



Parents and Guardians,

Your child is participating in a school-based youth tobacco prevention program entitled **Right Decisions, Right Now: Be Tobacco Free**, created by Lifetime Learning Systems, Inc., and funded by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company. The goal of the program is to help prevent tobacco use among adolescents and have them remain tobacco free for life. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children who report following a family calendar, eating meals together, and talking with their families, are less likely to smoke.¹ By communicating regularly with your child about the consequences of tobacco use, you can positively impact their decision to be tobacco free. Tell your child that you don't want them to use tobacco—take a stand. Find opportunities that will allow you to have an ongoing dialogue on the topic so your child will remain tobacco free.

Middle school means changes for both you and your child. Your child is experiencing new things and making more decisions independently. One decision your child may be thinking about is whether or not to try tobacco. According to the CDC, young people are most likely to try smoking for the first time between the ages of 11 and 15, or grades 6 through 10.²

To combat peer pressure and help your child make better, more informed decisions, this youth tobacco prevention program includes activities to enhance decision-making and refusal skills, along with lessons about the health consequences associated with tobacco use.

This guide provides information about tobacco use among adolescents that you can use during your discussions. Talk to your child about what they've learned in class. You will also find a chart with information about some of the developmental stages middle schoolers experience and tips you may find useful as you help your child navigate the middle school years.

Facts you should know about tobacco use among adolescents:

- Every day in the United States, approximately 3,600 youths between the ages of 12 and 17 initiate cigarette smoking, and about 1,100 young people become daily smokers.³
- Six percent of middle schoolers are current cigarette smokers.³ That number jumps to 20% in high school.³ Four percent of middle school boys and 13% of high school boys are current smokeless tobacco users.³ (Current is defined as having used tobacco on at least one day in the 30 days preceding the survey.)
- Health risks can be immediate, affecting the child's breathing⁴, for example.
- Nicotine is often the first drug used by young people who use alcohol and other drugs.⁴
- Since nicotine addiction can occur during adolescence, young tobacco users are likely to become adult tobacco users.⁴
- Young people have just as hard a time quitting smoking as adults. Most young people who smoke indicate they would like to quit, and have made numerous, usually unsuccessful attempts to do so.⁴

¹ CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Get Into Your Kid's Head*. Available online at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tobacco_control_programs/campaigns_events/got_a_minute/got_a_minute_brochure

² CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *2000 Surgeon General's Report – Reducing Tobacco Use; Highlights: The Impact of Educational Programs*. Available online at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2000/highlights/education/index.htm

³ CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *Fact Sheet—Youth and Tobacco Use: Current Estimates (updated May 2009)*. Available online at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/youth_data/tobacco_use/index.htm

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Preventing Tobacco Use Among Young People: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 1994. Available online at http://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/NN/B/C/F/T/_/nncbct.pdf

Why Most Adolescents Don't Use Tobacco

Most young people don't smoke cigarettes or use smokeless tobacco. However, they might think about it or even try it. Aside from a personal commitment to be tobacco free, what influences young people to abstain or stop using tobacco?⁴

- strong parental support not to use tobacco
- the health risks
- having friends who are tobacco free
- the difficulty of obtaining tobacco products
- the cost of tobacco products
- school programs that teach them to identify social influences of tobacco use and provide refusal skills

With this information, you can positively influence your child's decision to be tobacco free by:⁴

- letting your child know you disapprove of him or her using tobacco.
- being involved in your child's free time.
- talking with your child about the health consequences of tobacco use.
- encouraging academic achievement and school involvement.

What Prompts Adolescents to Experiment with or Regularly Use Tobacco?

In middle school, adolescents experience a lot of changes and challenges. Friends become an ever-increasing and powerful influence, and, as a result, adolescents might face peer pressure to try new things. Or, they may put pressure on themselves to engage in risk behaviors like experimenting with tobacco or alcohol because they think such behaviors will help them "fit in." Some common factors that may influence young people to use tobacco include:

- having friends, peers, or parents who use tobacco⁵
- overestimating the number of people who smoke⁵
- linking smoking with a "positive" social image and bonding with a peer group⁵
- perceiving tobacco use as a transition to adulthood⁵
- underestimating the health consequences of tobacco use⁶
- not fully understanding that nicotine in tobacco is as addictive as heroin, cocaine, or alcohol⁶
- having low levels of academic achievement⁴
- having low self-esteem or low self-image⁴
- lacking skills to resist influences to use tobacco⁴



Tips for Talking with Your Child About Tobacco

The more you talk to your child about a wide range of issues—schoolwork, friends, sports, TV shows, etc.—the easier it is to talk about specific topics such as tobacco. The most important thing you can do for your child is keep the lines of communication open. Talk to them on a regular basis. If your child is not approaching you with questions about sensitive topics like tobacco, take the initiative and start the conversation. Here are some ways you could bring up the topic:

- Say, "I understand you've been talking in school about peer pressure and the health consequences of tobacco use. Tell me about some of the things you've learned."
- If you see smoking portrayed in the media, say, "I wonder why the director had that one guy light up a cigarette in the last scene. What do you think?"
- If you and your child see a young person smoking, use it as an opening by saying something like, "How much tobacco use are you seeing in your school? I wonder if it's the same as when I was your age."

