

Middle Childhood

(5–10 Years)

Venturing Beyond the Family

From the ages of 5 through 10, your child begins to move from the close and familiar world of family to the larger world of school and friends. At the beginning of this period, your child will make the big jump into kindergarten. By the end, she'll be looking forward to junior high school. Her growing physical, mental, and social skills will help her develop confidence in her abilities. This new feeling of "Yes! I can do it!" will show in her school work, sports and other activities, jobs around the house, and relationships. This feeling is all-important to a healthy childhood and, later, to a healthy adolescence.

Parents and Health Professionals: Partners for a Healthy Child

Health professionals like your doctor or nurse are your partners in keeping your child healthy. Each of you brings something special to the effort. Health professionals know about child health care, growth, and development. You have the day-to-day experience that makes you an expert on your child. You are also the best person to make sure your child gets the kind of care she needs. This tip sheet will help you think about some of the most important health issues of middle childhood.



Health Professional Visits During Middle Childhood

Your health professional will want to see your child for regular checkups at these ages:

- 5 years
- 6 years
- 8 years
- 10 years

These visits are important. They give your health professional a chance to make sure your child is healthy and growing well. They are also a time for you to ask any questions or discuss concerns. At these visits, your health professional will begin to give your

child a chance to ask questions and talk directly with him. Your child will get a physical exam and hearing, vision, or other screening tests. Also, before your child enters school (sometime between the ages of 4 and 6), he should get the following immunizations:

- Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP)
- Polio (IPV)
- Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)
- Hepatitis A (in selected areas)

Social Development

Social development is how your child grows in confidence, independence, and positive feelings about himself. It's also the ways in which he acts with other people. During these years, your child begins to develop a sense of who he is, what he can do, and how he fits in. Friends become very important. He develops ideas about right and wrong and personal responsibility. Here's how you can help your child grow in positive ways:

Help Your Child Feel Good About Himself

- Show affection. Praise your child's efforts and achievements.
- Spend time together. Do things you both enjoy, like reading, being physically active, or going to museums.
- Encourage your child to talk to you about school, friends, and things that happen during the day.
- Encourage a sense of responsibility. Give him household jobs that he is able to do. For example, ask your 5-year-old to help you set the table. Ask your 10-year-old to take out the trash.
- Be clear about behavior that is okay and not okay. Don't change the rules (bedtime, chores) from day to day.
- Use discipline to teach and protect your child, not to punish him or make him feel bad about himself. For example, use time outs or take away time from the computer, Internet, video games, or TV.

Encourage Good Feelings Within the Family

- Encourage family members to show affection and respect for each other.
- Do lots of things together as a family.

- Spend special time alone with each child in the family.
- Try to let your children solve their own arguments. But don't allow them to hit or hurt each other in any way.

Help Your Child Feel Good About Others

- Help your child learn how to get along and work well with others.
- Encourage him to become more aware of other people's lives, strengths, problems, and needs. Talk about ways he might want to help out.
- Go with your child to school, community, or faith-based activities.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- How your child expresses his anger and resolves conflicts.
- Signs of low self-esteem or depression.
- How your child is doing in school.



My Child Is Changing!

During infancy and early childhood, children change quickly and in many ways. In middle childhood, your child will still be changing. Here are some ways your child will change by the end of this period.

Physical Changes

- Steady growth in size, strength, and coordination.
- Breast development and menstruation around age 10 in some girls.

Mental Changes

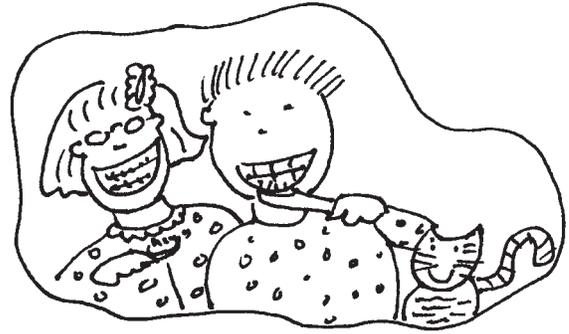
- Rapid development of mental skills.
- Greater ability to describe experiences and to talk about thoughts and feelings.
- Change in thinking ability from being self-centered to being able to think about others. Children also become able to understand cause and effect.

Emotional/Social Changes

- A growing independence from parents and family.
- A strong sense of right and wrong.
- A beginning awareness of the future.
- A growing understanding about one's place in the larger world.
- A greater emphasis on friendships and teamwork.
- A growing desire to be liked and accepted by friends.

