

Promoting Resilience in Middle School Girls: A Guide for Parents

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The parent/child relationship changes in middle school with young adolescents becoming less reliant on their parents. While this period in movies and fiction is often depicted as a period of “Storm and Stress,” the reality suggests a more gradual transformation from dependency to independence (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2010). Research by Steinberg (1990) suggests that most adolescents have a positive view of their parents and rely upon them for guidance. They usually embrace values that are similar to their parents and feel that they are loved and supported by their parents.

From this position of influence, there are several ways that parents can promote self-esteem and resiliency in their middle school girls. First of all, parents should recognize that their availability is important in their child’s sense of wellbeing. Efforts should be made to keep communication open. Parents are advised to show concern — but not too much — when their daughter shares her problems. Adolescents usually don’t want their parents to take over their problems; they just want to know that parents will listen without lecturing or intervening and to know that help would be available if needed.

Secondly, parents should recognize the power of the peer group on their daughter’s behavior and happiness. Adolescents who are viewed positively by peers have enhanced self-esteem (Harter, 2005). Adolescents have a high need to belong so parents should be aware of the peer groups’ influence and activities as these groups can have either a positive or negative influence.

Parents should also try to promote physical fitness in their daughters. Several research studies have shown that students with higher fitness scores have higher test scores and are less likely to display anxiety and depression (Ratey & Hagerman, 2008). Fitness can be supported through sports and family activities. Although adolescents are busy with school and activities, family meals should be a priority several times per week to ensure proper nutrition. Family meals are also associated with better communication among family members.

Parents typically provide much less academic oversight to middle school students. Still, parents should try to be aware of their daughter’s academic progress and stress level. The curriculum changes in middle school and demands more organization, multitasking, and abstract reasoning (Lerner, 2007). Girls who handled elementary school with ease sometimes find this transition difficult. A learning evaluation may be helpful to rule out subtle learning disabilities, undiagnosed attention issues or mental health concerns if academic or emotional problems suddenly arise or intensify. According to Nadeau and Quinn (2002), “Girls with untreated ADHD are at risk for chronic low self-esteem, underachievement, anxiety, depression, teen pregnancy, early smoking during middle school and high school.”

Social media can also have a significant influence on middle school girls. While trying not to be intrusive, parents are advised to encourage their daughters to talk about their on-line activities and be aware of the time they are spending on it. Some research shows that individuals who use social media the most, tend to be some of the most socially isolated. Try to encourage a balance of face-to-face social contact with online communication. Parents should be cognizant of the risk for online or cyberbullying and be a resource to their daughter if online communication becomes uncomfortable.

Hopefully, the above suggestions can help parents support the development of resilience in their teen girls.

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