to the group
    - Intimacy – Having warm, close relationships with others
- 



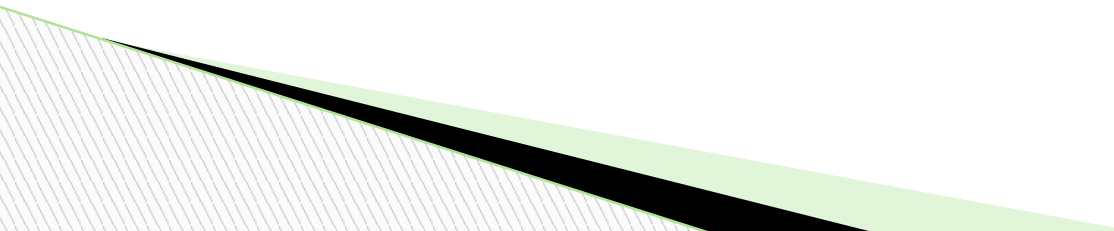
# Social and Emotional Development of a Middle School Student

- Friendships affect the middle school student's well being.
    - When friendships are formed with prosocial peers, emotional health and self-esteem tends to be high.
    - When friendships are poorly formed or are inconsistent, the emotional development is negatively affected. Moreover, when students are bullied or have no friendships, one's self-esteem is also negatively affected.
    - Thus, students should be encouraged and supported to make positive choices in regards to friends.
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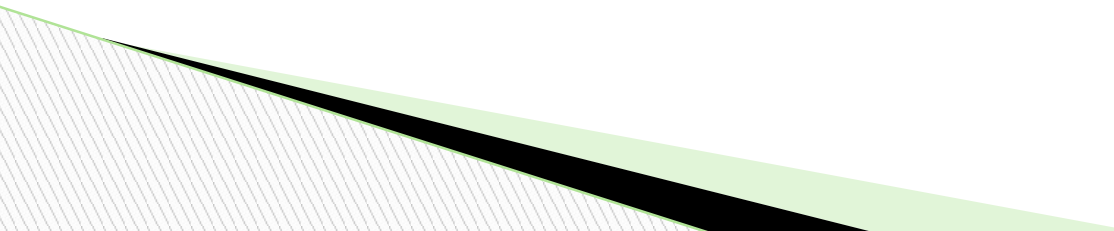
# Putting It All Together



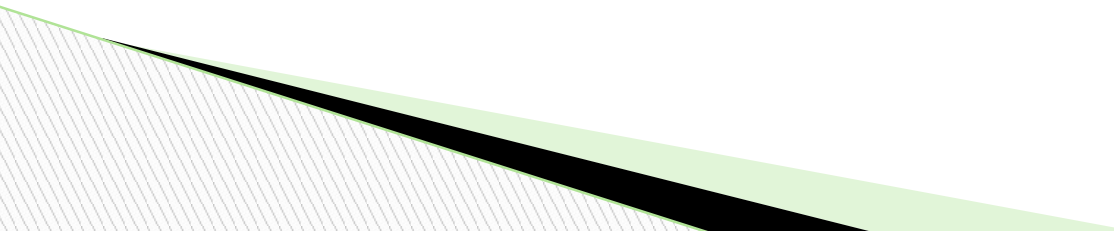
# Putting It All Together

- ? Students in middle school need a constructive environment.
    - Kids learn best in school and at home when they are active and engaged in lessons.
  - ? Students need their ideas to be encouraged and they need to perceive that you will not be judging them.
    - Ask open ended questions in order to start conversations
- 