Here are some tips to consider when you talk with your child.

How to talk about tobacco use

- Talk with your child, don't lecture—children respond more favorably to discussions than to lectures.
- In general conversation, emphasize all the things your child does well—especially things like taking care of their health—rather than the things they don't do well.
- Demonstrate respect for your child's opinions. Show that you're listening. Ask follow-up questions.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Reducing Tobacco Use: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2000. Chapter Three. Available online at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgr/2000/complete_report/pdfs/chapter3.pdf

⁶ CDC. Healthy Youth! Health Topics. *Tobacco Use: School Health Guidelines, Summary*. Available online at www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/tobacco/guidelines/summary.htm

What to talk about

- Talk about the health consequences, such as cancer of the lungs, mouth, esophagus, pancreas; shortness of breath; emphysema; stroke; etc. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/sgf/2004/index/htm.
- Ask your child what they think might be appealing or unappealing about tobacco.
- Tell your child that if someone offers them tobacco and they feel pressure to use it, they can always refuse by putting the blame on you (“I know my parents; they’ll find out and then they’ll ground me for life.”)
- Children want moral guidance. Communicate your values to your child and be sure they know where you stand when it comes to tobacco use.

What to Do If Your Child Uses Tobacco and Wants to Quit

Support your child’s decision to be tobacco free. Help him or her out by speaking to your child’s guidance counselor, school nurse, or a healthcare professional to learn about local resources available to your child and strategies you can use to help your child. You can help your child by:^{1,7}

- encouraging them to stop immediately.
- helping them stay busy—maybe by suggesting a new hobby to try.
- reminding them to drink lots of water and non-caffeinated drinks, take deep breaths, eat regular meals, and keep active.
- talking about their thoughts and feelings.
- helping them stay clear of places where smoking is allowed.
- encouraging them to hang around with friends who don’t use tobacco.

For more information, check out the resources available from the CDC at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/index.htm.

Resources

There are additional organizations and resources that can provide information on these and other lifestyle behaviors. The listing in this booklet does not imply that the organization endorses this program, nor does it constitute an endorsement of the organization by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company.

BOOKS

- Borden, Sarah, et al. *Middle School: How to Deal*. Chronicle Books, 2005.
- Ciannetti, Charlene S. and Margaret Sagarese. *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*. Broadway Books, 1997.
- Erlbach, Arlene. *The Middle School Survival Guide*. Walker and Company, 2003.
- Farrell, Juliana and Beth Mayall. *Middle School: The Real Deal. From Cafeteria Food to Combination Locks*. Harper Trophy, 2001.
- Mosatche, Harriet S. and Karen Unger. *Too Old for This, Too Young for That! Your survival guide for the middle-school years*. Free Spirit Publishing, 2000.
- Rimm, Sylvia. *Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret World of America’s Middle Schoolers*. Rodale, 2005.

WEB SITES

- For adolescents who want to stop smoking, look at the American Lung Association’s “Not On Tobacco” program for adolescent cessation at www.lungusa.org.
- The Centers for Disease Control “Healthy Youth!” program (www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth)
- “How to Talk to Your Kids About Anything” from Talk With Your Kids (www.talkingwithkids.org/first.html)
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information 1-800-729-6686 (<http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>)
- Kids Health sponsored by The Nemours Foundation has health information for adolescents and parents (www.kidshealth.org)

⁷ CDC. Smoking & Tobacco Use. *I Quit! What To Do When You’re Sick of Smoking, Chewing or Dipping*. Available online at www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit_smoking/how_to_quit/iQuit/

What Your Child Might Be Experiencing ... And Tips for You

This chart^a provides a broad description of some behaviors your child could be exhibiting, along with some tips you might find useful. Keep in mind the following points:

- *Every child develops at his or her own pace. Boys and girls don't necessarily develop in the same ways and at the same pace.*
- *Children don't necessarily complete one stage before progressing to the next. Sometimes unanticipated crises (death in a family, move to a new state, etc.) or environmental factors (the stability of a neighborhood or a family, for instance) arise that either spur or stunt development.*

