

Understanding Your Child's Development & Behavior

A Parent/Guardian Resource Guide for Middle School, Ages 11–13

This excerpt was developed for MPCSD parents/guardians of middle school students and includes developmental context, what to expect at home, how to support your child, and age-appropriate sleep and screen time guidance for grades 6 through 8 (ages 11–13).



Sources & Attribution

The developmental descriptions in this guide are original summaries prepared by the District, informed by and paraphrased from two published works on child development, *Yardsticks: Child and Adolescent Development, Ages 4–14* (Wood, 2017) and *Developmental Profiles: Pre-Birth Through Adolescence* (Marotz & Allen, 2023), and are not reproduced text from either book.

Sleep ranges are drawn from the American Academy of Sleep Medicine's pediatric consensus statement (Paruthi et al., 2016), endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. Screen time guidance reflects the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2026 media use guidance, which replaced the AAP's earlier hour-based recommendations with the “5 Cs” framework: Child, Content, Calm, Crowding Out, and Communication for evaluating screen use in context, alongside the Family Media Plan tool from HealthyChildren.org.

Full citations for every source appear in the References section at the end of this guide. These are general guidelines, as individual needs vary, and your child's teacher or pediatrician can help you tailor them.

A Shared Foundation for Partnership

Behavior Is Communication

Children, especially younger ones, often can't put their feelings into words. Challenging behavior is usually a message: “I'm overwhelmed,” “I need connection,” or “I don't know how to handle this yet.” When we approach behavior from the lens of curiosity, we respond more effectively.

Most Challenging Behavior Is Developmental

The behaviors that puzzle or frustrate us are often textbook for the age. The defiance of an 11-year-old, the perfectionism of a 7-year-old, the silliness of a 4-year-old, these aren't problems to fix. They're signs of growth happening right on schedule.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

Resilience Is Built Through Appropriate Discomfort

Children grow stronger when they experience, and move through, manageable frustration, disappointment, and challenge. Our shared goal isn't to remove all discomfort, but to support children in developing the tools to navigate it. That work happens at school and at home, together.

Understanding the AAP's “5 Cs” Screen Time Framework

In January 2026, the American Academy of Pediatrics updated its media use guidance for the first time in a decade. The AAP moved away from fixed hour-based limits (such as the earlier “2 hours a day” rule) and replaced them with a framework built around context and quality, often summarized as the “5 Cs.” Rather than asking “how many minutes,” the 5 Cs ask what a screen is actually doing for a specific child. The screen time guidance throughout this guide reflects that shift.

Child	The same amount or type of screen use can affect two children very differently. Temperament, age, and individual needs matter more than a universal number.
Content	What a child is watching, playing, or scrolling matters as much as how long. High-quality, age-appropriate content is different from fast-paced or algorithm-driven feeds.
Calm	Screens are sometimes used to soothe big emotions. Occasional use this way is normal, but it's worth noticing if a screen becomes the only tool for managing frustration or boredom.
Crowding Out	The central question: is screen use displacing sleep, physical activity, homework, or in-person relationships? If so, that's the signal to adjust — regardless of the clock.
Communication	Ongoing, non-judgmental conversation about what kids see and do online — including a family media plan — matters more than a fixed limit enforced without discussion.

One useful distinction in the updated guidance: recreational and social screen use (games, social media, video) is not the same conversation as educational technology (homework platforms, learning apps). Both call for attention, but not the same rules. For older children and teens, the AAP recommends building a Family Media Plan together (consistent, family-agreed expectations) rather than relying on a single universal number.

AGE 11

6th Grade “Restless, Argumentative, and Hungry”

OVERVIEW AT A GLANCE

Restless, talkative, argumentative. Mood swings, hunger, and fatigue dominate the day. Abstract thinking emerging unevenly. Peer approval rising sharply; adult authority tested. Beginning of adolescence.

This Year, Developmentally

Eleven brings a marked shift. Children become more restless, more talkative, and more willing to argue, especially with the adults they trust most. The cooperative spirit of ten gives way to a more questioning, sometimes contrary stance. Mood swings return, energy levels fluctuate, and hunger and fatigue can dominate the school day. This is not a regression; it is the beginning of adolescence, with all its expansion of identity, autonomy, and capacity.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

What You May See at Home

At home, elevens push back. They argue rules, claim unfairness, and may treat parents as the source of most problems. They eat enormous amounts, sleep unpredictably, and shift moods quickly. Siblings can become flash points. Privacy becomes more important, and bedroom doors may close more often. Underneath the friction, elevens still need close adult relationships, even when they appear to reject them.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

How You Can Support at Home

- Choose battles carefully; not every friction requires a response
- Address concerns privately, one-on-one, away from peer audience
- Give real choice and voice within firm, clear limits
- Acknowledge the physical realities of hunger, fatigue, and rapid growth
- Model respectful disagreement rather than demanding immediate compliance
- Prioritize the relationship over winning the immediate power struggle
- Listen for the real concern underneath the argument
- Hold limits firmly while respecting the emerging need for autonomy

RECOMMENDED SLEEP

9–12 hours per night, trending toward 8–10 as adolescence approaches

Source: Paruthi et al., 2016 / American Academy of Sleep Medicine consensus statement.

SCREEN TIME GUIDANCE

Apply the 5 Cs rather than a strict hour count: watch for Crowding Out of sleep, activity, or homework, and keep Communication open as requests for more independence online increase.

Keep chargers and devices outside bedrooms overnight, and talk regularly — without judgment — about apps, games, and content (the “Content” and “Calm” Cs).

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics (2026) media use guidance — the “5 Cs” framework — and HealthyChildren.org Family Media Plan.

