Social-Emotional Needs of Today's Middle-Schoolers

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Staff Therapist

DePaul Family and Community Services

My Background

- Licensed Social Worker
- Worked with children and families for 5 years

- DePaul Family and Community Services is a full-service Child, Adolescent and Family behavioral health clinic located on the Lincoln Park campus of DePaul University https://fcs.depaul.edu

Mindful Middle Schoolers Program

Resiliency Skills for Anxiety, Depression and Executive Functioning

- DePaul University, in partnership with the Oak Park Township Community Mental Health Board and D97, plan to offer the following services and supports to the Brooks/Julian community during the 2019-2020 school year:

- Community Talks on technology, anxiety, depression, executive functioning, mindfulness and the social and emotional needs of youth

- School-based group mindfulness-based services for students

- Individual and family therapy at school and home

For more information please reach out to omorriso@depaul.edu, your school principal or social worker
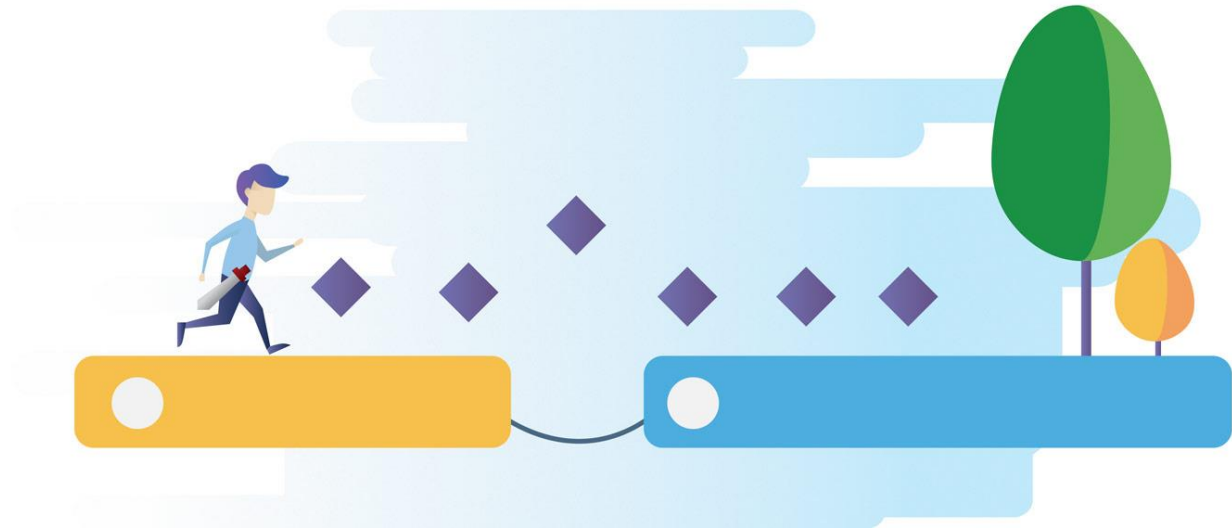
Objectives

- [VIDEO](#)
- Developmental Milestones
- What is impacting social and emotional development
- Identity Development
- Strategies to support social and emotional learning

Developmental Milestones

- Physical
- Cognitive
- Language
- Social-emotional

- These are milestones that you can expect your child to develop before entering high school.
- It is important to remember all children develop in different ways and at their own pace.

Physical Milestones

- Growth spurts

- Decrease in coordination as height and weight rapidly change

- Uneven development in skills such as agility, balance, strength and flexibility

- Possibly sleeping or resting more due to energy used for growing

- **Middle schoolers may look more mature physically, but they are not growing as fast cognitively or emotionally**

- R.STUBLER -

"YOU WON'T RECOGNIZE JUNIOR, HE HAS REALLY GROWN."

Understood.org, Dr. Molly Algermissen

Cognitive Milestones

- Can stay on task for more than one hour
- Link more abstract, complex ideas with child's preexisting knowledge
- Problem-solving skills and thinking skills develop
- Paying more attention to decision making and to organizing (ideas, time, etc.)
- Start to understand concepts like power and influence
- Question things and don't take everything at face value
- Think about how current actions effect the future
- Memorize information more easily
- Flexible thinking such as checking work and changing approaches, where necessary
- Begin to develop a worldview and basic set of values
- Want to contribute and make their own money

Language Milestones

- Picking up on social norms

- Using metaphors, slang, text speak, etc.

