

## STAGES OF MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

	EARLY	MIDDLE	LATER
<b>what children do</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn how to control their bodies</li> <li>Have a lot of energy</li> <li>Enjoy manipulating objects</li> <li>May find handling small objects or performing fine motor tasks challenging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoy moving and being active</li> <li>Enjoy sports, dancing and physically intense games</li> <li>Can play until they are exhausted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experience physical changes, especially girls</li> <li>Have variable energy levels</li> <li>May find it difficult to control their emotions</li> </ul>
<b>what children can understand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn best by doing</li> <li>Need instructions to be few and simple</li> <li>Have a limited attention span and are easily distracted by their environment</li> <li>Are very imaginative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are curious and enjoy learning new things</li> <li>Learn best when involved in a concrete project</li> <li>May become frustrated when things do not turn out as expected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin to develop abstract thinking skills</li> <li>Learn well through imitating role models</li> <li>Are adventurous and enjoy change</li> <li>Have a good attention span</li> </ul>
<b>what types of relationships children can have</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be somewhat self-centered</li> <li>Play better in pairs than in groups</li> <li>Need to be constantly reminded of the group rules</li> <li>Like to express themselves, but must be asked directly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place increasing importance on friendships</li> <li>Enjoy playing and taking up group challenges</li> <li>Are sometimes competitive</li> <li>Can express what they like or do not like, but their judgment is sometimes not well developed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoy working in teams</li> <li>Seek the approval of their peers</li> <li>Are more independent and begin to question authority</li> <li>Enjoy projects that involve helping others and social justice</li> </ul>



## MIDDLE CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT GUIDE



Children's Partnership  
Surrey - White Rock

### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was put together by the Middle Childhood Matters Steering Committee, a diverse group of professionals and community members who are dedicated to ensuring that our community considers and meets the needs of our children in middle childhood, from 6—12 years. This document is meant to be a tool for anyone working with children from—12: service providers, volunteers, coaches, mentors, and others to create a picture of what is happening developmentally for children in the middle years. This document draws heavily on the reports and research of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC and their groundbreaking work on Middle Childhood Development.

[childrenpartnershipsurreywr.com](http://childrenpartnershipsurreywr.com)

## WHY MIDDLE CHILDHOOD MATTERS

The Middle Years, when children are between the ages of 6 and 12, are a time when children undergo important cognitive, social, and emotional changes that establish their lifelong identity and set the stage for adolescence and adulthood. During the middle years children master fundamental academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic and become more aware of themselves and of the feelings and perspectives of others. Their worlds expand beyond that of the family, as peers begin to play a larger role and children move into ever widening social circles, including neighbourhood and school environments. Their bodies continue to change and grow, allowing

them to develop confidence and competence with movement. As well, they have an increased awareness of body image.<sup>(1)</sup>

Children's experiences during their middle childhood years have a big impact on who they become and are a powerful predictor of adolescent adjustment and success. Their overall health and well-being affects their ability to concentrate and learn in school, develop and maintain friendships, and make thoughtful, considered decisions. Like great architectural structures, children need supports like healthy relationships with adults and peers and proper health and nutrition to create solid bases on which they can build.<sup>(2)</sup>

## WHAT IS MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Middle childhood—the time between ages 6 to 12, universally marks a distinct period in human development. Children undergo important cognitive, social, and emotional changes that establish their identity and set the stage for development in adolescence and adulthood (Eccles, 1999). It is during this time that children master fundamental academic skills, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. Children become more aware of themselves and of the world around them during middle childhood (Selman, 1980). This period has also been identified as a time in which children expand their social world beyond the family and move into ever widening social circles, such as peer groups, neighbourhood, and school environments (McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001). What happens during middle childhood is critical for health, well-being, adjustment, and success in late childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood (Hertzman & Power, 2006). Middle childhood is a time of opportunity to optimize health and promote positive future development (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). The factors influencing positive development during this time are not well understood.

Connectedness to adults and peers, in the different social worlds of home, school, and community, account for the assets with the strongest association with children's overall health and well-being. "Stated simply, relationships are the 'active ingredient' of the environment's influence on healthy human development. They incorporate the qualities that best promote competence and well-being—individualized responsiveness, mutual action-and-interaction, and an emotional connection to another human being, be it a parent, peer, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbour, teacher, coach, or any other person who has an important impact on the child's early development."

(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/mapsets/MDI/summaries/2010\\_mdi\\_sd39\\_vancouver\\_community\\_summary.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/mapsets/MDI/summaries/2010_mdi_sd39_vancouver_community_summary.pdf)



## DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

### INVOLVEMENT IN MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES

Children have a natural determination to excel, be good at something, and to be socially engaged.

