



## Developmental Stages of Middle Schoolers (11 – 15 years) With Implications and Activities for Character Education

### What they do...

- Experiences rapid changes in physical appearance, growth spurts happen earlier for girls than boys.
- Shows interest in sports and active games.
- Shows concern about social graces, grooming and being liked by peers.
- Exhibits less dependency on parents to more dependency on opinions of peers.
- Becomes interested in activities that involve boys and girls.
- Tends to reject solutions from adults in favor of their own.
- Begins to think more abstractly and hypothetically. Can think about own thinking and becoming skilled in the use of logic and cause-and-effect.
- Takes more responsibility for planning and evaluation of work.
- Can be painfully self-conscious and critical. Vulnerable to bouts of low self-esteem.
- Changes in hormones and thinking contribute to mood swings.
- Desires independence, yet need their parents' help.

### What that means for us...

#### Physical

- Talk about physical changes because new teens are often uncomfortable with and embarrassed by their changing bodies. (Respect, Caring)
- Encourage active, fun learning experiences.

#### Social

- Encourage learning experiences related to self-discovery, self-understanding, and getting along with others. Be patient with grooming behaviors that may seem excessive. (Trustworthiness, Respect, Fairness)
- Help parents understanding this is a sign of growing maturity, not rejection of family. (Responsibility, Respect)
- Provide opportunities for boys and girls to mix without feeling uncomfortable—seems to work best if youth plan activities themselves. (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Caring)

#### Intellectual

- Involve young teens in setting rules and planning activities for your group or program (Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness)
- Ask questions that encourage predicting and problem solving. Help youth to find their own solutions by providing supervision without interference. (Ethical Decision-making)
- Allow young teens to plan activities and expect follow through. Help them to evaluate the outcome. (Trustworthiness, Responsibility, Citizenship)

#### Emotional

- Plan many varied opportunities to achieve and have their competence recognized by others. Concentrate on developing individual skills. (Trustworthiness, Responsibility)
- Remember that early adolescents are known for their drama and feelings that seem extreme to adults. Accept their feelings and be careful not to embarrass or criticize. (Caring)
- Encourage youth to work with adults and older teens. (Responsible, Fairness, Citizenship)

Source: Volunteers...the foundation of youth development Internet course, University of Missouri 4-H Youth Development Programs

## Six Pillar of Character<sup>SM</sup> Activities

The following briefly describes each of the Six Pillars of Character. They are accompanied by example activities that are age appropriate. Most require few supplies and could be led by older teens as well as CYS staff.

### Trustworthiness

- Be honest
- Don't deceive, cheat or steal
- Be tolerant of differences
- Use good manners, not bad language
- Be considerate of the feelings of others
- Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

#### Activity 1 - Trust Walk

##### *Supplies:*

Enough toys (balls, stuffed toys etc.) for each member to have one; blindfolds for half the group.

Divide the group into teams of two. Each team member is given a toy or object to toss into the area you have designated as a trust area. As each person tosses the item into the area they say one thing that is important to them to trust others (e.g. "If they say they will do something for me, I know they will.") The one member of the team is blindfolded and it is the task of the other team member to give verbal instructions on how the blindfolded person is to move through the trust area without stepping on the toys or objects. The team member giving verbal instructions cannot touch the blindfolded teammate. When one team member has successfully completed the trust walk have the team members trade places.

##### *Discussion questions:*

1. Was it easy to trust your partner? Why or why not?
2. What did the guide do to help you trust/distrust him/her?
3. Did you want to peek? Why?
4. How is this activity like real life? What can you do to be trusted by others?

(Adapted from Project Adventure and Challenge Master, Inc.)

#### Activity 2 - Who Do You Trust

Hold a group discussion on the importance of being able to trust someone. Use questions such as these to guide the discussion:

- What are some things adults do that help young people trust them?
- What are some things young people do that help parents/teachers trust them?
- It is important to have friends you trust. Why do you think it's also important to have an adult you trust and can talk to if you have a problem?
- Do you act or speak differently around a person you trust than around a person you don't trust?

Have youth to choose one adult they trust. Have them share the positive qualities of that adult that enables them to trust him or her.