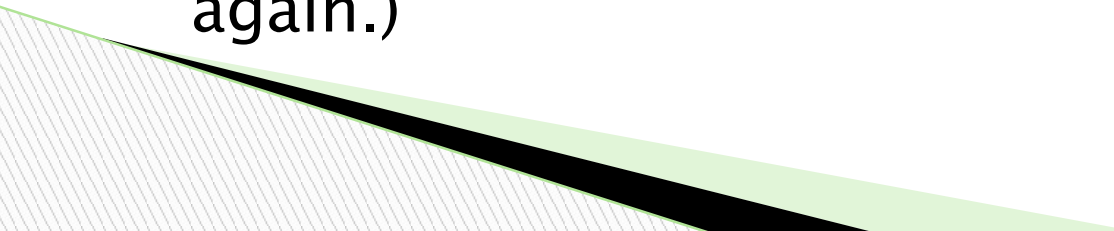
# Putting It All Together

- ? Students in middle school may need assistance in putting their ideas together. Helping to frame their ideas, rephrasing, and assisting them in making the connections will aid them in developing and formulating articulate thoughts.
    - Asking “why do you think like that” is a good start
    - Rephrasing their thought process to them while talking will also help build skills
- 

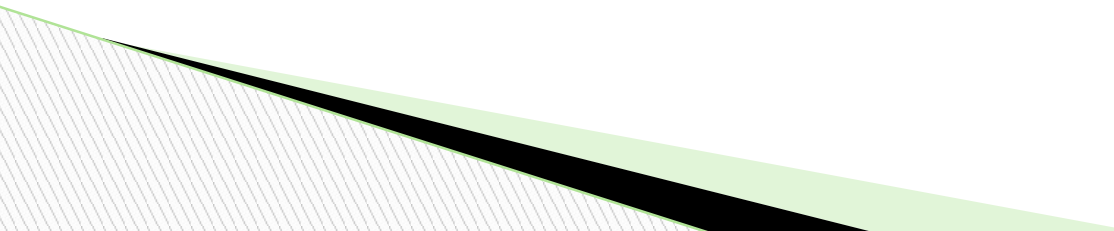
# Putting It All Together

- ? Allow your student some space and independence
  - ? Increasing responsibility in intervals will show you trust them
  - ? Middle school students need consistency in their lives.
    - o When a rule at home is broken or when a child does something well at home, consistent consequences (both positive like rewards or negative like grounding) should occur.
- 

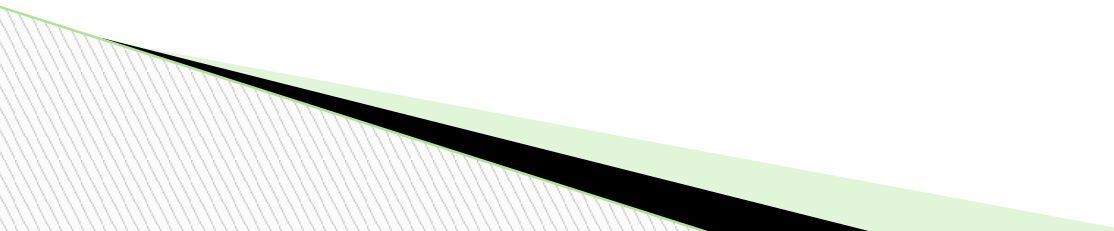
# Putting It All Together

- ? When talking and interacting, giving information in shorter bursts may help. (Middle school students struggle to remember long instructions and tasks lists.)
  - ? If your child becomes highly emotional, please remember this behavior is “normal.” If the emotional behavior is not acceptable, talk with the child when he/she is calm about what happened, what went awry, and what better choices could be made next time. (You can also clearly state a consequence that will occur if that behavior occurs again.)
- 

# Putting It All Together

- ? Middle school students need direct lessons in learning independence.
  - ? They need to be explicitly taught skills such as laundry, what to do when home alone, how to organize their homework, etc.
  - ? These lessons may need reinforced A LOT.
- 

# Putting It All Together

- ? Middle school students need to have models of positive social interactions.
  - ? It is very beneficial for children of this age to be in at least one extra curricular activity.
- 



# Putting It All Together: Social Media

This is a popular way for children to socialize. Remember, though, they need to be taught explicitly how to post and use social media correctly.

Make sure to check their social media accounts with them.

Make sure to have the usernames and passwords for all accounts.

To check on usage of apps and internet use, make sure to check the history use of devices your teenager uses.

# Putting It All Together

This is such a special and important part of a child's development. It's not easy to go through puberty and figure out how to become an adult.

The best thing caregivers can do is to continue to be the loving and consistent parent/guardian you've already been.

