

Middle School *Social* Scene

Helping Your Student Create and
Maintain *Healthy Relationships*

Social Life

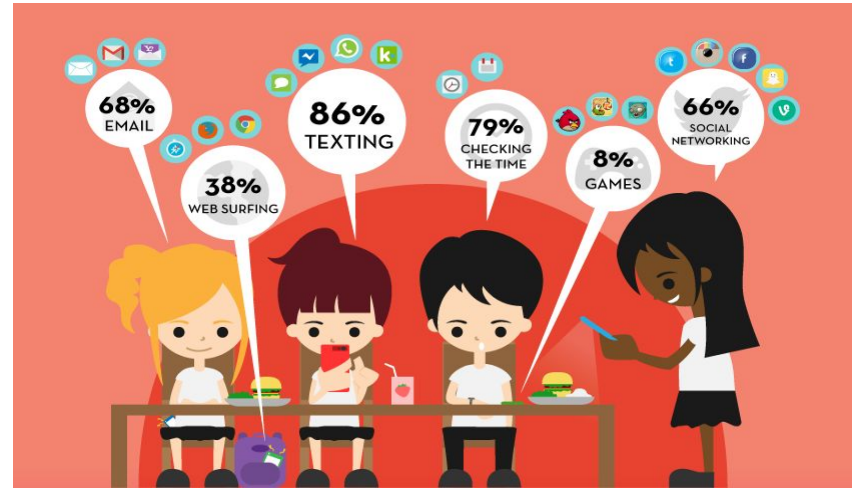
Preteens' social life really starts to explode in middle school. All of a sudden, students are much more concerned with texting and social media as a means of communicating with their friends.

Friend groups start to expand and change. Kids are being asked to more sleepovers and parties . . . and some might even have their first "boyfriend" or "girlfriend."

So it begins . . .

Social Life

As their social circles expand and evolve, now is the critical time for understanding and developing healthy relationships.



Students are developing new relationships constantly throughout middle school. However, many of those relationships are over-involved and lack appropriate boundaries.

This creates excess **STRESS** and exposes children to issues that are too adult or serious for their age. Often we see kids that are too distracted by the drama of their social life to focus on school.

Healthy Relationships



What makes a Healthy Relationship? Here is what you can teach your student:

1. **Respect** each person. A healthy partnership means learning about the other person and valuing what's important to them. Each person should be equal.
2. **Trust** each other. Friends feel that they can count on each other. Trust needs to be earned over time and can be lost with a broken promise.
3. **Be Honest** about thoughts and feelings. If you are changing the "real you" to be liked then a friendship is based on a false reality.
4. **Communication** is key. It requires sharing and listening and should be characterized by respect, trust, and honesty.

Healthy VS. Unhealthy:

*Help your kids
know*

<http://westernhealth.nl.ca/uploads/Addictions%20Prevention%20and%20Mental%20Health%20Promotion/Healthy%20Relationships%20Resource%20Kit%20-%20Western.pdf>

Healthy Relationships	Unhealthy relationships
You feel good about yourself when you're together.	You feel sad, angry, scared, or worried.
You do not try to control each other. There is equal amount of give and take.	The relationship is imbalanced. You feel you give more attention than you get, feel controlled, etc.
You feel safe and trust to share secrets.	You do not communicate, share or trust the other person.
You like to spend time together, but also have a life separate from each other.	You feel pressured to spend time together and are guilty when you are apart.
You feel as though you can be the "real you."	You feel the need to change or be someone you are not.
You respect each other's opinion and feel safe to disagree.	You feel there is no respect for your opinion and you have to always agree with the other person.
There is no fear in your relationship.	You feel fearful so you can't communicate, trust or be honest with the other.

What type of friendship do you have?

It is important for us to help define "friendship" for our kids. Here are some questions you can ask your child:

- Does your friend listen to and respect your ideas?
- Is your friend ok that you have friends other than her/him?
- Do you have fun spending time together?
- Do you feel comfortable telling your friend when something they do upsets you?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts and feelings?
- Is your friend happy for you when good things happen?
- Does your friend respect your differences?

Where Relationships Go Wrong

Middle school students are connected to their phone--and social media. Monitoring conversations with their friends is SO important!

1. Students give out their password information.
2. Students feel pressured to say or act a certain way.
3. Students OVERshare.
4. Students freak out when someone doesn't answer their text messages.
5. Students put TOO much on their peers when it comes to emotional support.
6. Students become OVER dependent on their friends.

Signs we see in Middle School

Students do not recognize when relationships are unhealthy. An unhealthy relationship is when one person tries to control (or have power) over the other. What does that look like in middle school?

1. Name calling, insults, spreading rumors
2. Using someone for money, possessions, etc.
3. Possessiveness regarding other friendships, dating relationships, etc.
4. Requiring that friends share their password information.
5. Nonstop calling, texting, emailing, social media chatting, etc. with urgency.
6. Sending inappropriate pictures or text messages with graphic content/language.
7. Relying on friends to be their sole emotional support ("lifeline," "savior").
8. Taking on responsibility of keeping their friends "safe" from harm.

What Can Parents Do?

Our middle schoolers are experiencing a LOT on a daily basis . . . more than we are aware. Parents are their BEST support system and hold the most influence in their lives.

1. Know your child's friends.
2. Model the characteristics of healthy relationships.
3. Keep lines of communication open--be involved.
4. Monitor, monitor, MONITOR their phone and social media accounts (ex. <https://www.bark.us/>)
5. Implement "No Screen Time" at home.
6. Discuss how to treat people and how people should treat your child.
7. Foster support systems for when your child feels overwhelmed.

Resources

Presentation adapted from information found at following websites:

<https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/sex-and-relationships/relationships>

<https://www.poehealth.org/how-to-talk-with-kids-about-healthy-relationships/>

<http://westernhealth.nl.ca/uploads/Addictions%20Prevention%20and%20Mental%20Health%20Promotion/Healthy%20Relationships%20Resource%20Kit%20-%20Western.pdf>