Eating

By now, your child has learned how to eat and drink by herself. She is beginning to make her own choices about what goes on her plate and in her cup or glass. She is also starting to eat away from home at school and friends' houses. This means you will have less control over what she eats. This is a good time to teach her the importance of healthy eating and how to choose healthy foods on her own.



Encourage Healthy Eating at Home

- Prepare nutritious meals with breads, cereals, and grains; fruits and vegetables; chicken, fish, and lean meats; and low-fat dairy products.
- Encourage everyone in the family to have healthy eating habits. Eat meals together as often as you can.
- Start your child's day off right with a good breakfast. For a balanced meal, include bread or cereal, milk, and fruit.
- Keep nutritious snacks in the house. Limit foods that are high in fat or sugar, like candy, potato chips, and soft drinks. These foods are high in calories but don't offer much nutrition.

Encourage Healthy Eating Away from Home

- Be sure your child eats a nutritious breakfast or lunch at school. Pack a balanced breakfast or lunch or use the school meal program.
- Fast foods like french fries, burgers, soda, and pizza are high in fat or sugar. Encourage her to choose these foods less often and in smaller portions.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- Your child's weight gain.
- Possible food allergies.



Oral Health

During this period, your child will lose many of his baby teeth. Permanent teeth will grow in their place. He will have these teeth for the rest of his life, so he needs to protect them from decay and injury.

Prevent Tooth Decay

- Be sure your child brushes his teeth twice a day. Have him use a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Take him to the dentist every 6 months or as often as your dentist or health professional recommends.
- Talk with your child about smoking and tobacco. Discuss how smoking cigarettes or chewing tobacco can cause oral disease, cancer, and other conditions.

Protect the Teeth and Mouth from Injury

- Teach your child ways to protect his teeth. For example, he should wear a mouth guard for sports, a safety belt in cars, and a helmet when he bikes, ice skates, or roller skates.

Things to Discuss with Your Dentist or Health Professional

- How to deal with thumb sucking.
- When and how to teach your child to floss his teeth.
- Whether your child needs fluoride supplements.
- What to do if your child hurts his mouth or breaks a tooth.
- Whether your child might need braces.
- Whether your child should get dental sealants. Sealants are a thin plastic coating that covers the molars, the big teeth used for chewing. Sealants keep food and bacteria from getting trapped in the molars where they can cause decay.



Physical Activity

Your child isn't growing as fast now as when she was a young child. Still, during these years, she will become much taller, stronger, and more coordinated. Any fun, safe physical activity is good for your child. Many children enjoy physical education classes at school, after-school sports programs, and playing in the neighborhood with friends. Here are some ways to help your child stay physically active.

Build Healthy Habits for a Lifetime

- Make physical activity fun.
- Encourage your child to try lots of different physical activities. Soccer, biking, gymnastics, walking, and swimming are just a few. Everyday tasks are also forms of physical activity. Encourage your child to walk the dog, rake up and play in a pile of leaves, wash the car, and join in neighborhood clean-up events.
- Limit the amount of time your child watches TV, plays video or computer games, and uses the Internet.
- Be active with your child. Plan physically active family outings, like hikes and bike rides.
- Be physically active yourself. Be a role model.



Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- The right amount of physical activity for your child.
- Difficulties with any physical activities.
- Concerns about physical activity if your child has special needs.

Education

School will be one of the most important parts of your child's life. She'll have a world of things to discover. She will learn to read and write, add, subtract, and multiply. She'll be introduced to history, geography, and science. Your child is more likely to enjoy learning and do well in school if you show that you believe education is important. Your praise for what she can do will help her feel good about herself.

Get Off to a Good Start

- Prepare your child. Tour the school together. Meet your child's teacher and talk about the things your child will learn in the classroom. If you can, have your child meet some of her classmates before school starts.
- Once school starts, stay in touch with the teacher. Attend parent-teacher conferences. Talk to the teacher about any concerns or questions. Tell the teacher about your child's feelings about school, too.

Be Active in Your Child's School Life

- Try to attend school plays, concerts, team games, and other special events.
- Join the school parent-teacher association (PTA) and participate in PTA-sponsored activities.
- Encourage your child to join clubs or activities, like the chess club, the science club, or a school play.



Help Your Child Learn

- Set aside a special time and place for your child to do her school work every day.
- Go over her homework. Help her if she has questions.
- Make learning part of everyday life. You can do simple math together in the grocery store or read street signs

as you drive. Talk together about nature and science when you're outside.

- Talk to her about school. Know how she feels about it. Does she look forward to going? Is she making friends? Does she enjoy her subjects?

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- Difficulties in school that may be related to vision, hearing, or other health problems or behaviors that may interfere with learning.
- Concerns about school progress.
- If your child has special needs, how the health professional can support you in getting special educational services or adaptive equipment.