Noted developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson (1968), described this phase in development as a time of "industry," with specific attention being directed to developing a sense of competence in a variety of situations and activities, and learning how to cooperate with both peers and adults.

### SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

A shifting social focus from the family towards the peer group occurs during middle childhood (Gavin & Furman, 1989).

Being part of a peer group, having friends, and positive relationships with significant adults inside and outside the family (for example, teachers, adults in the neighbourhood, family friends) are key for positive social and emotional development and well-being during this time. (Scales, Benson, & Mannes, 2006)

### DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Children master academic tasks such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. They become more self-aware, reflective, and less egocentric. They begin to consider feelings and perspectives of others with improved social understanding. (Selman, 1980)

### ENVIRONMENTS OUTSIDE THE HOME

Increasingly, time is spent in social settings, such as schools, neighbourhoods, and the community during middle childhood. Children are presented with new challenges and expectations outside the family. (Eccles, 1999; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Pianta, 2006)

### BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

During the middle childhood years there are important improvements in the area of the brain responsible for planning, decision-making, emotional regulation, and abstract thought. (Steinberg, 2005)

Source: Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) middle childhood (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2010) [http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/mapsets/MDI/summaries/2010\\_mdi\\_sd39\\_vancouver\\_community\\_summary.pdf](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/mapsets/MDI/summaries/2010_mdi_sd39_vancouver_community_summary.pdf)

## WE HAVE AN IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY... WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

During middle childhood, out-of-home environments have an increasing influence on children's development. **The average child in their middle years has approximately 67 hours of free time each week, which is more time than they spend in school.**<sup>(3)</sup> High quality after school programming has the potential to be instrumental in a child's development during these years.

Adults play a pivotal role in helping children develop by providing opportunities to learn new skills in supportive and caring contexts. Parents and family are joined by teachers, peers, a soccer coach, a best friend's mother and other members of the community who can influence a child's development during this time period.

# FIVE DIMENSIONS FOR ASSESSING THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN AGED 6–12

This guide addresses five dimensions of middle childhood development that are strongly linked to well-being, health, and academic achievement. These dimensions provide a lens for children's overall health and well-being and are reflective of those measured by the Middle Years Development Instrument, a research tool developed by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia.



## DIMENSIONS

**SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT** Empathy, optimism, self-esteem, psychological well-being.

Relationships with peers and adults in the school and community are important in fostering children's social and emotional competence.

### CONNECTEDNESS

With adults at home, in school, neighbourhood, Peers, Belonging.

Children who have an adult who they look up to and spend time with report higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, feel more competent in school, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviour.

### SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Academic self-concept, school supportiveness, school belonging, future goals, experience with bullying.

Remember the **ABC's**: Young people crave opportunities for **Autonomy, Belonging & Competence.**  
[www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/](http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/)

### PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Overall health, body, image, nutrition, sleep habits.

Healthy early eating patterns affect growth, cognitive development, academic performance and prevention of chronic disease in later life.

### CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF AFTER-SCHOOL TIME

Participation in organized & structured activities & programs, afterschool time use, arts, music, sports.

Children who engage in excessive use of technology during the afterschool hours consistently report being less happy and feeling less competent than their peers

## WHY DOES THIS MATTER IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD?

Children with higher levels of social and emotional health do better as they make the transition to middle or secondary school. Optimism, having a mindset of positive expectations for the future, is a predictor of long-term health and life success.

Parents matter, even in middle childhood. Children's connections to their parents are central to their development. Children entering adolescence still function best if they experience high parent connectedness.

Social interaction supports children to develop interpersonal understanding and moral reasoning as well as learning cooperation, gaining support, acquiring interpersonal skills, and persisting through difficulties.

Children who do not feel part of a group or feel outcast by their own group are at risk for anxiety and depression and are also at higher risk of low school attendance and future school drop-out.

Children who feel a sense of belonging at school also report greater happiness, contentment, calmness, self-esteem, commitment to school, enhanced reading comprehension and increased social competence.

Children who are victimized at school are at greater risk of lifetime social emotional maladjustment, substance abuse, violence and aggressive behaviour, and suicide.

Children become increasingly self-aware and self-conscious about their bodies and how they compare to their peers. These anxieties are compounded for many by the onset of puberty.

Body image dissatisfaction in middle childhood forecasts later depression, low self-esteem, and eating disorders in both boys and girls.

