



# the family connection

News to use for families of young adolescents

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## Discovering How Your Child Is Smart

When you were growing up, being “smart” or “intelligent” likely meant having a high IQ. IQ, or “intelligence quotient,” is a term used as a result of research beginning in the early 1900s when psychologists and educators were trying to figure out why some students were better learners than others. Almost none of the researchers ever claimed that their tests fully measured intelligence, but like a lot of erroneous ideas, the IQ tests took hold and became standards for defining what makes someone “smart.”

Today educators understand that intelligence means different things to many people, and there is a new emphasis on the ways in which students are intelligent. You know this about your own children. One may be great at writing music but not so good at writing essay questions; another may get good grades in school but has almost no common sense. This does not mean they will not be successful in their adult lives.

Additionally, national standardized tests have become an annual event in nearly all schools. These tests measure primarily math and reading skills, the same skills generally measured on the IQ test. These standardized tests result in a single score taken during a single sitting in a student’s life and do not take into account the entire spectrum of a student’s education or his or her “smarts.”

Over the next few issues of The Family Connection, we will be examining current research into the ways students

are smart and what are useful approaches to make each child’s learning successful. Your middle grades teachers are attuned to this information; some even offer learning styles inventories at the beginning of the school year to be used by students, parents, and teachers to better connect with a student’s true intelligence. All students must learn to read, write, and master mathematical concepts; however, by understanding the many aspects of intelligence, each child will have a better opportunity to achieve.



Pediatricians need to ask two questions about media use at every well-child or well-adolescent visit: 1) How much screen time is being spent per day and 2) Is there a TV or computer in the child’s bedroom?

**Source:** American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, 2011

# What Could Happen?

Brain research tells us that young adolescents have trouble planning ahead and considering consequences. As a result, they often make poor decisions, especially when under pressure from their peers or when feeling defensive about something.

Knowing this about 10- to-15-year-olds should make parents ever more careful if their child owns a phone or other device that allows texting/ messaging. Sometimes, parents say to me, "Why? What could happen?"

- Your child is angry about something a fellow student has said or done, so he sends a mean text (that could be construed as bullying) to the student.
- While "fooling around," your child and her friends text a lewd rumor about another student as a joke. The text is passed on.
- At the mall, your child receives a "flash mob" text, encouraging kids at the mall to converge on a particular store to shoplift. You might think that your child is too smart or nice to do that, but if her friends are doing it, she will too.
- As a joke, some kids are taking photos of themselves almost naked. They text the photos to someone else, who then texts it to someone of the opposite sex.

Speak seriously and repeatedly to your child about the rules for texting. Let them know that the consequences for breaking the rules are grave and, in some instances, involve the law



## You were wondering...

*Now that my child is in middle school, should I "let go"? When is it time for independence?*

While 10- to 15-year-olds crave independence, most do not yet have the ability to make adult decisions. This is especially true when they are influenced by their peers or feel under pressure to take on responsibilities for which they aren't ready.

Young adolescents very much need (and want) the guidance and direction of adults, especially their parents. Middle schoolers try to differentiate themselves from the adults in their lives through dress, music, and attitude; but this differentiation isn't the same as separation.

Assistance with schoolwork, meeting obligations, navigating relationships are all areas in which your child will need help, even into the high school years. Little by little, you will see an increase in their ability to work things out on their own and become responsible, but not in the middle years. Think of when your two-year-old said, "Me do it!" You allowed that child some independence but were supervising and coaching the whole time. 10- to 15-year-olds are in the same sort of phase. Don't let go, they need you there!



### Health Tip for Teens

Many middle school students do not feel like eating breakfast when they first get up, yet we know that this is the most important meal of the day. Pack a breakfast that can be eaten on the way to school or right before school starts. Good things to pack: banana, apple, yogurt, string cheese, nutrition bar, granola, multigrain crackers, a sandwich, and water or juice (be careful of sugar content).



*The Family Connection* is published by Association for Middle Level Education as part of its ongoing commitment encouraging family and community involvement in the education of young adolescents. AMLE is unique among educational organizations because of its commitment to addressing the needs of middle level students—youth ages 10 to 15. Membership in AMLE is open to all persons interested in and concerned about middle level education. Teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, college students, and other educational professionals are well represented in AMLE's membership. Call 1-800-528-6672 to receive further information about membership and middle level resources.

**About the Editor:** Judith Baenen, a former classroom teacher, speaks and writes about middle grades students and the issues that affect them. She is author of Association for Middle Level Education's pamphlets for families of middle grades students *HELP* and *More HELP*.