

Dear Family,

We want your child to be successful in school, and that means going beyond the basics. Excelling in academic classes is important, but students also need to know how to learn, make good decisions, handle strong emotions, and get along with others.

This week, we'll begin the ***Second Step*** Middle School Program, which focuses on skills and concepts that are designed to help students both in and out of school.

These include:

- **Mindsets and Goals:** Students learn about ways to grow their brains and get smarter, along with research-based strategies for achieving goals and handling difficult situations.
- **Values and Friendships:** Students learn to identify their personal values and use those values to make good decisions and build strong, positive relationships.
- **Thoughts, Emotions, and Decisions:** Students learn the positive role emotions play in their lives, how to handle unhelpful thoughts and strong emotions, and specific strategies for calming down.
- **Serious Peer Conflicts:** Students learn how to identify and avoid serious conflicts, resolve conflicts that can't be avoided, think about other people's perspectives, and help stop bullying and harassment at school.

If you have any questions about the ***Second Step*** Middle School Program, please do not hesitate to contact me for more information. Thank you for supporting your child in learning the skills and concepts that lead to success in school and in life.

Grade 8, Lesson 1

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson will help your child understand some of the changes that happen during adolescence and how the social-emotional skills taught in the Second Step Program can help your child be successful and get along with others, in middle school and beyond.

Family Lesson Question

Ask about any changes your child has noticed in friends now that they're all growing up and what your child thinks about these changes.

Grade 8, Lesson 2

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson will help your child reflect on personal identity by asking the question "Who am I?" Your child will learn that people's identities change over time and that adolescence is a period when people typically explore questions about who they are.

Family Lesson Question

Ask each member of the family to answer the question "Who am I?" Follow up by asking which are the most important aspects of each person's identity and why.

Grade 8, Lesson 3

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will continue to think about identity and how people sometimes "switch" identities to fit in with different social groups. The lesson explains that it's okay to change identities depending on the group you're in, but your child doesn't have to change in ways that don't feel right.

Family Lesson Question

Ask if your child ever feels the need to switch identities to fit in, and how that feels. Tell your child about a time you felt you had to change in a way that didn't feel right so you would be accepted by a group.

Grade 8, Lesson 4

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will think about how the world could be a better place. Your child will also reflect on personal interests and how to develop them to create that better world.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child, "What are some ways the world could be a better place?" Ask how you can support your child's interests, and together, think about creative ways those interests can be developed to create a better world.

Grade 8, Lesson 5

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn that making mistakes and failing can feel bad, but they're also an opportunity to get better at something. Your child will think about ways to get better using these techniques: asking for help, using a new strategy, and working harder.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child to describe a personal experience that involved making a mistake or failing at something. Together think about how that experience can be used as an opportunity to get better. Talk about a time you failed at something and how you learned from the experience.

Grade 8, Lesson 6

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn about SMART goals. SMART goals are Specific, Measurable, Action-Oriented, Realistic, and Timely.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what SMART goals are. Talk about goals you and your child have and your plans for achieving those goals.

Grade 8, Lesson 7

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn how to use If-Then Plans. Research shows that when people make an If-Then Plan, they're twice as likely to follow through. Using an If-Then Plan is also a great way for students to prepare for difficult or important situations before they happen.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what an If-Then Plan is. Work together to make a plan for how your child can respond positively to a difficult situation he or she might encounter at home.

Grade 8, Lesson 8

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn about values—"the things that matter to you most"—and how remembering their values can help people make good decisions, especially in difficult situations.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child, "What are some of your values?" Describe your own values, and talk about the ones you have in common and what they mean to each of you.

Grade 8, Lesson 9

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will explore how remembering their values can help people build positive relationships. Your child will think about ways to form positive relationships with people who share similar interests.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child to think of one value everyone in the family shares. Talk about ways everyone in your family can help show that value.

Grade 8, Lesson 10

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn that relationships often change during middle school, when interests and identities are changing. Your child will learn strategies for handling these changes in a healthy way.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child about any recent changes in friendships at school. Reassure your child that relationships change throughout our lives, and talk about ways to handle these changes.

Grade 8, Lesson 11

Family Lesson Summary

As children grow up, they form close relationships with their peers. Sometimes friendships can become negative and hurtful. This week, your child will learn how to identify negative relationships and think about what to do when a relationship turns negative.

Family Lesson Question

Talk to your child about the different kinds of relationships kids have at school. Ask if any seem negative or unhealthy. Discuss what to do when a relationship turns negative.

Grade 8, Lesson 12

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will continue to practice identifying negative relationships.

Family Lesson Question

Talk to your child about the kinds of behavior that signal a friendship needs to end. Ask your child what would be a good way to end a friendship.

Grade 8, Lesson 13

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn how emotions affect decision making, and that even when your child's emotions feel very strong, he or she can still make good decisions.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child to describe a time when he or she was angry or upset. Together, talk about the kinds of good decisions your child can make the next time his or her emotions are that strong.