Proper nutrition and sleep impacts children's long-term physical and cognitive development.

School age children need about ten hours of sleep a night.

[http://www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HealthCanada\\_HealthyEatingAfterSchool.pdf](http://www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HealthCanada_HealthyEatingAfterSchool.pdf)

Children who spend three or more hours alone per day show an increased risk of drug and alcohol use, higher stress, anger, depression and behaviour problems, lower self-esteem, and lower academic achievement.

Activities such as arts groups, sports leagues, and drama, give children beneficial experiences that promote their social skills and self-esteem.

Participation in collaborative, skill-based activities has been found to predict a number of positive social, physical, and cognitive outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT MIGHT I EXPECT TO SEE?

- As children enter this stage, they begin to
- Assert themselves and desire some independence from their parents and family.
- Pay more attention to friendships and teamwork.
- Form beliefs about themselves as either competent or inferior people. Realistic self-awareness about a child's strengths and shortcomings can build self-esteem.
- Anxiety is the most prevalent mental health concern among children in middle childhood.
- According to the Children's Health Policy Center at SFU, 3.8% of children meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder; 12.6% of children may meet criteria for any type of mental disorder.

Children begin to:

- Associate more with peers and less with family. Children absorb information from peers about how to behave and who they are.
- Form relationships with adults outside of the immediate family network.
- Recognize social categories and observe social groups to which they do or do not belong.
- Children still want and need to be closely connected to their parents and continue to look to them for guidance.

- Social acceptance becomes a priority at this time. Children become preoccupied with belonging to a group or "clique".
- Children can become involved in negative behaviours and relational aggression (manipulation, gossip, bullying, cyber bullying and exclusion).
- Academic self-concept, which refers to children's beliefs about their academic ability, including their interest and confidence in school, typically declines. Boys tend to be less academically oriented than girls.

- Canadian health standards recommend 60 mins of physical activity/day. Less than half of Canadian kids get 60 mins three day/week.
- Reports state children have an average of 6 hrs/day of screen time outside of school.
- Only 19% of kids aged 10–16 meet Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines: max 2 hrs/day, recreational screen time.<sup>(1)</sup>
- Studies support a link between sedentary behavior with being overweight and obese.
- Children without access to playgrounds are much less active than those with access.
- Comparisons with peers increase during middle years. Girls, in particular, focus on appearance and physical comparisons. Physical appearance also becomes fodder for teasing & bullying.<sup>(5)</sup>

When the 2007 Middle Childhood study conducted by UBC and the United Way asked what children were doing on a typical day after-school between 3–6pm, 66% of Grade 4's and 5's reported watching TV, and 60% were on the computer browsing the Internet or playing games. 71% reported doing homework.

Children who watched more than one hour of TV on a typical day reported lower self-esteem, lower optimism, and higher sadness than children who watched less than one hour of TV.

## WHAT TYPES OF ACTIVITIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- Activities designed to increase empathy and prosocial behaviour have been found to increase social and emotional awareness, decrease aggressive behaviour, and increase academic performance.
- Encourage children to talk about their feelings while working or playing together.<sup>(3)</sup>
- Watch for signs of anxiety and depression in children. Intervene early if symptoms are present.
- Use mistakes/incidents as "teachable moments."

- After-school programs and activities can provide a "group" for children to belong to and can assist them in building connections to their community.
- Children want to be heard, to know that someone is listening and understanding them. Take the time to actually listen and understand what children are saying.
- You should encourage families to create or continue with routines and traditions that allow for time to connect (e.g. sharing family dinners together, family movie nights).
- You should share children's successes with their parents as they pick up their children from activities. This will provide the parents and children with a place to start talking.

- Consistent and constructive feedback from parents and teachers influences how children view themselves as learners.
- School environments that value children's participation, provide time for self-reflection, encourage peer collaboration, and enables them to make decisions about classroom norms and activities.
- Local service providers offer tutoring supports or homework clubs that can enhance academic school experiences.

- Daily opportunities for participation in various forms of physical activity and access to outdoor play spaces.
- You can educate parents and children about their body's need for ten hours of sleep, physical activity and healthy foods.
- Limit screen time to no more than two hours per day.
- Since young people can be sensitive to the topic of weight, model a healthy lifestyle that includes fun physical activity and healthy eating habits when talking to kids, rather than focusing on weight, scales, or Body Mass Index. Try instead to promote health at every size and shape and consider what that means for every person.

You should provide activities and environments that are safe, welcoming and inclusive, supportive mentoring, opportunities to belong, and opportunities to build skills (e.g. exploring music, movement, sports, drama).