(Adapted from: Character Education, Teaching Values for Life, Grades 7-8; Instructional Fair, TS Denison, Grand Rapids, MI )

#### Activity 3 - What Kind of Person?

Ask the participants to work on their own and complete the following:

1. Imagine yourself several years in the future. You are now a parent. What kind of person would you want your child to be?
  - A perfect person
  - A person who makes some mistakes
  - A person who tries not to make the same mistake twice
  - A person who tells the truth, even when he or she makes a mistake
  - A person who doesn't let his/her parents know about mistakes so they won't worry

- A person who lies to cover up a mistake
2. What kind of person do you think your parent(s) want you to be?
- A perfect person
  - A person who makes some mistakes
  - A person who tries not to make the same mistake twice
  - A person who tells the truth, even when he or she makes a mistake
  - A person who doesn't let his/her parents know about mistakes so they won't worry
  - A person who lies to cover up a mistake
3. What kind of person do you think you are?
- A perfect person
  - A person who makes some mistakes
  - A person who tries not to make the same mistake twice
  - A person who tells the truth, even when he or she makes a mistake
  - A person who doesn't let his/her parents know about mistakes so they won't worry
  - A person who lies to cover up a mistake

*Discussion questions:*

1. Do you think most people expect others to be perfect? Why or why not.
2. Do you think it is important to be able to trust the people with whom you interact? Why or why not.

(Adapted from: Character Education, Teaching Values for Life, Grades 7-8; Instructional Fair, TS Denison, Grand Rapids, MI )

<b>Respect</b>
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- Treat others with respect, follow the Golden Rule
- Be tolerant of differences
- Use good manners, not bad language
- Be considerate of the feelings of others
- Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone
- Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements

**Activity 1 - Labels**

*Supplies:*

Mail labels or other sticky-type labels with one of the following printed on each label.

COMEDIAN Laugh at my idea	OVER EMOTIONAL Comfort me	Speak softly to me
EXPERT Seek my advice	Listen to me and get me to talk	Don't let me say anything—you talk
IMPORTANT Defer to me	Tell me I'm OK	Back away as you talk
LONER Ignore my ideas	Ask me about myself	Walk away in the middle of my talking
Yell at me	Look into my eyes as I talk	OUTSIDER treat me with distrust
Put me down	Help me	Ignore me
HELPLESS Give me positive support	Pity me	Look at my shoes as you talk to me
Support me	Talk at me when I'm listening	Reinforce me

Put a label on each person, in a spot where they cannot see it. This could be a headband or on their forehead so others can read it. Ask members to walk around and talk with as many others as possible, but to respond

to the labels, not the people. Assign a topic for members to discuss while mingling (e.g. Where to go on vacation, best actor and actress, projects they plan to take next year.) After not more than 5 minutes, stop the group and discuss the following:

*Discussion questions:*

1. How was this experience for you?
2. What does this activity tell you about labeling people?
3. What happened to you – the person – when others responded to just the label? How did you feel?
4. What insights does this give us for working with groups?

(Leadership RAP, Missouri 4-H Youth Development Programs)

## **Activity 2 - Standing in Their Shoes**

This activity is based on the old saying "walk a mile in someone else's shoes" so you can get to know what it feels like.

*Supplies:*

Sets of footprints made from colored construction paper.

*Suggested Procedure:*

1. Show the group two pairs of footprints made from different colors of construction paper. Explain that these are point of view footprints. When you stand in them, you see someone else's point of view – you look at the world the way they do.
2. Set the footprints of the floor. Present the group with situations such as those that follow. Ask a volunteer to stand on one set of footprints and summarize one point of view, then stand on the other set of footprints and give the other point of view. Encourage participants to identify both the point of view and the feelings of the people might have about the situation.

Sample situations:

- Ms. Chang says no one in after school can use a computer until their homework is done. Reginald doesn't like this idea.
- Ruth wants to watch a video she just rented. Her sister Naomi wants to watch a show on TV at the same time.
- Marcus wants to sit by himself and read a book. His best friend Raphael keeps asking him to play a game.

Reflection:

- What was it like trying to identify with different points of view?
- How might different points of view lead to conflict?
- What other points of view might there be in these situations?

(Adventures in Peacemaking; William J. Kreidler and Lisa Furlong, 1995.)

