

The Trials and Tribulations of Young Adolescence

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The Upper Elementary/Middle School Years

- Parents to be aware of the following events common to middle school:
 - Peer groups begin to exert tremendous pull.
 - Independence is shown in clothing and hairstyles.
 - Grades can fluctuate at the start of school due to new class routines.
 - Identity questions arise -- who am I? what am I going to be?
 - Substance abuse becomes more prevalent.
 - Sexual identity and sexual activity become issues.
 - Relationship violence is more prevalent (bullying, cyberbullying).
 - Students begin to address the disappointments in life.
- This also is the time when children become terminally embarrassed by their parents. Wise parents understand that and do not take it too personally.
- Parents should bridge the gap between elementary and middle school by being aware of and willing to talk about the additional stresses their child is facing.



Peer Pressure

- Students in middle school are sometimes subjected to peer pressure, which may include underage drinking, illegal drug and substance abuse and issues of a sexual nature.
- Being aware of your child's schedule, friends and interests are all helpful when monitoring his safety.
- Keep involved actively with your child's hobbies and interests, along with his daily routine while still giving him personal space and freedom to grow on his own.
- When issues such as peer pressure arise, remove those who are influencing from his social circle and discuss the matter face-to-face with your child, being direct and firm.
- You should also contact the school and his counselor if the problem is persistent inside of school.

- Parents spend a lot of time teaching their kids right from wrong.
- They show them what they think is right and hope they can keep their children from falling for negative peer pressure.
- Even though we work hard at raising our children to do what's right, they will still make mistakes along the way.
- It's not feasible to expect them not to make mistakes, but we can still help them learn to stay on track by utilizing some techniques to avoid peer pressure.
 - As with most issues, **start talking to your teens early**. Teach them what kind of behavior you expect from them and what you won't tolerate.
 - **Set clear rules and boundaries** for your teen. Make sure they know ahead of time what they are and are not allowed to do. Set a strict curfew and make sure they understand what the consequences will be if they break the rules. If they break the rules, be firm. When you make rules and don't stick to them, your child is less likely to follow them.
 - **Ask your teen where they are going and what they are doing**. Take it upon yourself to make sure they are where they say they are. This doesn't mean you need to follow them around town, but you should call parents of the friends they're going with and double check the plans and just to ensure they're safe. You may also consider getting them a cell phone so they can check in every so often. While you may think your children will feel oppressed by this behavior, they will also know you care what happens and feel more responsible about keeping out of unsafe situations.

- **Encourage your child to suggest other things to do.** If a friend is offering alcohol or drugs, it's tough to say no. Instead, your child can make other suggestions. "Let's go see a movie." "Why don't we ride our bikes to the park."
- **Get to know your child's friends.** Turn your house into the after-school or weekend hangout. For the price of some pizzas or popcorn, you can learn who is influencing your child. And, you'll be able to make sure that your children and their friends aren't using drugs and alcohol.
- **Teach your child to foresee situations that may lead to trouble.** An invitation to a place that will have no adult supervision, or hanging around students who use drugs can lead to "sticky" situations. Phrases like "We won't get into any trouble" or "Everybody else is doing it" should be a tip-off that this may be a situation to avoid.
- **Develop backup plans when your child is in a situation she can't handle.** Create a family code that means "Come and get me right away." In one family, the code is, "How is Aunt Beth feeling?" When these parents hear this code, they know to pick their daughter up immediately—no questions asked.
- **Teach your child how to say "no."** Sometimes, the shortest response is the easiest. Help your child role play a situation in which he says, "No, thanks" pleasantly—but firmly. Or, help your child think of, and rehearse, other ways to say "no." "I'm doing something else that night." "The coach says drugs will really hurt my game." And, of course, the oldest—and still effective—reason is, "My parents would kill me."

Academic Problems: A Parent's Supporting Role

- When it comes to homework, be there to offer support and guidance, answer questions, help interpret assignment instructions, and review the completed work. But resist the urge to provide the right answers or complete assignments.
- It can be difficult to see your kids stressed out over homework, especially when there's a test or important deadline looming. But you can help by teaching them the problem-solving skills they need to get through their assignments and offering encouragement as they do.

- **Plan ahead.** Regularly sit down with your teen to go over class loads and make sure they're balanced. If your teen has a particularly big workload from classes, you may want to see if you can shuffle the daily schedule so that there's a study hall during the day or limit after-school activities. Teachers or guidance counselors might have some perspective on which classes are going to require more or less work.
- **Establish a routine.** Send the message that schoolwork is a top priority with ground rules like setting a regular time and place each day for homework to be done. And make it clear that there's no TV, phone calls, video game-playing, etc., until homework is done and checked.
- **Instill organization skills.** No one is born with great organizational skills — they're learned and practiced over time. Most kids first encounter multiple teachers and classrooms in middle school, when organization becomes a key to succeeding. Give your teen a calendar or personal planner to help get organized.
- **Apply school to the "real world."** Talk about how what teens learn now applies outside the classroom, such as the importance of meeting deadlines — as they'll also have to do in the workplace — or how topics in history class relate to what's happening in today's news.