- Interest in discussions, debates and arguments (even for the sake of it)

- Start to comprehend and is more attentive to body language, tone of voice and other nonverbal language cues

- Go through "what if" scenarios and talk through other ways of problem solving

- Continue to build grammar knowledge and vocabulary

- Start to use writing to describe personal experiences

Social and Emotional Milestones

- Peer pressure
- Bullying/cyberbullying
- Value friends' and other's opinion more
- Sensitivity to other's opinions and reactions (the whole world is watching me)
- Develop a sense of pride in accomplishments and awareness of their challenges
- Keep secrets or just have secrets
- Awareness of what's appropriate to say in conversations
- Introspective (trying to understand where they fit in the world), moody, increased need for privacy
- Experimentation with clothing styles, personalities to figure out where and how to fit in
- Frequently feeling social discomforts, awkwardness, and loneliness leading to feelings of anger, sadness and anxiety

What Is Impacting Middle-Schoolers Social and Emotional Development?

Early Adolescence Phenomenon

- The Spotlight Effect
  - The idea that, in any social situation, everyone's attention is focused only on them.
  - [VIDEO](#)
- Personal Fable
  - The belief that a young adolescent's feelings and thoughts are unique to them and that the people around them have never experienced the emotions they are having.

Gilovich T, Kruger J, Medvec VH. (2009)
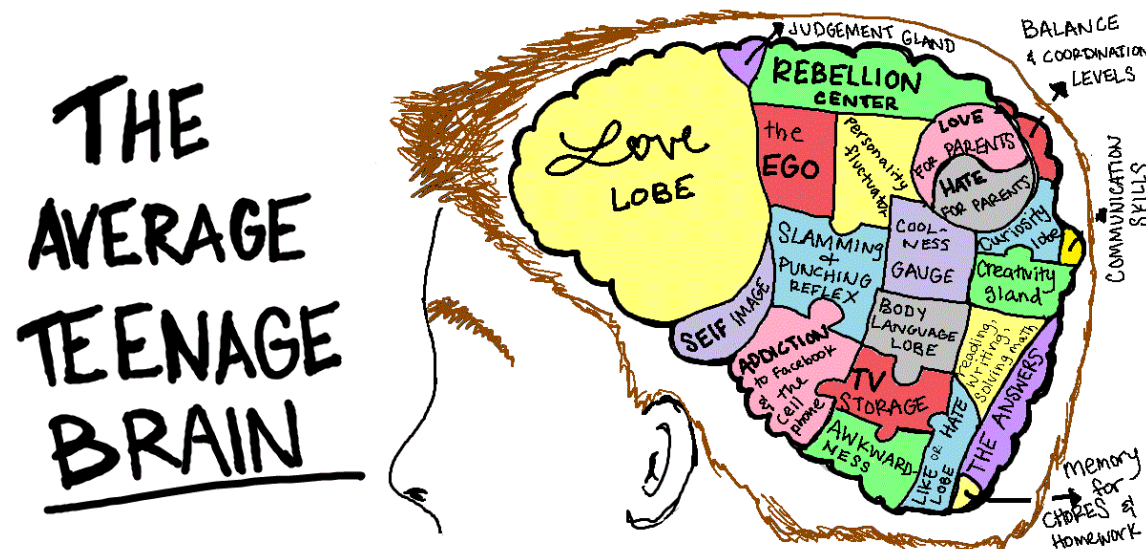
The Adolescent Brain

- The prefrontal cortex of the brain is not fully developed
- This region of the brain is responsible for:
  - Regulating moods
  - Planning and decision making
  - Controlling impulses
- The amygdala (region of the brain that controls "gut reactions" and emotions is more readily used by middle schoolers while the prefrontal cortex (responsible for reasoning) is still developing.
- [VIDEO](#)

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of abuse, neglect and family dysfunction between birth and age 18 can disrupt brain development and limit social, emotional and cognitive functioning (CDC.gov).

- ACEs/trauma changes the architecture of a developing child's brain and physiology. These changes impair academic efforts. They affect children's memory systems and their ability to learn as well their ability to regulate emotions, follow directions, pay attention and read social cues (childwelfare.gov).

- Students with three or more ACEs are 2.5 times more likely to fail a grade.

- Students with three or more ACEs are significantly more likely to be unable to perform at grade level, be labeled as special education, be suspended, be expelled or drop out of school (Hernandez, D., 2011).

Racial, Ethnic and Cultural Factors

- LGBT youth are up to three times more likely to experience harsh disciplinary treatment than their heterosexual peers (UCLA, 2013).

- Twenty percent of secondary school students with disabilities were suspended in a single school year, compared to fewer than 10% of their peers without disabilities (US Dept. of Justice BJS, 2015).

- Black students represent 16% of U.S. student population, but make-up 32% of in-and-out of school suspensions and 42% of expulsions (US Dept. of Ed.)
  - Implicit bias
  - Institutionalized racism
  - Discrimination leads to lower socioeconomic outcomes (Fuller-Rowell, 2012)

Identity Development

Middle school is a critical time for development and students learning who they are.

