Now we turn our attention to middle childhood. This is the age when many children begin formal schooling. It is approximately 6 to 11 years of age.   
  
First, let’s explore physical development during this time.  
  
Middle childhood has been called the “golden age” of childhood. Overall, children are relatively healthy during this period.  
Growth rates slow and children start gaining about 5-7 pounds in weight and 2 inches in height each year.  
Many children begin to slim down as their torsos become longer.  
A child at this age can have strong muscles and increased lung capacity to enable them to play for long periods of time.   
  
This is the age when many children begin to play organized sports. Their bodies are well-equipped for such activities.   
However, it’s been said that sports are best for children if their parents stay home. This is because parents can have the tendency to focus primarily on competition and less on instilling enjoyment of the game. This can lead to tension, hostility, and become a source of discouragement for a child who doesn’t always win. Unfortunately, such children may give up and become less active or experience burn-out at a young age.  
Listen to the story entitled “College Sports Excesses Seep into High School” by Frank DeFord, the editor of Sports Illustrated magazine for a humorous look at the adult mentality applied to sports.  
We know that unstructured play offers children the ability to be active without penalty and to be creative and improve social skills in ways that structured sports cannot.   
  
  
Childhood obesity has become an increasing problem in the United States, Great Britain, and other parts of the world.   
It’s estimated that between 16 and 33 percent of American children are obese. This doesn’t mean that they are a few pounds overweight. It is defined as being at least 20 percent over ideal weight.  
Childhood obesity has tripled in the last 30 years. Obesity is defined as having a body mass index greater than or equal to the 95th percentile for sex and age.   
Children who suffer from obesity can be the subject of ridicule, bullying, cardiovascular disease, bone, joint problems, and type 2 diabetes.   
  
  
The Center for Disease Control recommends that schools examine their nutrition on school menus, reevaluate the offerings of food and beverages outside school lunches, and increase physical activity to begin to combat this problem.   
Here is a copy of the school lunches served at my children’s school a few years ago. A popular meal was served on Wednesdays each week. It consisted on chicken nuggets, a roll, green beans or mashed potatoes.   
Let’s examine the nutritional breakdown of this meal  
  
Here we find some alarming information. This menu, which fell within state nutritional guidelines, consisted of 1181 calories, 2878 mg of sodium, 145 mg of cholesterol, 39.33 grams of fat (of which 20.04 grams were saturated fat), and 151 grams of carbohydrates.  
Ice cream, cookies, chips, and sodas were available at the end of the line for additional purchase.  
School lunches vary from state to state and school district to school district. Parents need to be aware of what is served within the schools as well as to consider other sources of high fat, high starch foods their children are consuming.  
  
  
Now we will explore cognitive development in middle childhood.  
  
  
Piaget’s third stage, the concrete operational stage of intelligence, involves the ability to understand the physical or tangible world.   
Children can now classify objects in many ways.  
They recognized that objects retain their identity, even if modified (such as a scrambled egg is still an egg), and recognize the identity held by numbers.  
It becomes easier for school aged children to reverse a set of operations in math or to understand that moving backward in a set of procedures can bring one back to the beginning point.  
Reciprocity is also understood. A child recognizes that the water level rises if a container of water is narrow and falls if water is placed in a wide, shallow container.  
  
  
Information processing theory is a classic theory of memory that uses the analogy of a computer to help us understand how memories are built.  
The first location for information to enter is through the senses. Seeing, hearing, touching, or smelling a stimulus is the first step to forming a memory. Most of what comes into our sensory register is there for only a split second and then is either dismissed or moved to our working or short term memory.  
Short term or working memory has a limited capacity of about 9 to 11 pieces of information at a time. Information must be rehearsed to be kept alive in our short term memories.   
The long term or knowledge base consists of information that we have stored and can access when needed. This storage area has a seemingly unlimited capacity. The key to being able to access what is in your long-term memory is making sure that it is stored in a meaningful way.  
As children enter school, they begin to process information more quickly than before. This is because they can find links and meaning in new information and store it more easily.  
Schooling often involves learning new strategies to help with academic tasks.   
  
  
Vocabulary continues to increase throughout middle childhood at the rate of about 20 new words each day.   
A 5th grader knows an estimated 40,000 words. And they begin to understand the meanings of words and plays on words.  
Grammar is more easily learned and rules of grammar are applied more flexibly.  
  
  
Lawrence Kohlberg applied Piaget’s principles to moral decision-making.   
In the preconventional stage, moral decision-making is based on whether an action brings direct, personal benefit such as reward or punishment.  
Conventional moral reasoning is based on the opinions of others about the act. Still, personal benefit, perhaps in the form of being viewed as right or good is the basis for a decision to act.  
Post conventional moral reasoning is based on universal, moral, or ethical principles or the good of others rather than self.  
  
School brings assessment of a child’s performance and developmental problems can be recognized once a child enters this setting.  
Diagnosing and labeling a child with a developmental problem can help parents, teachers, and others to form a treatment plan to assist the child.   
But labels can be inaccurate and misapplied. Nevertheless, the label can become part of the child’s self-assessment and the child may begin to act accordingly. For example, a child labeled as a ‘slow-learner’ may lose confidence in their abilities and feel self-conscious about the label. This can get in the way of learning and thereby create a self-fulfilling prophecy.  
  
  
Autism spectrum disorders range from pervasive developmental delay to Asperger’s syndrome. Children vary in the degree to which they exhibit autistic symptoms.  
The word autism means ‘selfism’ or a focus on an internal world.   
Children with autism spectrum disorders may lack motivation to learn language, be sensitive to detail, prefer consistency, and lack or be delayed in developing social emotions such as embarrassment or guilt.  
A minority of children with autistic spectrum disorders have unusual talents. These talents or strong interests are more characteristic of Asperger’s syndrome.  
  