Learning to Deal with Life's Disappointments

- All over town this past couple of weeks, you could almost hear the cries, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes staggered. Cries of joy and cries of pain, as students from area schools looked at posted “results” and found out if they made it into their school of choice, next year’s school teams/groups/leadership positions—cheerleading squads, “elite” bands, the co-ed western dance team... drum majors, drill team officers, club presidents...and the cries weren’t just from the kids.
- Parents cried, too. “When we found out she didn’t make it, we both boo-hooed together,” said one mom. “I’d put so much effort into driving her to extra practices, and doing whatever else she needed me to do to help, that I felt like I’d lost, too.”

Dealing with Disappointment

- No parent wants to see their child disappointed or emotionally troubled.
- The most common concern for young adults in colleges and universities around the country is an inability to solve personal problems when they arise. For far too many of these young adults, their parents solved each and every problem that arose during their elementary, middle , and high school years.
- "If you bend over backwards to shield them from disappointment, you're keeping them from developing some important skills." Robert Brooks, *Raising Resilient Children*

Disappointment is part of life.

- Your child will feel disappointed about friendships, test scores, tryouts for plays and sports teams, acceptance to certain schools; she'll even feel disappointed with you on occasion.
- Sadness → Anger → Re-Grouping
- You can model responses that help your teen learn to handle disappointment.
- Here are a few things that have proven effective in helping your child develop a resilient personality that will likely support success and happiness:

- **Do Acknowledge**

The fact your child took a risk is worth celebrating. Help your child understand his/her efforts were not entirely in vain; don't give him/her a reason to give up on their dreams. Focus your attention on how hard he/she worked and how far he/she came.

Don't Trivialize

This is big one. Even you really do not understand why your child is upset, do not trivialize their disappointment. Petty problems are not petty when you are in the midst of them. Even if the disappointment seems ridiculous, try not to brush it off without acknowledging their very real pain.

Do Encourage Venting

Let your child air her frustration "off the record." Do not hold them accountable for every word when they are feeling the full weight of the disappointment. Make venting safe at home, so they do not spew all their anger online. Facebook and [Twitter](#) rants can be more damaging in the long run.

Do Offer Perspective

It may help to insert a personal story of one of your own disappointments. There are times when this is not appropriate, but it can help for a child to see that you survived major rejection or crushing loses and went on to bigger and better things. If a bad situation really did turn out for the best, you can remind them that they cannot always see the big picture.

•Don't Take Sides

This can be tough for parents. You are upset your child has to deal with the emotional pain and want to throw the blame. Please don't do this. Bad mouthing teachers, students, coaches, organizations and the like will only backfire. Let your child do the talking and the venting, **your job is to listen**. It can be harder for a teen to take responsibility for their actions when mom is pointing fingers at the culprit. It is important for parents to model good coping skills.

Don't Avoid

Give a little space, but do not completely ignore the situation, especially if it was a big disappointment and if it is affecting his/her behavior and mood. Be available, not pushy. Give him or her the time and space to regroup after rejection. Whether your child decides to eat junk food, listen to music, hide out in their bedroom or sulk around for a few days, recognize that this is an acceptable, normal way of coping. Just monitor that it doesn't last for weeks.

Do Have Fun.

Help your child refocus by doing something enjoyable. Rent a funny movie, serve their favorite meal or take a quiet trip to a favorite place. Your child may be miserable, but after a walk near the lake they are noticeably calmer.

Do Look Forward and Look Back.

Encourage your child to try again, or take another avenue. Maybe they had their heart set on acting, but didn't get a role. See if they would consider working on the set or costumes instead. Revisiting disappointments, when appropriate, can help give your child perspective and build a resilient spirit.

A photograph of a snowy forest with a path leading through trees, overlaid with the text "REJECTION is not fatal." The text is in a bold, black, serif font. The word "REJECTION" is in all caps, while "is not fatal." is in lowercase. The background is a soft-focus image of a winter forest with snow-covered ground and trees.

REJECTION
is not fatal.