GRADES 5 AND 6	
Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Slight self-consciousness and an increased desire for privacy ■ Bedroom door is shut for longer periods of time ■ Early feelings of conflict between family values and peer values ■ May begin modeling the behavior of older children ■ Anxiety about "fitting in" in new school environment ■ Intense value placed on being able to do things well ■ Issues of right and wrong generally viewed narrowly ■ Less forthcoming with parents about a day's activities ■ Some avoidance of regular family activities ■ Early experimentation with risk behavior (smoking, drinking, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Respect their privacy. Try not to pry. ■ Listen when a child is expressing a value contrary to your own; don't be in a hurry to argue against it. ■ Engage the child more in decision-making processes that affect him or her directly. ■ Encourage participation in family activities, but don't always insist on it. ■ Insist on knowing what your child's plans are after school and on weekends. ■ Get to know his or her friends as much as possible. ■ Watch for signs that may indicate onset of risk behavior (glassy eyes, excessive gum chewing, an unusual amount of secrecy around who his or her friends are, evasiveness about plans).
GRADE 7	
Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Powerful desire for privacy ■ Increased anxiety about "fitting in" and "being accepted" by peer group ■ Significant shift in academic expectations can trigger stress about ability to achieve ■ Sense of right and wrong loosens somewhat, with personal moral responsibility shifting (in some cases) from the individual to the group ■ Increased isolation from family, increasingly private about their activities ■ Peer identification rises; child will begin to dress, speak and act like those in peer group with whom she or he wants to be identified. "Fitting in" is still highly valued. ■ Group mentality pervades ■ Image conscious, may spend long hours preening, getting ready for school ■ More experimentation with risk behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Don't allow yourself to feel rejected by your child's desires for privacy. ■ Emphasize your acceptance of your child as he or she is. ■ Monitor schoolwork and performance; reinforce the child's ability to shoulder additional workload. ■ Have an occasional movie night; rent realistic movies that are reflective of risk behaviors and discuss them. ■ Introduce morally based topics of discussion at the dinner table. Gently challenge your child's assumptions; force him or her to articulate a train of thought. ■ Don't discourage the development of relationships with other adult authority figures, but learn who these people are. Get to know them. ■ Choose your battles; fighting over whether or not your child can wear old jeans to school may not be as important as deciding whether or not you will permit him/her to attend a weekend party. ■ Extend his or her curfew, but enforce it diligently.
GRADE 8	
Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child may measure him/herself against idealized physical image, such as professional models, athletes, rock stars ■ Increased sense of differentiation from family; child feels less ambivalent about this separation but more concerned with status among peers ■ Quicker to feel anger toward parents over disagreements, particularly related to values ■ Feels more at home with academic life, more willing to consider responsibilities beyond academics ■ Increased tendency to shift moral responsibilities to peer group ■ Popularity becoming more important; may engage in "attention-getting behaviors" in order to win approval of others ■ More curiosity about risk behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Give your child permission to engage in activities apart from the family. ■ Allow for them to have "alone time" at home. ■ Don't personalize disputes with them; let them air their feelings. ■ Validate their feelings even while disagreeing with their arguments. ■ Be certain to know who will be attending the party he/she has asked to go to; find out if a parent will be on hand. ■ Give the child a cell phone and insist on being apprised of changes in plans when he or she is out, especially for an evening. ■ Trust your child, but treat violations of trust seriously. Let them know ahead of time what consequences they might face. ■ They are still young enough that you can tell them not to spend time with kids you know to be dangerous.
GRADE 9	
Developmental Changes Your Child Might Experience	Tips for Dealing with These Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Greater sense of separation from family can lead to feelings of competence and independence, which can also be frightening because there is more exposure to new thoughts, feelings, and behaviors ■ Concern about the importance of high school and the "stakes" attached to academic performance, the child's future, college, career, etc. ■ Feelings of inferiority imposed by upper classmen on freshmen; or feelings of invincibility and elevated status that comes with being "oldest kids in the school" ■ More personally responsible moral code begins to develop ■ Image conscious; attention to clothes, grooming, overall appearance, style; attractiveness to the opposite sex ■ Possible emergence of annoying habits at home, such as messy room, unwillingness to do family chores, sarcasm ■ More evening activities that can yield conflicts at home ■ Increased interest in experimentation with risk behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Grant greater degrees of independence, while at the same time reminding the child that you are there to listen to them and guide them. ■ Reinforce your trust in their ability to be responsible adults. ■ Avoid sending too many messages emphasizing the importance of grades and their bearing on college acceptance. ■ Avoid comparing the emotional development of one child to that of another. ■ Allow children to keep their room as they see fit. ■ Ask your child's advice about things. As they get older, show them you have confidence in their maturity and intelligence. ■ Maintain a reasonable list of chores for which they are regularly responsible. ■ Decide for yourselves if you will allow them to accept car rides from older students, and make your feelings known about this before it becomes an issue. ■ Never reprimand your child in front of his or her friends.

^aThis chart was created with input from Erik Kolbell, LSW, Dr. Cassandra Cook, PhD, Dr. Richard Kolbell, PhD, and information from Pediatric Health Online (<http://pediatric.healthcentersonline.com>).