

# Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development

## Middle Childhood (9-11 years of age)

### Developmental Milestones

Your child's growing independence from the family and interest in friends might be obvious by now. Healthy friendships are very important to your child's development, but peer pressure can become strong during this time. Children who feel good about themselves are more able to resist negative peer pressure and make better choices for themselves. This is an important time for children to gain a sense of responsibility along with their growing independence. Also, physical changes of puberty might be showing by now, especially for girls. Another big change children need to prepare for during this time is starting middle or junior high school.

Here is some information on how children develop during middle childhood:

### Emotional/Social Changes

Children in this age group might:

- Start to form stronger, more complex friendships and peer relationships. It becomes more emotionally important to have friends, especially of the same sex.
- Experience more peer pressure.
- Become more aware of his or her body as puberty approaches. Body image and eating problems sometimes start around this age.

### Thinking and Learning

Children in this age group might:

- Face more academic challenges at school.
- Become more independent from the family.
- Begin to see the point of view of others more clearly.
- Have an increased attention span.

### Positive Parenting Tips

Following are some things you, as a parent, can do to help your child during this time:

- Spend time with your child. Talk with her about her friends, her accomplishments, and what challenges she will face.
- Be involved with your child's school. Go to school events; meet your child's teachers.
- Encourage your child to join school and community groups, such as a sports team, or to be a volunteer for a charity.
- Help your child develop his own sense of right and wrong. Talk with him about risky things friends might pressure him to do, like smoking or dangerous physical dares.
- Help your child develop a sense of responsibility—involve your child in household tasks like cleaning and cooking. Talk with your child about saving and spending money wisely.
- Meet the families of your child's friends.
- Talk with your child about respecting others. Encourage her to help people in need. Talk with her about what to do when others are not kind or are disrespectful.



- Help your child set his own goals. Encourage him to think about skills and abilities he would like to have and about how to develop them.
- Make clear rules and stick to them. Talk with your child about what you expect from her (behavior) when no adults are present. If you provide reasons for rules, it will help her to know what to do in most situations.
- Use discipline to guide and protect your child, instead of punishment to make him feel badly about himself.
- When using praise, help your child think about her own accomplishments. Saying "you must be proud of yourself" rather than simply "I'm proud of you" can encourage your child to make good choices when nobody is around to praise her.
- Talk with your child about the normal physical and emotional changes of puberty.
- Encourage your child to read every day. Talk with him about his homework.
- Be affectionate and honest with your child, and do things together as a family.

## Child Safety First

More independence and less adult supervision can put children at risk for injuries from falls and other accidents. Here are a few tips to help protect your child:

- Protect your child in the car. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recommends that you keep your child in a booster seat until he is big enough to fit in a seat belt properly. Remember: your child should still ride in the back seat until he or she is 12 years of age because it's safer there. Motor vehicle crashes are the most common cause of death from unintentional injury among children of this age.
- Know where your child is and whether a responsible adult is present. Make plans with your child for when he will call you, where you can find him, and what time you expect him home.
- Make sure your child wears a helmet when riding a bike or a skateboard or using inline skates; riding on a motorcycle, snowmobile, or all-terrain vehicle; or playing contact sports.
- Many children get home from school before their parents get home from work. It is important to have clear rules and plans for your child when she is home alone.

## Healthy Bodies

- Provide plenty of fruits and vegetables; limit foods high in solid fats, added sugars, or salt, and prepare healthier foods for family meals.
- Keep television sets out of your child's bedroom. Limit screen time, including computers and video games, to no more than 1 to 2 hours.
- Encourage your child to participate in an hour a day of physical activities that are age appropriate and enjoyable and that offer variety! Just make sure your child is doing three types of activity: aerobic activity like running, muscle strengthening like climbing, and bone strengthening – like jumping rope – at least three days per week.

A pdf of this document for reprinting is available free of charge from

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle2.html>

## Additional Information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/childdevelopment>

1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) <http://www.cdc.gov/info>



# BRIGHT FUTURES HANDOUT ► PARENT

## 9 AND 10 YEAR VISITS

Here are some suggestions from Bright Futures experts that may be of value to your family.