Bullying and Violence

Bullying, violence and "sexting" are on the rise in schools around the world with the increase in technology and the ability to share messages instantaneously. If your child is showing symptoms of social withdrawal, depression or anger when you bring up the subject of bullying or sexting, she may be hiding an issue that should be brought to your attention. Calling the school directly to speak with a teacher can also help identify specific issues she may be encountering in school. If she avoids the subject of cyber-bullying, being bullied in person or sexting, she may also be hiding the fact that it is occurring.



Peer Conflict and Bullying

- Peer conflict is a normal part of life and learning to deal with it helps young people master socialization skills as they mature into healthy adults.
 - Peer conflict can take a number of forms – not all peer conflict is bullying.
 - Unfortunately, many people mistake bullying for a "rite of passage" toward maturity.
 - Bullying is not the same as a healthy peer conflict scenario. There are distinct elements present with bullying that do not exist in normal behavior

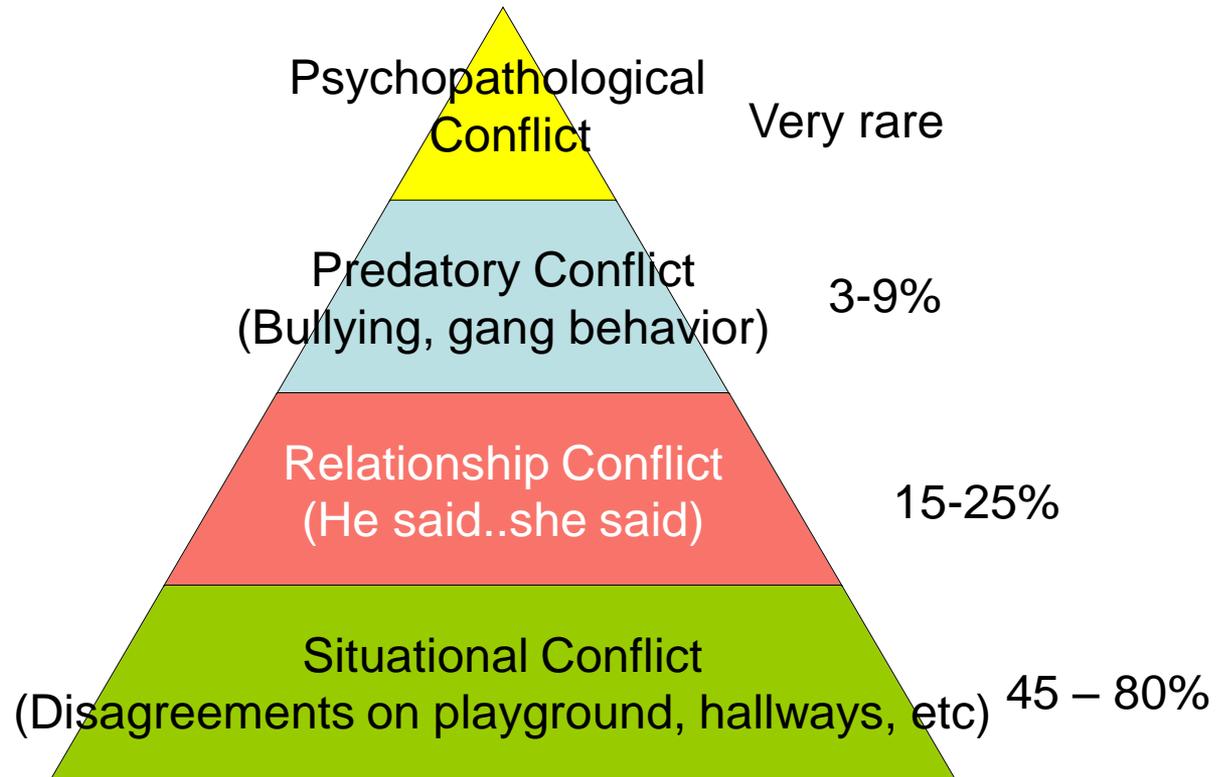
What is Bullying?

- Our students appear to have difficulty differentiating between conflict and bullying, so we wanted to address this and remind parents how we deal with both.
- Bullying is defined a way of using power aggressively in which a person is repeatedly subjected to intentional, unwanted and unprovoked hurtful verbal, written, physical, and/or electronic actions to which they feel powerless to respond.

Normal Peer Conflict

- Normal Peer Conflict is defined as disagreement or opposition of ideas or opinions. There are 2 sides to a conflict but they have equal power and respond to each other.