- Negative experiences around identity can impact their social-emotional development and overall engagement in school.
- If students are sent messages they are inferior due to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc. it can perpetuates the idea they are less than.
- Students may not feel motivated in school or even drop out if they are unable to verbalize their feelings of inferiority and differential treatment by teachers.
- Micro-aggressions:
  - Mispronunciation of names
  - School policies that prohibit students from embracing culture i.e. clothes, natural hair, verbal expression.
  - "A girl shouldn't do that"
  - "that's gay"

Gender Identity Development

- Middle-schoolers feel self-conscious about their physical changes and feel pressure to conform to cultural gender norms. They may be concerns about beauty standards and dating.
  - Pressures of social media
  - Discouragement in participating in certain extra curricular activities and other hobbies
  - Male dominated authors in reading curriculums.
  - [VIDEO](#)

- On average, girls are more motivated than boys to perform well in school, at least during elementary school. By the time girls reach high school, however, some may try to down play their own academic ability in order make themselves more likeable by both sexes (Davies, 2005).

LGBTQ Identity Development

- **Stage 1: Identity Awareness**
  -The individual is aware of being "different."
- **Stage 2: Identity Comparison**
  -The individual compares their feelings and emotions to those they identify as heterosexual.
- **Stage 3: Identity Tolerance**
  -The individual tolerates their identity as being non-heterosexual.
- **Stage 4: Identity Acceptance**
  -The individual accepts their new identity and begins to become active in the "gay community."
- **Stage 5: Identity Pride**
  -The individual becomes proud of their identity and becomes fully immersed in "gay culture."
- **Stage 6: Identity Synthesis**
  -The individual fully accepts their identity and synthesizes their former "heterosexual life" and their new identity.

People of Color Racial Identity Development

- **PRE-ENCOUNTER**

  -absorbed many beliefs and values of the dominant white culture
- **ENCOUNTER**

  -forced by event or series of events to acknowledge the impact of racism in one's life
- **IMMERSION/EMERSION**

  -simultaneous desire to surround oneself with visible symbols of one's racial identity and an active avoidance of symbols of whiteness
- **INTERNALIZATION**

  -secure in one's own sense of racial identity; pro-black attitudes become more expansive, open, and less defensive
- **INTERNALIZATION-COMMITMENT**

  -found ways to translate one's personal sense of blackness into a plan of action. General sense of commitment to concerns of blacks as a group

William Cross

Biracial Identify Development

- **Personal Identity**
  -Sense of self unrelated to ethnic grouping

- **Choice of Group**
  -Individual feel pressured to choose one racial or ethnic group identity over another.

- **Categorization**
  -Choice influenced by status of the group, parental influence, cultural knowledge, appearance

- **Enmeshment/Denial**
  -Guilt or confusion about choosing an identity that isn't fully expressive of their cultural influences; denial of difference between racial grouping; exploring unexplored identities

- **Appreciation**
  -of multiple identities

- **Integration**
  -Sense of wholeness, integrating multiple identities.

Paton

White Racial Identify Development

- **Contact**
-"color blind". May see racial differences but do not find them salient. Confrontation in the real world that uncovers privilege may move individual to disintegration stage.
- **Disintegration**
-May experience feelings of shame or guilt once new experiences that confront prior conception of the world. May learn to express these emotions positively or move to reintegration stage.
- **Reintegration**
-"Blame the victim" attitude. May feel that though they have privilege it is because they deserve it and in some way superior to minority groups.
- **Pseudo-Independence**
-Positive racial identification. Looks to people of color, not themselves, to confront and uncover racism. Approve anti-racism, but to validate their desire to be non-racist
- **Autonomy**
-Individual has a clear understanding of and positive connection to their white racial identity while also actively pursuing social justice and becoming actively anti-racist.

Janet E. Helms

Strategies Using the 5 Domains of Social and Emotional Development

5 Domains of Social and Emotional Development

- **Self-awareness**

Self-awareness is knowing your emotions, strengths and challenges, and how your emotions affect your behavior and decisions.

- **Self-management**

Self-management is controlling emotions and the behaviors they spark in order to overcome challenges and pursue goals.

- **Social awareness**

Social awareness is understanding and respecting the perspectives of others, and applying this knowledge to social interactions with people from diverse backgrounds.

- **Relationships**

The ability to interact meaningfully with others and to maintain healthy relationships with diverse individuals and groups contributes to overall success.

- **Responsible decision-making**

Responsible decision-making is the ability to make choices that are good for you and for others. It is also taking into account your wishes and the wishes of others.

What is Social-Emotional Learning?