### ✓ HOW YOUR FAMILY IS DOING

- Encourage your child to be independent and responsible. Hug and praise him.
- Spend time with your child. Get to know his friends and their families.
- Take pride in your child for good behavior and doing well in school.
- Help your child deal with conflict.
- If you are worried about your living or food situation, talk with us. Community agencies and programs such as SNAP can also provide information and assistance.
- Don't smoke or use e-cigarettes. Keep your home and car smoke-free. Tobacco-free spaces keep children healthy.
- Don't use alcohol or drugs. If you're worried about a family member's use, let us know, or reach out to local or online resources that can help.
- Put the family computer in a central place.
- Watch your child's computer use.
  - Know who he talks with online.
  - Install a safety filter.

### ✓ STAYING HEALTHY

- Take your child to the dentist twice a year.
- Give your child a fluoride supplement if the dentist recommends it.
- Remind your child to brush his teeth twice a day
  - After breakfast
  - Before bed
- Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste with fluoride.
- Remind your child to floss his teeth once a day.
- Encourage your child to always wear a mouth guard to protect his teeth while playing sports.
- Encourage healthy eating by
  - Eating together often as a family
  - Serving vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat or fat-free dairy
  - Limiting sugars, salt, and low-nutrient foods
- Limit screen time to 2 hours (not counting schoolwork).
- Don't put a TV or computer in your child's bedroom.
- Consider making a family media use plan. It helps you make rules for media use and balance screen time with other activities, including exercise.
- Encourage your child to play actively for at least 1 hour daily.

### ✓ YOUR GROWING CHILD

- Be a model for your child by saying you are sorry when you make a mistake.
- Show your child how to use her words when she is angry.
- Teach your child to help others.
- Give your child chores to do and expect them to be done.
- Give your child her own personal space.
- Get to know your child's friends and their families.
- Understand that your child's friends are very important.
- Answer questions about puberty. Ask us for help if you don't feel comfortable answering questions.
- Teach your child the importance of delaying sexual behavior. Encourage your child to ask questions.
- Teach your child how to be safe with other adults.
  - No adult should ask a child to keep secrets from parents.
  - No adult should ask to see a child's private parts.
  - No adult should ask a child for help with the adult's own private parts.

### ✓ SCHOOL

- Show interest in your child's school activities.
- If you have any concerns, ask your child's teacher for help.
- Praise your child for doing things well at school.
- Set a routine and make a quiet place for doing homework.
- Talk with your child and her teacher about bullying.

**Helpful Resources:** Family Media Use Plan: [www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan](http://www.healthychildren.org/MediaUsePlan)

Smoking Quit Line: 800-784-8669 | Information About Car Safety Seats: [www.safercar.gov/parents](http://www.safercar.gov/parents) | Toll-free Auto Safety Hotline: 888-327-4236

# 9 AND 10 YEAR VISITS—PARENT

## ✓ SAFETY

- The back seat is the safest place to ride in a car until your child is 13 years old.
- Your child should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's lap and shoulder belts fit.
- Provide a properly fitting helmet and safety gear for riding scooters, biking, skating, in-line skating, skiing, snowboarding, and horseback riding.
- Teach your child to swim and watch him in the water.
- Use a hat, sun protection clothing, and sunscreen with SPF of 15 or higher on his exposed skin. Limit time outside when the sun is strongest (11:00 am–3:00 pm).
- If it is necessary to keep a gun in your home, store it unloaded and locked with the ammunition locked separately from the gun.

Consistent with *Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents*, 4th Edition

For more information, go to <https://brightfutures.aap.org>.

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# Executive Function Activities for 7- to 12-year-olds

These games provide challenges and practice for executive function and self-regulation skills among school-age children. For children in this age range, it is important to steadily increase the complexity of games and activities.

## Card games and board games

■ **Card games in which children have to track** playing cards exercise working memory and promote mental flexibility in the service of planning and strategy. *Hearts*, *spades*, and *bridge* are popular examples.

■ **Games that require monitoring and fast responses** are great for challenging attention and quick decision-making in children at this age. *Spit*, for example, requires attending to your own play as well as your opponents' progress.