AGE 12

7th Grade “Enthusiastic, Group-Oriented, More Even”

OVERVIEW AT A GLANCE

Enthusiastic, group-oriented, more even-tempered than 11. Abstract thinking strengthens noticeably. Enjoys debate, current events, and serious conversation. Wants to be taken seriously by adults.

This Year, Developmentally

Twelve often brings a return of warmth and enthusiasm. Children are more even-tempered than at eleven, more open to adults again, and strongly oriented toward their peer group. They want to belong, to contribute, and to be seen as competent. Humor, energy, and a willingness to try new things define the year. Abstract thinking strengthens noticeably, and twelves can engage in genuine intellectual work when adults treat them as serious learners.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

What You May See at Home

At home, twelves are often more pleasant than at eleven. They engage in family conversation, contribute to plans, and may take on more responsibility. They still want privacy, but bedroom doors open more often. Friendships remain central, but family connection regains some ground. Eating and sleeping patterns may remain irregular, and physical changes continue at varied rates across the cohort.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

How You Can Support at Home

- Treat twelve-year-olds as capable, contributing members of the community
- Give real responsibility with matching real accountability
- Invite them into meaningful discussion about expectations and consequences
- Address concerns through genuine conversation rather than lecture
- Respect their peer relationships as central to their world
- Support ethical thinking through real dilemmas, not hypotheticals
- Recognize competence and growing capacity in specific, honest terms
- Maintain warmth even when they distance themselves

RECOMMENDED SLEEP

9–12 hours per night, trending toward 8–10
Source: Paruthi et al., 2016 / American Academy of Sleep Medicine consensus statement.

SCREEN TIME GUIDANCE

Build a Family Media Plan together and revisit it as apps and interests change; agreed-upon limits (the “Communication” C) matter more at this age than limits handed down.

Talk directly about social media, messaging apps, and the Content they're consuming — buy-in, not just enforcement, drives follow-through.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics (2026) media use guidance, the “5 Cs” framework, and HealthyChildren.org Family Media Plan.

8th Grade “Introspective, Private, and Identity-Building”

OVERVIEW AT A GLANCE

Introspective, private, focused on identity. Self-critical, sometimes secretive. Abstract thinking deepens. Sensitive to authenticity in adults. Sleep is often inadequate, affecting mood and capacity.

This Year, Developmentally

Thirteen turns inward again. Children become more private, more self-conscious, and more focused on identity. Friendships intensify and reorganize, and adult relationships often become more reserved, with secrets and privacy taking on new importance. Mood shifts can be sharp, and self-criticism can be harsh. The work of the year is figuring out who they are becoming, and adults are no longer the central audience for that work, though they remain essential partners in it.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

What You May See at Home

At home, thirteens may seem to disappear into their rooms, their phones, or their friendships. Conversation can become minimal, and what does happen often involves push-back, irritation, or one-word answers. Yet thirteens still notice and care about family relationships; they simply express that care less openly. One-on-one time, in low-pressure settings, often opens conversation that group settings cannot.

Developmental overview adapted from Wood (2017) and Marotz & Allen (2023). See References.

How You Can Support at Home

- Respect privacy and honor the need for personal space
- Choose one-on-one time over group conversations for hard topics
- Listen without immediately trying to fix, advise, or redirect
- Avoid public correction; at thirteen it lands as humiliation
- Accept some withdrawal without personalizing it
- Address serious issues in low-pressure settings (car rides, walks, meals)
- Recognize the impact of sleep deprivation on mood and behavior
- Be authentic; performance is quickly detected and rejected

RECOMMENDED SLEEP

8–10 hours per night

Source: Paruthi et al., 2016 / American Academy of Sleep Medicine consensus statement.

SCREEN TIME GUIDANCE

Protect sleep from screens above all — no devices in the bedroom overnight. This is the clearest Crowding Out risk at this age, regardless of total screen hours.

Check in regularly on social media use without being intrusive, and keep Communication open about content, friendships, and how screen use makes them feel (Calm).

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics (2026) media use guidance — the “5 Cs” framework — and HealthyChildren.org Family Media Plan.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2016). Media and young minds. *Pediatrics*, 138(5), e20162591. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2591>

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2026). Media use in children and adolescents: Policy statement update. *Pediatrics*. (2026 update replacing hour-based screen time limits with the “5 Cs” framework — Child, Content, Calm, Crowding Out, and Communication.)

American Academy of Pediatrics / HealthyChildren.org. (n.d.). How to make a family media plan. <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx>

Marotz, L. R., & Allen, K. E. (2023). *Developmental profiles: Pre-birth through adolescence* (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Paruthi, S., Brooks, L. J., D'Ambrosio, C., Hall, W. A., Kotagal, S., Lloyd, R. M., Malow, B. A., Maski, K., Nichols, C., Quan, S. F., Rosen, C. L., Troester, M. M., & Wise, M. S. (2016). Recommended amount of sleep for pediatric populations: A consensus statement of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, 12(6), 785–786. <https://doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.5866>

Wood, C. (2017). *Yardsticks: Child and adolescent development, ages 4–14* (4th ed.). Center for Responsive Schools.

Note: The age-by-age developmental descriptions, “what you may see at home” narratives, and support strategies in this guide are original summaries organized by the District, drawing on general concepts from the sources above. No text has been copied or closely paraphrased from Wood (2017) or Marotz & Allen (2023); readers who would like the authors' full discussion of each age are encouraged to consult those books directly. Sleep ranges reflect the American Academy of Sleep Medicine's 2016 consensus statement. Screen time guidance reflects the American Academy of Pediatrics' 2026 media use update and may be revised again as guidance evolves.