

»»» Mental Health Fitness

Middle School Skills Sheet

Middle schoolers experience all the same complicated, wonderful, confusing, and big emotions that adults do. **It's okay to feel all emotions, including feelings that are pleasant and feelings that are uncomfortable.**

Emotions are important because they provide us with information about ourselves and our environment, and they help us connect with one another. Learning how to notice, label, and express feelings helps middle schoolers feel more in control of their emotional experience.

Understanding »»» Feelings

- Label and name feelings to increase emotional vocabulary AND reinforce that you can feel more than one emotion at a time.
- Listen to and validate your middle schooler's emotions before jumping to problem-solving or fixing what is wrong.
For example: "I see that you're feeling sad, and that's okay."
- Use specific positive feedback frequently, immediately, and consistently when your middle schooler identifies how they are feeling or recognizes someone else's feelings.
For example: "Great job recognizing that you feel nervous, and thank you for letting me know."
- When watching a TV show together, help your middle schooler identify where they feel emotions in their bodies by discussing how the characters in the show might be feeling.

Understanding »»» Thoughts

- Our thoughts can be overwhelming at times and cause us to feel stressed and anxious. It can be easy to get stuck overthinking and making things bigger in our minds than they actually are.
- Help your child to practice identifying helpful and unhelpful thoughts and describing how their thoughts make them feel.
- If you recognize that your child is expressing an unhelpful thought, encourage them to replace the thought with a more helpful or realistic thought. Share some ways they can question their thoughts:
 - What are the facts about the situation?
 - What is the evidence that this thought is true or false?
 - What is the worst that could happen? If it does happen, what can you do to handle it?
 - Is this thought kind to you? If not, how can you be fair to yourself?

Managing »»» Emotions

- Everyone has urges to act that are caused by big, intense emotions. The key is riding out the urge and waiting for big feelings to lessen.
- Middle schoolers can ride out big feelings by using their five senses (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell) to ground to the present.
- Validate emotions! Show that you're listening to your middle schooler and that you empathize with how they feel by paraphrasing what you hear, without judgment.
For example: "I hear you feeling angry that your friend shared something you told her in confidence!"
- Model at home healthy ways of tolerating and riding out intense emotions. Encourage your child to engage in healthy distracting activities and being active (e.g., taking a walk, talking with friends, reading, journaling).