## **Activity 3 – Dots**

*Supplies:*

Red, green, yellow and blue dots.

*Procedure:* Have the following listed on newsprint

Red Dots	Learning disabled, extremely attractive, athletic
Green Dots	Gifted, poorly dressed, appears unclean
Yellow Dots	Physically handicapped, foreign student
Blue Dots	Child of prominent family, painted hair, one hoop earring, tattoo

"Today's activity will depend a lot on your imaginations. First, I want you to close your eyes. We're going to place a colored dot on each of your foreheads. You are not to remove the dot or discuss the dot with anyone else." Place the dots on youth.

"Now that everyone is ready, open your eyes. I want you to find a partner. Look at the dot on your partner's head. Do not tell him/her the color of the dot. Look at the list to see what your partner's colored dot represents. Treat your partner as if they have the characteristics described by their dots."

Now ask the youth to take turns explaining to their partners how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. They are to keep in mind the description of their partner, but not to let on what color dot the partner is wearing. "Remember, you must treat your partners as if they had the characteristics described by their dots."

Give them about 5 minutes to do this. Now, instruct them to group together according to the color of their dots, but remind them they still can not tell each other what color dot they have. Let those who believe they have red dots on their foreheads move to one corner of the room. Direct those who think they have green dots to another corner; yellow, another corner; and blue, to yet another part of the room.

"Share with the people in your corner what happened."

*Discussion questions:*

1. How did it feel to be treated that way?
2. What was it about the way each member of your group was treated that made you all go to the same corner?
3. What words, looks or body language gave you clues to what color dot you had?

(Source: Boomerang, Character Education Program; Iowa State University, 4-H Youth Development)

## Responsibility

- Do what you are supposed to do
- Persevere keep on trying
- Always do your best
- Use self-control
- Be self-disciplined
- Think before you act – consider the consequences
- Be accountable for your choices

### Activity 1 - I'll Save You!

*Supplies:*

Several pieces of poster board or carpet squares cut into different sizes (Each poster board should have room for at least two people to stand on,); masking tape to tape down squares and radio or boom box.

Several different rescue boats have been placed around the room. We are going to play music, similar to musical chairs. When the music stops, you must immediately get onto a rescue boat – the more crowded the better. Pull as many people onto the rescue boat with you as possible. The object is to get everyone pulled out of the water and onto a boat in 3 seconds. Please play safely.

Should you fail to save everyone trying to get onto your rescue boat in 3 seconds your entire group will drown and you will have to wait for a new game to begin in order to play. Also, if you ignore saving someone that is near you, your whole group will drown, and you will have to wait for a new game to begin in order to play.

Does everyone understand the rules? Do you accept that you are going to help get each other out of the water and onto a rescue boat as quickly as possible?

Repeat the directions of the game as many times as necessary. Begin a new game at a point you feel is appropriate. Play the game for 15 minutes. If you can think of creative twists to add to the game, all the better.

*Discussion questions:*

1. Were you able to save everyone that you attempted to save?
2. What happened when you couldn't get everyone onto your rescue boat?
3. How did that affect the whole group on that boat?

(Boomerang!, Iowa State University, 1998)

## Activity 2 - Make a Machine

Divide the large group into smaller groups of six. Explain that machines are made up of many moving parts. Each group is to make a machine, with each member becoming a moving part, complete with sound. Examples of machines are a lawn mower, vacuum cleaner or record player.

*Discussion questions:*

1. How did your functioning machine relate to responsibility?
2. Does the size of the machine part have anything to do with the machine working?
3. What would happen if one part of the machine decided not to work?

(Missouri 4-H Youth Development Programs)

## Activity 3 – Aftermath of Violence

The number of violent crimes committed by juveniles is rising at an alarming rate. This activity encourages participants to think about the people who are affected by a crime and the responsibility of the criminal.

Choose a news article, or have the participants choose an article, describing a crime. Read the article to the group and discuss what happened. Have the participants make a list of all the people involved, including those not cited in the article. Next, working in pairs, have the group write a dialogue for two voices. One participant should write as if they are a friend or family member of the victim and the other should write as a friend or family member of the criminal. Have the group discuss the dialogue.