Types of Conflict and Typical School Levels of Reporting



Common Types of Peer Conflict

	Friendly Teasing	Hurtful Teasing	Situational Conflict	Bullying
Power	Equal Power	Unequal Power	Equal Power	Imbalance of Power
Frequency of Occurrence	Can be frequent – neutral topic	Infrequent- Sensitive Topic	Occasional- tied to task or situation	Repeated – Sensitive topic
Purpose	Playful, increase interaction	To upset the other person	To remedy a disagreement or exert influence	Intentional effort to dominate or control
Outcome	Fosters joining and interaction	Excludes or alienates	Negotiations or separation (at least for a time)	Emotional distress fro victim – victim is vulnerable
Value of Relationship	Valued	Valued	Valued	Not Valued
Resolution	Typically not required - civility	Social skills - civility	Effort to resolve through negotiation	No effort to resolve – no remorse

Is it Bullying?

Three questions guide school officials to determine when a behavior constitutes bullying:

- (1) Was the alleged bullying behaviors repeated and deliberate?
- (2) Did the alleged bullying behaviors inflict harm or suffering (physical or psychological)?
- (3) Is there an imbalance of real or perceived power between the alleged victim and alleged author of the behavior (reasonable belief)?

No, you can't play

- Michael, Cary and Josh are playing a game of cards at the table after lunch. Brian asks if he can play too. Michael says no they are almost done with the game and it is too late to start over.
- How would you classify this interaction?

“You smell!”

- A few weeks ago, Amy and Erin told Shauna she couldn't sit at their table during lunch because she smelled funny. They then start calling her names and encouraged all of their friends to do the same. Now, Shauna is called names frequently by a number of the girls in her class and no one wants to sit with her at lunch.

“Dork!”

- Darren and Jason are playing a computer game together and Jason accidentally hits the power switch and the game ends.
- Darren turns to him and says, “You are such a dork. Now we have to start over.”
- Jason says, “It’s a good thing because you were playing like you didn’t know what you were doing anyhow.”
- The boys reboot the game and start another session.

“You look REALLY FAT!”

- Beth says to Kristy, “I can’t believe you wore that outfit. It makes you look fatter than you already are.” Beth then laughs and walks away.

Cyberbullying

- Cyberbullying is defined in legal glossaries as actions that use information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior by an individual or group, that is intended to harm another or others.
 - use of communication technologies for the intention of harming another person
 - use of internet service and mobile technologies such as web pages and discussion groups as well as instant messaging or (SMS) text messaging with the intention of harming another person.
- Cyberbullying includes communications that seek to intimidate, control, manipulate, put down, falsely discredit, or humiliate the recipient. The actions are deliberate, repeated, and hostile behavior intended to harm another.
- Cyberbullying has been defined by The National Crime Prevention Council: “when the Internet, cell phones or other devices are used to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person

As parents we too often seek:

"Compassion for our own child, ...and justice for everyone else's children."

- The different types of peer conflicts need different types of responses for effective intervention.
 - Situational Conflict = negotiation skills, peer mediation, perspective taking
 - Relationship Conflict = civility training, social skills and social problem solving, character programming, assertiveness training
 - Bullying = school-wide bullying prevention programs, victim support, accelerating consequences and support services.

"You are not going to punish someone out of social problem solving or bullying behaviors!"

If you think your child is experiencing problems addressing peer conflict.

Talk to your child. Listen to what he or she is saying.

Talk to his or her teacher and share your concerns. Perhaps there are ways the school can assist your child in gaining the social problem solving skills needed.

If your child is being bullied, the school can act to help prevent and remedy the situation.

Remember, school personnel can not discuss a child's individual educational program or disciplinary actions with anyone except parents, legal guardians, and authorized school personnel.

Victims

- Get help from someone you trust—family, neighbor, teacher, coach, parent, school counselor, relative.
- Leave the group that is giving you so much grief (very hard but possible)
- Express your feelings: journal, paint, take up kick boxing whatever. Don't let it build up in you.
- Join a group or club away from the problem people. A new fresh start.
- Understand that as bad as it is it will end. It may be tomorrow or it may be next year, but it will end!
- You are not alone. <http://www.bullying.org/>

Victim's parents.

- Talk to your son or daughter
- If you remember being bullied growing up, share.
- Don't brush it off. Never discount his or her feelings.
- Don't 'dis' his or her friends (this could be a very short term disagreement).
- Don't stick our nose in if s/he wants to deal with it him- or herself.
- Don't jump on the phone to the school and blame the teacher. She/he may not even notice what is happening.
- Ask your son or daughter what you can do to help.
- **Listen!**

School-Wide Efforts

- The teachers and staff at Stone Academy make every effort to support the healthy development of peer interaction skills.
 - Teaching and supporting clear expectations related to peer interactions.
 - Establishment of a school culture that does not tolerate bullying
 - Promotion of ‘civility’ in all social interactions.
 - Implementation of positive behavioral supports to address issues as they arise.

Questions and Discussion