

The word, "middle," would seem to evoke thoughts of neutrality. Yet terms like, "don't put me in the middle," and "don't make me the middle man," seem to connote a negative emotion. Indeed, the term "middle school" to some evokes negative thoughts as it is often dubbed as the place where kids are at "a difficult age."

If you are now, or have ever been, the parent of a middle school aged child, you know some of the issues. Many attribute it to "raging hormones." It is more complex. The physical aspect of the child is just one part of it.

There are five aspects of our being that grow and mature over the years: physical, intellectual, emotional, behavioral and spiritual. For each of those five areas, there is a normal pattern of growth. If someone is deemed to be exhibiting behavior that is not "age appropriate," it would indicate that their behavioral growth is not developing at the rate that would be considered normal.

What makes a middle school age child so complex, is that the child can be ahead of normal development in some areas, behind normal development in others and on track in yet others. It is this wide range of developmental growth in a child that can be problematic.

In the elementary years, often children who are on a course to be developmentally behind do not stand out. As time goes on, that trajectory of slower development begins to show a more obvious gap in the middle school years. This can be true for all aspects of development and can create doubt and concerns for both the child and parents.

Take an example of a young man with abnormally slow physical development. Nothing is physically wrong, but his growth hormones just haven't kicked in yet. . In his middle school years, where physical size means so much to peers, he begins to notice he is smaller than most other boys. If his emotional development is normal or above normal, he will likely weather the storm of his feelings of physical inadequacy. But if his emotional and behavioral development is also behind, and he does not have appropriate parental support, he may begin to deal with the issue in inappropriate ways.

So one child may be all over the board in terms of the appropriateness of his or her development. Now, put 700+ of these children under the same roof and you have a middle school.

Fortunately, for General McLane, we have professionals who enjoy and welcome the challenge of working with this age student. And, they now have a systematic way to deal with these challenges. They have developed "pyramid of interventions" for both the behavioral and academic areas.

At the bottom of the pyramid are interventions that are least restrictive. As interventions at the bottom of the pyramid are implemented, most children will respond and improve. For those who do not, other interventions further up the pyramid are employed. Parents are brought into the process about a third of the way up the pyramid.

Having a systematic approach to dealing with the children of middle school age is critical. Without a system, the chaos going on inside the child is only amplified. The principals of Parker, Mr. Hansen and Mr. Buto, and the teachers there, are to be commended for their work with these children. With caring professionals like these, the word, middle, in front of school, can only mean good things.