(Adapted from: Character Education, Teaching Values for Life, Grades 7-8; Instructional Fair, TS Denison, Grand Rapids, MI )

<b>Fairness</b>
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- Play by the rules
- Take turns and share
- Be open-minded; listen to others
- Don't take advantage of others
- Don't blame others carelessly

## Activity 1 - A Tall Order of Fairness

*Overview:*

Working as a team to complete a competitive task with limiting rules, the participants learn what skills are necessary to play fair.

*Supplies:*

40 straws (for each group); 20 paper clip (for each group); Adhesive tape (for each group); Scissors (one pair for each group)

*Procedure:*

Explain that the lesson will focus on fairness. Reiterate key qualities of fairness. Then ask: "How do rules affect fairness?" Offer the students examples and have them come up with more. Next ask: "What types of situations make sets of rules hard to follow? Why?" Lead the discussion to the importance of teamwork and the influence of competition on fairness. Ask them to explain why people cheat. Then solicit examples of consequences for such behavior. Introduce the task. Say: "We are going to complete a competitive task today to see who can build the tallest tower out of certain materials." However, there are certain rules and limitations. Distribute materials and divide the students into four or five groups. Say: "Your group will have five minutes to design a tower and five minutes to build it. Every person in the group must be involved in the planning and building of the tower. Finally, you can only talk while you are designing the tower. Once you start building it, you cannot talk to one another. If you talk during the building stage, your group will have to start over and will lose any materials that have been used up to that point. Finally, ask: What is the most important thing to remember? After fielding answers, say: The most important thing is not to win but to play fair."

Once the game is over, discuss the role of fairness in their tasks and what is taught them about solving problems fairly,

(Good Ideas to Help Young People Develop Good Character, 2002-2003 edition, Josephson Institute of Ethics)

### Activity 3 - Fairness Journals

#### Overview:

Participants reflect on the issue of fairness in journal writing exercises and subsequent discussions.

#### Supplies:

One small notebook and pencil for each participant.

#### Procedure:

Have the participants write short entries in a “fairness journal.” Discuss what it means to be fair and suggest they list the following on the first page of their journals as a reminder of what fairness means:

- Playing by the rules
- Not changing the rules to suit your purposes
- Giving everyone a chance
- Not treating others differently because of the way they look

This activity should be done with regularity (every day, every other day, once a week) and followed by a discussion about what they have written. Have them make journal entries about fairness beginning with the following sentence stems:

1. The way older people are treated is....
2. The way young people are treated is....
3. I am treated fairly when...
4. What I am an adult I will make things more fair for others by...
5. To make things more fair at home this week I can...
6. One example of how people are not treated fairly is...
7. Everyone deserves...
8. It's important to play by the rules because...
9. Every person is important because...
10. All children are important because...

(Good Ideas to Help Young People Develop Good Character, 2002-2003 edition, Josephson Institute of Ethics.)

### Activity 3 -Through the Eyes of Another

#### Overview:

The participants read a story with a situation that involves an issue that various characters might perceive differently. They reflect on and discuss the importance of seeing an issue from all sides before making a judgment.

#### Supplies:

Copy of a short story that teaches a moral lesson (the story should involve several characters who might have different perspectives, but it should be told from the perspective of one character.); Paper; pencils or pens

#### Procedure:

Present this scenario: “A teen is playing catcher in a softball game. Another player on the opposite team runs to home plate after his teammate hits the ball. As the runner slides into home plate, the catcher catches the ball and tags him. The runner says he is “safe.” The catcher says he is “out”. Fans sitting on one side agree with the runner. Those on the other side agree with the catcher. Who is correct?”

Solicit answers. Then explain. “Either of the players might be correct because they saw the throw from different points of view.” Ask the participants to help you define “point of view.” Then ask: “How could each player act more fairly if he had considered that everyone has a different point of view?” Field answers. Suggest: “The players might have been more willing to accept the other’s opinion. Or they could have decided to have the hitter bat again.”

Say: “Everyone has his or her own view of things. Sometimes things are clearly right or wrong, but it is important to learn as much as possible about an issue and look at it from all angles before making a judgment.” Tell them you are going to read a story that is told from one point of view, then say: “Afterward, I am going to ask you to write the same story from the point of view of another character in the story.”