Grade 8, Lesson 14

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will continue to learn about emotions and explore how remembering values can help him or her make good decisions when experiencing strong emotions, like being angry or upset.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what it feels like to have someone get angry at him or her. Talk about how it's still possible to make good decisions even when someone is angry with you.

Grade 8, Lesson 15

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will explore how his or her thoughts affect the decisions he or she makes, and how to recognize and handle the unhelpful thoughts that may lead to bad decisions.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child about a time he or she felt rejected, and how that made him or her feel. Ask what kinds of unhelpful thoughts people can have when they feel rejected, and think of people your child can go to for help if he or she experiences thoughts like that.

Grade 8, Lesson 16

Family Lesson Summary

This week, your child will learn skills for calming down. Identifying good ways to calm down can help your child make good decisions even when he or she is feeling angry or upset.

Family Lesson Question

Talk to your child about what you do to calm down when you feel upset or angry. Ask your child about the things he or she can do to calm down in difficult situations.

Grade 8, Lesson 17

Family Lesson Summary

Research shows that taking slow, deep breaths is an effective way to calm down. This week, your child will practice using slow breathing when he or she feels anxious.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child about situations that might make him or her feel anxious, either at school or at home. Discuss using slow breathing to calm down and come up with a plan your child can use in these situations.

Grade 8, Lesson 18

Family Lesson Summary

Making assumptions is something people do every day, but making negative assumptions can lead to conflicts. In this lesson, your child will practice thinking of multiple assumptions about situations, including positive assumptions, as a way to avoid conflicts.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what an assumption is. Tell him or her about a time you made a wrong assumption that led to an argument or conflict. Work together to think of different assumptions you could have made in that situation.

Grade 8, Lesson 19

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson uses an engaging activity to practice exploring how making assumptions affects the decisions people make. Practicing the skills he or she has learned will help your child use them in real life.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child about a time he or she made a decision based on an assumption. Talk together about how assumptions can affect decisions, both good and bad.

Grade 8, Lesson 20

Family Lesson Summary

Serious conflicts between students can make them feel unsafe and distract them from their schoolwork. This lesson is the first of 5 on this topic. In this lesson, your child will identify ways to avoid getting into serious conflicts.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what kinds of conflicts can happen between students at school. Talk about the consequences of those conflicts, and ask your child how he or she avoids getting involved in them.

Grade 8, Lesson 21

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson uses an engaging activity to practice helping friends recognize and avoid serious conflicts. Practicing the skills he or she has learned will help your child use them in real life.

Family Lesson Question

Tell your child about a time you helped someone avoid a conflict. Ask your child if he or she has ever helped a friend avoid a conflict. Together, discuss some ideas for how to help friends avoid serious conflicts.

Grade 8, Lesson 22

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson teaches students to identify reasons why conflicts may be hard to resolve and to explore ways they can help their friends in these situations. This practice helps students come up with strategies they can use in their own lives.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child about a time he or she was able to help a friend with a conflict. Talk with your child about why conflicts are sometimes hard to resolve. Together, come up with ideas for how best to help a friend in these situations.

Grade 8, Lesson 23

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson uses an engaging activity to practice helping friends resolve conflicts. Practicing the skills he or she has learned will help your child use them in real life.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child about some of the problems that people have when resolving conflicts, and talk together about how to handle those problems.

Grade 8, Lesson 24

Family Lesson Summary

Children sometimes have trouble dealing with the results of a serious conflict, even after the conflict is over. In this week's lesson, your child will learn to identify ways to help friends recover from serious conflicts.

Family Lesson Question

Tell your child about a time you needed help recovering from a serious conflict. Talk about how your friends were able to help you do this. Ask your child how he or she would help a friend recover after a serious conflict.

Grade 8, Lesson 25

Family Lesson Summary

Sexual harassment is common in middle school and can cause emotional harm to students. In this week's lesson, your child will learn to recognize sexual harassment and identify ways to help stop it.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what he or she thinks school would be like if there were no harassment.

Grade 8, Lesson 26

Family Lesson Summary

This week's lesson teaches students that it's okay to feel nervous about starting high school. Discussing common fears about high school lets students know their concerns are normal and helps them feel like they belong.

Family Lesson Question

Ask your child what he or she is thinking about starting high school. Talk about what things will be different and what things will stay the same. Together, come up with a list of people your child can go to when high school gets challenging.

CHECK OUT PARENTEENCONNECT.ORG

ParentTeenConnect.org, a free website for parents and their teens created by the makers of the Second Step Program, is a great resource for middle school families. It provides expert advice and practical tools for dealing with real parent-teen issues.

GET TALKING WITH PARENTEEN CONNECT

At ParentTeenConnect.org, you can hear from real parents and teens about the issues that cause conflict in their lives—including screen time, independence, responsibility, and communication—and get expert advice. Visit ParentTeenConnect.org at home with your child, select a topic together, and get talking!