You should encourage children to play both cooperative and competitive games. The Equitas Play It Fair! Toolkit has many games and activities to encourage cooperation.

## REFERENCES

Websites / pamphlets / brochures / videos

BC Council for Families website | [bccf.ca](http://bccf.ca)  
Pamphlets | "Letting Go," "Dads and Teens," "Get Involved in Your Kids School," "Parenting Teens Series" (set of 5 titles)  
Videos | "My Tween and Me: Tweens in Canada," "Why I Love my Tween and Me"  
British Columbia Recreation and Parks Association | [bcrapa.bc.ca](http://bcrapa.bc.ca)  
Burnaby Middle Childhood Matters website | [burnabycommunityconnections.com/mcm\\_family.shtml](http://burnabycommunityconnections.com/mcm_family.shtml)  
Canadian Sport for Life | [canadiansportforlife.ca](http://canadiansportforlife.ca)  
Child and Nature Alliance of Canada | [childnature.ca](http://childnature.ca)  
Children and Nature Network | [childrenandnature.org](http://childrenandnature.org)  
Erase Bullying | [erasebullying.ca](http://erasebullying.ca)  
Equitas Play It Fair! | [equitas.org](http://equitas.org)  
High Five: The best way to play | [highfive.org](http://highfive.org)  
Langley Middle Childhood website | [langleychildren.com/mcm/index](http://langleychildren.com/mcm/index)

Media Smarts, Canada's Centre for Digital and Media Literacy | [mediasmarts.ca](http://mediasmarts.ca)  
National Alliance for Children and Youth | [nacy.ca](http://nacy.ca)  
Richmond Middle Childhood Matters website | [richmondchildrenfirst.ca/what-we-do/helping-kids-succeed-richmond-style/](http://richmondchildrenfirst.ca/what-we-do/helping-kids-succeed-richmond-style/)  
Screen Age Child Care Association of BC website | [saccabc.org](http://saccabc.org)  
Screen Smart: Helping Families Manage Media: [screensmart.ca](http://screensmart.ca)  
Tri Cities Middle Childhood Matters website | [tricitiecmcm.org/pages/about.html](http://tricitiecmcm.org/pages/about.html)  
The 2Learning.ca Education Society: Early Learners in a Digital World | [2learn.ca](http://2learn.ca)  
Vancouver Windows of Opportunity Coalition website | [vancouverwindowsofopportunity.com/for-professionals/middle-years-resources/](http://vancouverwindowsofopportunity.com/for-professionals/middle-years-resources/)

- 1 — HELP website, [earlylearning.ubc.ca/mdi/tools/](http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/mdi/tools/); National Network for Child Care, Middle Childhood Development
- 2 — Schonert-Reichl et al, 2010. Our Children's Voices: The Middle Years Development Instrument.
- 3 — Centre for Disease Control and Prevention. School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors among Youth.
- 4 — Health Canada. [www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HealthCanada\\_HealthyEatingAfterSchool.pdf](http://www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/HealthCanada_HealthyEatingAfterSchool.pdf)
- 5 — Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children & Youth 2012. [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)

Articles / Reports / Research

Experience of Parenting Study | Provincial Poll Report Child care, changing ways of communicating, family finances.  
Bergmann, Carolyn. | Are you losing control of your teen?  
Canadian Pediatric Society | Are we doing enough for our Kids?  
Champion-Smith, Diane. | Alcohol and Other Drugs - Prevention Strategies for Parents.  
Healthy Families BC. Being Me: Promoting positive body image | A Teacher's support resource for Elementary and Middle Schools.  
Holder, Mark, Coleman, Ben and Wallace, Judy M. | Parenting Pre-teens - Spirituality and Happiness in Children.  
Layous K., Nelson S. K., Oberle E., Schonert-Reichl K. and

Lyubomirsky S. | Kindness counts: Prompting Prosocial Behavior in Preadolescents Boosts Peer Acceptance and Well-being.  
Radford, Jan and Thorne, Sally. | Living on the Edge: Families with technology dependent children at home.  
PSOS, P911, ROTFLUTS, TCOY, WYHAM. | Generation Who, What, Y?  
Reaching Out to Young People in a Changing World: Do you know what these mean?  
Schonert-Reichl: Kimberly A. | You're Not the Boss of Me! Parent-Child Relationships during the Transition to Early Adolescence.  
Usher, Carolyn M. | Pre-teens: They're all originals!  
Usher, Carolyn M. | Teaching money management skills to children.