

8th Grade Social Changes: What To Expect

In 8th grade, kids enjoy being the oldest students in school and look forward to the increased freedoms of high school.

by Patti Ghezzi



You've gotten used to the mood swings. You've accepted the fact that your child is taller than you, and you've (almost) convinced her that taller does not equal smarter. It took time, but you and your adolescent have learned to live under the same roof.

Now it's 8th grade. The middle school years are almost a memory, and high school looms large.

Eighth grade is the year kids turn 13 or 14, making them full-fledged teenagers, an intimidating concept for parents. On the plus side, 8th graders typically have settled into themselves after the initial years of puberty. There's a good chance the child you see each morning will resemble the child you said goodnight to the night before.

"By 8th grade, kids are a little more predictable," says Len Patton, principal at Rising Starr Middle School in Fayetteville, Ga. "You can definitely see the maturing take place between 7th and 8th grades....Magically, when they reappear as 8th graders, they've grown up a bit."

Evolving Friendships

Eighth-graders are still concerned with fitting in with their peers, yet finding that ideal group can be difficult. Kids develop at different paces. Longtime best friends may find that one is growing up faster than the other. Petty feuds may play out as melodramatic soap operas and lead to broken friendships.

Kids at this age, especially girls, tend to crave a best friend, but that best friend may change often. Even with a best pal, your 8th grader will probably want to find a larger group to hang out with. Some kids will be satisfied with a group of friends and not have one confidant.

In 8th grade, kids are looking ahead to the freedom they'll have in high school and most likely thinking about—maybe even stressing out about—relationships and dating.

Longing for Independence

By the time kids are in 8th grade, they want their parents to treat them as if they are no longer children, Patton says. Yet, they're still in middle school and need to be given responsibility gradually.

At school, most 8th graders are comfortable with middle school and relish being the oldest kids in the building. "They want us to recognize their ascent to being kings of the hill," Patton says.

And, they want freedom. Parents should give their 8th grader increasing responsibilities yet be ready to rein them back in when necessary. For example, your child may be mature enough to stay home alone with a friend on a Saturday night. But make it clear that you will yank that privilege if your child violates your rules.

As parents give their 8th grader more responsibility, they need to be on alert for inappropriate reactions to newfound freedom. Kids at this age are more prone to risk-taking, says Jerry Parks, a teacher at Georgetown Middle School in Kentucky; "as their world and individuality expands, they become more likely to test authority to evaluate how flexible the system at home and school will become."

But this doesn't mean a child is becoming a troublemaker. "Very often, their actions are merely to do just that—test the system—rather than indicate rebellion or incorrigibility," says Parks, author of *Help! My Child Is Starting Middle School!* "They see themselves as more mature than they are and often react to peer pressure, or other stimuli, rather than thinking things through."

In responding to a child who may be pushing boundaries, parents can rely on the solid

foundation they've built to get them through. "Parents should remember that the middle school years are especially transitional," Parks says. "They must allow a certain measure of hormone-driven irrationality and not assume that their parenting skills up to this point have been all for naught."

Continue the routine of asking your child "How was your day?" But don't take it personally if your child continues to keep you in the dark about much of his school life. "Parents should not overly pressure for answers they are not easily given," Parks says. Even if your child doesn't say much, the fact that you offer the chance to talk will let him know he can go to you about school when needed.

Be on the lookout for drastic behavior changes that could indicate a more serious problem, such as toxic friendships or drugs, Parks says. But be aware that most kids will not go this route. "Parents must always remember that, the great majority of the time, when the middle school changes run their course, the child will generally revert back to the core values and upbringing which parents taught them," he says.

Homework Headaches

Eighth grade can be frustrating for parents waiting for their child to do his homework without prodding. Unfortunately, kids at this age are often hard-pressed to see the point of homework, and they are frequently too disorganized to turn it in when they do take time to do it.

Thus, parents may need to continue intervening. "Parents should assign a required homework time—generally 10 minutes per grade level, in total, per night. Cell phones, TV, MP3 players, online time, and such should be strictly off limits," Parks says. "Even if they say they have no homework, the child should be required to at least read something related to school. Parents should look over—and ideally talk over—the work accomplished, and adjust privileges accordingly."

Let your child know that by the time she hits high school, you will expect her to manage her homework herself. Make sure she knows that the stakes will be higher in high school, with all class grades showing up on the transcript colleges will see.

Watching your 8th grader settle into his teenage self can be exhilarating and unsettling. You can still see glimmers of your child, and you can glimpse the adult he is on his way to becoming. It's a year of loosening the reins and watching, cautiously, as your child takes those first steps toward independence. And it's a year when, as a parent, you still have the power to pull those reins tight when necessary.

For more information, read ["8th Grade Academics: What To Expect"](#)

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