Sexual Development

During these years, your child becomes more aware of his own body. If he has brothers or sisters, he will be curious about the differences he sees. Your child's sexual curiosity is normal.

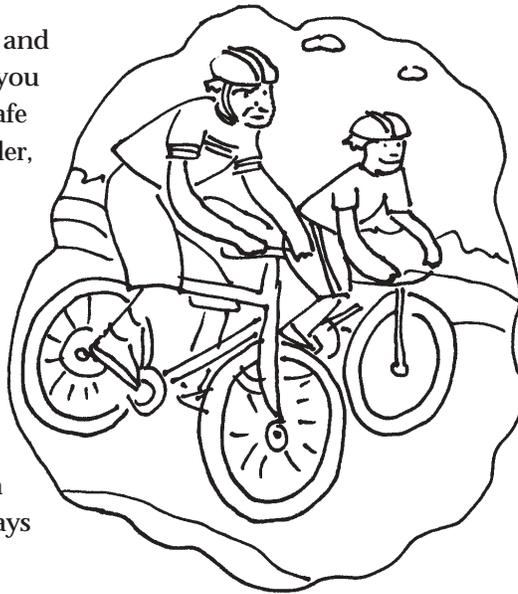
Puberty, with all its physical changes, starts toward the end of middle childhood. As your child nears 8 to 10 years of age, prepare your daughter for menstruation and your son for wet dreams. Let them know that these are expected and natural.

Help your child feel comfortable with his body and his physical changes:

- Avoid using slang words or street language for parts of the body. Using the correct words shows respect for the body.
- Explain that certain parts of the body (those normally covered by a bathing suit) are private. He should not be touched by anyone in places that make him feel uncomfortable.
- Encourage your child to ask you questions. Answer his questions frankly, in ways he can understand.
- Get books for your child that answer some of his questions. A librarian can help you find books that are written at the right level.
- If your child receives any type of family life or sex education at school or in the community, discuss with him what he's learning.
- Start sharing your values and attitudes about sex. Explain why it's important to delay sexual behavior.
- Explore your child's understanding of sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

Safety

From ages 5 to 10, children are starting to become more active and independent. This means that you will need to set clear rules for safe behavior. As your child gets older, take time to talk about safety rules and the reasons behind them. Around age 10 some children are tempted to try tobacco, alcohol, inhalants, or illegal drugs. Helping your child learn to say "NO" is a good beginning. It's a good idea to talk to him and tell him how you feel. Here are some ways to keep your child from harm:



Get to and from School Safely

- Walk with your child to school or have him walk with a friend or neighbor.
- Work out a safe route.
- If he takes the bus, make sure that the bus stop is in a safe place.
- Remind your child never to talk with strangers or get into a car with them.

Be Active Safely

- Teach your child how to cross the street safely by obeying these safety rules: Obey traffic signs and signals, cross only if the light is green, cross only at a corner or crosswalk, and look both ways for people and cars. Explain the danger of chasing balls and running into the street.
- Teach your child biking rules, including using hand signals before turning.

- Be sure that your child wears a bike helmet whenever he rides a bike.
- Talk about the importance of wearing protective gear, such as a mouth guard, helmet, and knee and wrist pads, when he plays sports.
- Teach your child to swim and make sure he follows water safety rules. Safety rules include: no swimming alone, no rough horseplay, no running near a pool, and no diving into the shallow end.
- Limit the time your child spends in the sun. Make sure he puts on sunscreen before he goes outside. Have him use sunscreen with a rating of at least SPF 15.

Be Safe at Other Times

- Never place your child in the front seat of a car that has a passenger-side air bag. The back seat is the safest place for him to ride.

- Use a car safety seat until he can sit upright against the back seat and bend his knees over the edge of the seat. When he is ready to use a seat belt, make sure it has both shoulder and lap straps.
- Remove guns from the home or keep them unloaded and locked up.
- Install smoke alarms. Check them regularly to make sure they work.
- Lock away medications, household cleaners, poisons, and matches.

Plan Ahead

- Know when to go to an emergency room. Know where the closest one is and how to get there quickly.
- Find out which hospitals are covered by your insurance. Ask about financial assistance if needed.
- Keep the number of a poison control center near the phone.
- Take a first-aid and child CPR course.
- Every once in a while, do a safety check on your home.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- A plan for dealing with emergencies, injuries, or poisonings.
- Ways to reach your health professional after office hours.
- Community safety programs.

For information about Bright Futures, please contact (703) 524-7802 or e-mail brightfutures@ncemch.org. Visit our Web site at www.brightfutures.org.

© 2001. Permission is given to photocopy this fact sheet.