

# PARENT transition

## 6th grade Parent Transition Experience

To help ease the tension of the journey into 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we've provided questions and discussion guides for you and your students to work through on the topic of faith. Middle school is the time students choose to make their faith their own. As parents, you are the most influential people in their lives. So, these discussions will center on your faith journeys and will equip your students with a vocabulary to express their own doubts and questions.

Remember these tips for better conversations with middle schoolers:

**Don't Freak:** Panic shuts down conversations. Don't show shock at what they tell you (even though you may be!). Always try answering with, "Me too. I remember when I experienced something similar when...."

**Be Real:** You'll have to model vulnerability. Students have a highly sensitive phony detector.

**Go with the flow:** Never force conversation. Quantity time leads to quality time. The great conversation might not come in the next few days, but you're laying the groundwork for a great conversation in the future (probably when he/she is avoiding doing homework one night).

**Begin with the end in mind:** This transition in your relationship is a long, long process. They are not going to be fully mature adults for a number of years. However, you need to start prepping your relationship now so that it will thrive later.

Options on how to do this:

3 conversations over 3 nights

Simply set aside some uninterrupted time with your 6<sup>th</sup> grader. You might choose to put it on the calendar or send him/her an invitation to make it official. It might be three trips to your favorite ice cream parlor or three nights on the back deck. Whatever location works for you and your student, the key is for it to be consistent and feel official.

Overnight Camping Trip

These conversations could also be spread into Friday night, Saturday morning, and Saturday night conversations while on a trip together. Go whitewater rafting on the Oconee; try caving Raccoon Mountain in Chattanooga; or hit up one of the many great state parks for a special weekend.

Weekend Trip

Is the great outdoors not your cup of tea? Head to a downtown hotel or out of town to a sporting event. Or you could try as many restaurants as you can in. Savannah or visit the lodges at the state park. You don't have to be around a campfire to make it memorable, but you do need to make it a special one-on-one time.

Below you will find three discussion guides. They are guides, not blueprints or scripts. As you know, conversations are best when they happen organically. However, sometimes students need help opening up. That's what the following questions are for.

## Discussion Guide 1 – Physical and Mental Changes

Do you remember what it was like to be a middle schooler? Do you remember always being tired, your joints aching, or realizing that you're the one who smells? Do you remember having a hard time concentrating in class, getting obsessed with a cute guy or girl, or always changing your look (from country to preppy to punk and then back to country)?

Well, guess what? There is a perfectly good explanation for all of that and your sons and daughters are about to go through all of those changes as well. They are changing physically and growing at a very fast rate. And the visible changes are small in comparison to all the ways they are changing mentally. So, for the next few minutes, let's open up and try to share a little about what you went through and what your student is experiencing.

**Parents:** Can you think of an embarrassing "phase" you went through during middle school? I am sure your student would love to hear about that.

**Parents:** Can you remember any of the physical changes you went through in middle school and the challenges those brought? Take a minute and read this quote together:

*The middle school brain is always changing. One change is that we become aware that other people in the room might be thinking about us.*

**Parents:** Do you feel that was true when you were a middle schooler?

**Students:** Do you feel those things are true in your group of friends?

**Students:** Has there been anything about puberty that you've always wondered about but haven't had a chance to talk about?

**Students:** When do you feel the most self-conscious?



## Discussion 2 - Communication

Over the next few years, your parent/child relationship is going to go through an overhaul. It is the transition from an instructing, parent/child-like relationship to a guide/mentoring relationship. Often, there is a natural disconnect that occurs during this developmental stage that forces the change. However, the more healthy method is to keep the lines of communication open and ease through this transition. It won't be easy. There will be fights and disagreements. However, the ability to communicate is beneficial for the parent and the student.

**Parents:** What was your relationship with your parents like in middle school?

*Parents are still the number one source students go to when they have tough questions or are in tough situations.*

**Students:** Does that ring true for you?

**Students and Parents:** What would happen if a parent and student truly went cold turkey on their relationship and didn't continue to communicate until the student got to college?

**Students and Parents:** How do you argue? Are you a shouter, an under-your-breath talker, or a withdrawer?

**Students:** We all need room to cool off and be left alone. How will you communicate that to each other in the future?

**Students:** What is the best way for your parents to tell you they want you to change your actions?

**Parents:** How would you like your students to tell you they disagree with you?



## Discussion 3 – Faith of Their Own

*Just like a student's body and mind are going through changes, so is his/her faith during middle school. For the first time, students begin to process whether they believe what their parents believe. It may sound odd, but students saying, "I don't believe in God" at this age can be healthy. After all, it shows they are working through their beliefs for themselves and they are comfortable expressing their doubts.*

*The goal of this conversation is not to convince them to join the mission field or become nuns. No, we want them to hear your stories. Allow them to see your faith as something that has evolved and changed. Allow them to hear about your doubts and questions. This will give them the courage they need to start processing their faith and will equip them with the words to express their ideas.*

Start by reading 1 Timothy 4:12 aloud:

*"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."*

**Parents:** Do you remember feeling like you were "underestimated"?

**Students:** Can you think of a time when you felt like adults "looked down" on you?

**Students:** What are the biggest questions students your age are asking about God?

**Parents:** What ideas about God do you feel you inherited from your parents?

**Students:** What are the big ideas you've learned about God?

**Students:** What are the big questions about God and faith that run through your mind as you try to go to sleep at night?

**Students:** All those hard questions about God have answers but often require each person to talk about them and think about them for a long time and then make up their minds for themselves. What can your parents do to help you on that quest to find answers?

**Parents:** Please take a few minutes and share your faith journeys. Here are a few tips for sharing your stories:

- *Be prepared.* Spend some time and think this through. It may be a good idea to write it out so you can stay on track. Figure out what it is about your story of redemption that your students need to hear.
- *Be appropriately honest.* Students need to know the sin and redemption of your story. In some cases, you may want to filter some of the distracting details. In others, those details may be exactly what students need to hear to connect with your story.
- *Be bold.* This is not easy. But imagine a generation of kids who are willing to boldly tell their stories to the next generation and be used by God to tell his story!