■ **For younger children, card games requiring matching** by either suit or number continue to test cognitive flexibility. *Rummy* games, including *gin rummy*, are popular examples. Games with more complicated sets of options, such as *poker* and *mahjong*, may challenge older children.

■ **Any game involving strategy** provides important practice with holding complicated moves in mind, planning many moves ahead, and then adjusting plans—both in response to imagined outcomes and the moves of opponents. With practice, children can develop real skill at classic games of strategy like *Go* or *chess*, while challenging working memory and cognitive flexibility. Many more modern strategy games exist as well. Mensa, the high IQ society, holds



a yearly competition testing new games, and provides an interesting list of favorites.

■ **Children this age also enjoy more complex games** involving fantasy play, which require holding in working memory complicated information about places visited in imaginary worlds, rules about how characters and materials can be used, and strategy in attaining self-determined goals. *Minecraft* is a popular computer game of this sort, while *Dungeons & Dragons* is a longtime card-based favorite.

## Physical activities/games

■ **Organized sports** become very popular for many children during this period. Developing skill at these games practices children's ability to hold complicated rules and strategies in mind, monitor their own and others' actions, make quick decisions and respond flexibly to play. There is also evidence that high levels of physical activity, particularly activity that requires coordination, like soccer, can improve all aspects of executive function.

■ **Various jump rope games** also become popular among children of this age. Children can become very skilled at *jump rope*, *double Dutch*, *Chinese jump rope*, and other such challenges. Developing skill in these games requires focused practice, as well as the attention control and working memory to recall the words of the chant while attending to the motions.

■ **Games that require constant monitoring** of the environment and fast reaction times also challenge selective attention, monitoring, and

*continued*

inhibition. For younger children, hiding/tag games, particularly those played in the dark, like *flashlight tag* and *Ghost in the Graveyard*, are fun. Older children may enjoy games like *laser tag* and *paintball*. Many video games also provide practice of these skills, but can include

violent content, so care should be taken in selecting appropriate options and setting reasonable time limits. Common Sense Media, a non-partisan media information organization, provides useful reviews of popular games.

## Music, singing, and dance

■ **Learning to play a musical instrument** can test selective attention and self-monitoring. In addition to the physical skill required, this activity challenges working memory to hold the music in mind. There is also some evidence that the practice of two-handed coordination supports better executive function.

■ **Whether or not children learn an instrument, participating in music classes** or community events can still require them to follow rhythmic patterns, particularly when improvisation is involved (e.g., clapping or drumming). This can challenge their coordination of working memory, attention, cognitive flexibility, and inhibition.

■ **Singing in parts and rounds**, as is done in children's singing groups, is also a fun challenge, requiring a similar coordination of working memory, monitoring, and selective attention. As children's musical skills grow,



adults can present them with steadily increasing challenges.

■ **Dancing**, too, provides many opportunities to develop attention, self-monitoring, and working memory, as dancers must hold choreography in mind while coordinating their movements with the music.

## Brain teasers

Puzzles that require information to be held and manipulated in working memory can be terrific challenges.

■ **Crossword puzzles** are available for all skill levels and draw on manipulation of letters and words in working memory as well as cognitive flexibility.

■ **Sudoku** provides a similar challenge but

works with numbers and equations rather than letters and words.

■ **Classic spatial puzzles** like *Rubik's Cube* require children to be mentally flexible and consider spatial information in devising potential solutions.

■ **Cogmed and Lumosity** provide computer game puzzles and challenges that are designed to exercise working memory and attention.

## Resources

### Common Sense Media

- [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)
- [www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews](http://www.commonsensemedia.org/game-reviews)

### List of winning games from American Mensa's Mind Games competitions

- [mindgames.us.mensa.org/about/winning-games/](http://mindgames.us.mensa.org/about/winning-games/)

### Other programs

- [www.cogmed.com](http://www.cogmed.com)
- [www.lumosity.com](http://www.lumosity.com)

### Tips for using video games

- [www.mindinthemaking.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PFL-learning-and-videogames.pdf](http://www.mindinthemaking.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PFL-learning-and-videogames.pdf)