Read the story aloud and then discuss what was learned from the experience. Decide who was treated most fairly and why. Discuss what was right and what was wrong in the story. Next, instruct each participant to

write the same story from another's point of view. Tell them to explain what the character learned from the experience.

(Good Ideas to Help Young People Develop Good Character, 2002-2003 edition, Josephson Institute of Ethics.)

## Caring

- Be kind
- Be compassionate and show you care
- Express gratitude
- Forgive others
- Help people in need

### Activity 1 - Thank You Notes

*Supplies:*

Paper and pens or pencils.

Saying thank you to others for the kindness they show you is so important. It may not always be necessary to send formal, written thank-you notes for many occasions, but it is a very thoughtful gesture to thank someone who has spent money on you, sent a gift or taken time to do something special. For which of the following situations would you send a thank you note to someone?

1. A birthday gift from Aunt Marion.
2. Someone lends you a pencil at school.
3. A friend lends you a dollar.
4. A friend's family invites you to spend a week at their lake cottage.
5. A friend's older brother takes you to the movies.
6. Your grandmother gives you \$50 for Christmas.
7. You go to a cookout at your neighbor's house.
8. You spend the night at your best friend's house.
9. Your sister gives you an old sweater that is too small for her.
10. A friend's dad takes you to a baseball game, buys you dinner at a very expensive restaurant, and then takes you to meet the players and get their autographs and pictures.
11. You receive a scholarship to assist with the registration fees to attend a county or state camp.
12. Your neighbor gives you aluminum cans for your club's clean up.
13. Your project leader spent extra time with you on your project.

A thank you note should include:

- Reason you are writing the thank you note
- The occasion for the recognition or gift
- The gift specifically unless it is money
- Why the gift is important to you

Take a few minutes and have each participant write a thank you note to someone who has done something special for them.

(Ohio State University 4-H Youth Development Programs)

### Activity 2 - What Are Your Gifts

Read aloud this quotation by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: *Give what you have. To someone else it may be better than you dare to think.* Invite participants to think about what "gifts" they have within themselves, such as the ability to listen, a talent for art, or a sense of humor. Challenge them to think of at least three gifts. Direct participants to draw a circle in the center of a blank sheet of paper. Within the circle, have them illustrate and label one of their gifts. Next have them draw lines from the circle outward. For each line have them write the name of a person or group with whom they could share their gift.

(Adapted from: Character Education, Teaching Values for Life, Grades 5-6; Instructional Fair, TS Denison, Grand Rapids, MI)

### **Activity 3 -100 Ways to Care**

Divide the class into groups. Give each group a long piece of butcher paper. Challenge groups to fill their pieces of paper with 100 caring ideas, ranging from small acts of kindness to major serve projects. Invite individual groups to share their murals with all participants. You may want to follow up the activity by having groups choose one of their service project ideas to complete.

(Adapted from: Character Education, Teaching Values for Life, Grades 75-6; Instructional Fair, TS Denison, Grand Rapids, MI)

<b>Citizenship</b>
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- Do your share to make your school, center and community better
- Cooperate
- Stay informed; vote
- Be a good neighbor
- Obey laws and rules
- Respect authority
- Protect the environment

### **Activity 1 - Citizenship Commercials**

*Supplies:*

Craft supplies, scrap paper, construction paper, markers and/or crayons.

It's important to tell everyone about citizenship – what it means and what individuals can do. Working in groups of 3 or 4, you have 5 minutes to develop and design a 30 second commercial on citizenship. Use any of the supplies available to make your commercial more exciting.

(Missouri 4-H Youth Development)

### **Activity 2 - Installation (Who, What, When)**

This month take the time to learn more about your installation. Study its history, find out how it got its name and share that information with others particularly the younger children in the CYS program.

### **Activity 3 - Service**

It doesn't take lots of people to complete a community service projects; in fact, one person is enough. This month think of 1-2 activities you can do by yourself to help your community. Some ideas might include organize a bingo party, costume party at a local nursing home, do yard work for an elderly neighbor or friend, or help a friend with their homework.

Adapted from materials written for US Army Child and Youth Services and USDA Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service.

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