- Social emotional learning is commonly defined as the processes through which students "acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions." (Bridgeland, J et al. 2013)

- Research indicates that children mentally healthy tend to be happier, show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, more eagerly participate in class activities, and demonstrate higher academic performance than less mentally healthy peers (Hyson 2004; Kostelnik et al. 2015)

- VIDEO or VIDEO

How To Improve Self-Awareness

- **Try to talk with your child about their feelings regularly.**
  - Take a couple of minutes a day to ask, "What made you feel good today?" or "Did anything upset you today?" is a great way to show you care.
- **Be careful not to tell your child how they feel.**
  - Say the emotion that you see and give your child an opportunity to deny or correct you.
- **Share personal stories to build your child's self-awareness.**
  - You may talk about experiences at work or experiences you remember from middle school and how you overcame them.
- **Talk to your child about their strengths**
  - Then find ways to praise their effort, energy and participation in activities
- **Use "how else" in conversations**
  - **"How else could that friend be feeling?" "How else can we look at this problem?"**

How To Improve Self-Management

- **Remind your middle-schooler that there are consequences to their actions.**
  - Address undesired behavior (i.e. slamming doors, yelling, etc.), express how you feel (i.e. sad, disappointed, etc.) then ask your child what is bothering them.
- **Set clear expectations and boundaries for your child and stick to them.**
  - Set desired behavior, explain consequences or loss of privileges then open up a discussion.
- **Be an example**
  - Maintain your own composure, remain calm and address your child with respect.
  - Model skills to your child. For example "I'm going to count to ten before I respond to your question." (Parent Toolkit)
- **Enable youth to see societal pressures and discrimination as reflections of societal ills rather than feelings of inferiority.**
  - Assist students in identifying societal challenges to pursue individual and collective solutions versus becoming emotion-focused and disengaged (Brannon, T.N. et. al, 2013).

How To Improve Social Awareness

- **Nurture your teen's empathy.**
  - VIDEO
- **You can talk to your teen about the importance of kindness**
  - You may teach lessons such as "good/bad karma" or "treat your neighbor as you want to be treated."
  - You ask your child "Have you done something kid and helpful for others lately?" "How did that make you feel?"
- **Assist your child and have open conversations around identity development**
  - Use the same language that your child uses
- **Help your child identify and analyze stereotypes, power structures and what they can do to resist them.**
- **Be an example**

How To Improve Relationships

- **Talk to your teen regularly about their friends**
- **Teach your teen about first impressions**
  - "How do you see yourself?", "How do you think others to see you?" and "How do you want others to see you?
- **Talk about bullying**
  - Work together with your child on what they can say to stop the harassment and allow them to remain respectful of themselves and others.
- **Resolve conflicts between you and your teen as peacefully as possible**
  - Give your child choices that will help them reach your desired outcome.
  - "I know you want to spend more time with your friends, but you haven't been meeting your responsibilities at home. If you do your chores this week, I will let you extend your curfew by 30 minute so you can hang out with your friends more. How does that sound?"

How To Improve Decision-Making

- **Talk through problems, logical consequences, and resolutions with your child**
- **Support your middle-schooler even when they make decisions you don't agree with.**
  - Even if you knew it was a bad decision, take the opportunity to talk with them about it. Try not to lecture; instead, ask what they learned from the choice, and how he'll handle a similar situation in the future.
  - Let your child know that you love them unconditionally and be there for them when they make mistakes
- **Get your middle-schoolers opinion on age-appropriate family issues**
  - Show their opinion matters
- **Be an example**
  - **Taking accountability for actions**
  - **Talk about your responsibilities and how you manage them**

Strategies for the Classroom

- **Begin and end each class with deep breathing**
  - Square breathing: Breathe in (4 secs), hold (4 secs), breathe out (4 secs), hold (4 secs)
  - Helps oxygen flow to the frontal lobes to decrease stress and increase concentration
- **Release feelings**
  - As students are arriving designate an area with a jar or box for students to write or draw feelings to release. Give them the option to allow you to read or discard.
- **Hand massage**
  - Give students a drop of lotion at the beginning of class to massage their hands for 90 secs
- **Create trigger lists**
  - Weekly or month have students write down a list of triggers that hinder their ability to learn and relationships. Also have them list positive experiences and people that enhance positive emotions.

Different Ways to Redirect

- Often times kids don't know how to calm down so saying "calm down" doesn't' help and, at times, can further escalate a student.

- Instead of, "Stop blurting out!" → Say, "Raise your hand, please."

- Instead of, "Calm down." → Say, "Let's take a deep breath and revisit this in one minute."

- Instead of, "Stop leaning back in your chair." → Say, "I need you to sit still but you seem like you need a movement break. After this activity, why don't you take a lap."

Thank You!!!

Please fill out this 4 question survey to provide feedback:

bit.ly/SELTALK