  
Consider this definition of learning disability:  
“A measured discrepancy between expected learning and actual accomplishment in a particular academic area.”  
This definition calls our attention to the academic standards we set for children and the labeling process to which they may be subjected.  
By this definition, raising standards can result in an increase of students who are considered learning disabled.  
  
  
Learning difficulties are specific to academic skills and include dyslexia, dyscalcula, and attention deficit disorder.  
There are numerous conditions that can lead to these difficulties.  
  
Schooling brings assessment of intellectual skills.  
Some assessments are achievement tests. These are designed to measure what a child has learned and are administered at the end of a course of study.  
Aptitude tests are designed to measure a child’s potential to learn and may be used as entrance requirements.  
Intelligence tests are one type of aptitude test. However, intelligence tests are not uniformly administered. They are more likely used as part of a clinical assessment in situations in which a child needs special attention or instruction.   
  
  
Intelligence tests do not measure all types of talents or intelligences.  
Howard Gardner suggests that there are many talents abilities that can set a person apart and help them be successful that go beyond academic intelligence.  
His domains of intelligences include logical-mathematical, linguistic, and spatial intelligence, which are the kinds of abilities measured by intelligence tests.   
Other intelligences include bodily-kinesthetic intelligence which focuses on movement, strength, accuracy, and endurance; musical intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, or knowledge of one’s own motivations and internal psychological state; interpersonal intelligence, or the ability to read others accurately, negotiate, communicate and exhibit other interpersonal skills; naturalistic intelligence such as the knowledge of climate, crops, or animals vital to success in farming or herding; and existential intelligence that involves spiritual or philosophical understandings that address life’s bigger questions about existence and purpose.  
  
  
Robert Sternberg offers another model of intelligence that takes us outside academic intelligence.  
His triarchic theory of intelligence includes academic intelligence or “book smarts” which is the type of intelligence IQ tests measure.  
But also considered key are creative or experiential intelligence and practical intelligence.  
Creative intelligence is the ability to use what has been learned or to put knowledge into experience.  
Practical intelligence or “street smarts” also referred to as common sense is the ability to understand what is called for in a situation and to act accordingly.  
These intelligences are important for success in life  
  
Let’s take a different look at school and the world of school as experienced by parents and students.  
Schools often express a desire for family involvement. Some families bring qualities to the school setting that can influence the child’s experience. These qualities, such as financial support for the school or community status are referred to as family capital. A well-known member of the community or a parent who offers time, money, and a supportive attitude toward the teacher may be receive additional resources or guidance for their child.  
Have you ever asked a child about their day at school? Chances are, the answer focused on the social life at school.  
Educator Peter McLaren observed and recorded the amount of time students spent in various states throughout the school day.  
The student state is a state in which the students is on task, compliant, and focused on teacher requests. About 298 minutes were spent in the student state. This is the state preferred by teachers.  
But many students preferred to spend time in the street corner state. This is a state in which the child is able to socialize with other children and to act as they might when not in school. Children try to maximize this stage by taking longer in the halls when going from one classroom to another or by moving more slowly when getting out books or other materials.   
The home state occurs when family members are at the school. In this state, children are subjected to a different set of rules than those set by the school. For example, a child may get to sit with their parents or leave a class early as a result.  
  
  
All schools have a formal curriculum or set of courses and objectives that are clearly written down. But schools also teach powerful lessons referred to as the “hidden curriculum.”  
These lessons include gender roles, competition, preferences based on social class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The hidden curriculum is not directly states, yet students receive indirect messages about the believed superiority or inferiority of these groups.   
For example, a teacher may ignore insults made toward a student for being gay even if the school has an official policy against discrimination based on sexual orientation.  
  
  
Psychosocial development in middle childhood.  
  
  
Entering school often means entering the society or culture of children. Children establish a language, set of rules, behaviors, and roles for one another.   
This society of children can serve as a living laboratory for learning and practicing social skills such as negotiation, communication, and problem-solving.  
Think about the children you remember from your early grades in school. You may remember some children who were known by many and were well-liked. These popular-prosocial children are highly visible and seem to have the support and the encouragement of the school.  
Some children are popular, but their popularity comes from altercations with other students and rebelliousness within the school. It may be hard for these children to change their social behavior as it has become part of their persona and popularity.   
Some children are withdrawn and suffer the rejection of other children. They may have some qualities that make them a safe target for bullying such as being poor, having a physical challenge, or being shy.   
Aggressive-rejected children are rebellious and have altercations with other students, but this doesn’t gain them popularity? Why not? Perhaps it is because they are not physically attractive or are poor.  
  
School-aged children are forming a sense of self or self-concept. This begins earlier in life, but continues to take shape in middle childhood.  
In societies where media is powerful, children may develop evaluation themselves based on images or products in television shows, commercials, or on the internet.   
Erikson believed that these children struggle with industry, a stage of being busy and learning about one’s capabilities, versus inferiority. To what extent might a child feel inferior in these comparisons?  
  
  
To what extent are developmental needs addressed in the world that we establish for children?  
Many of the activities and products created for children may really be designed to meet adult needs rather than those of children. Think, for example, of the elaborate birthday party given a 6 year old that is really an effort to establish parental status in the neighborhood.   
False self-training refers to children being held to external, adult standards while having their own developmental needs denied.   
One area in which children are held to adult standards is in the case of sexual abuse.   
  
  
Child sexual abuse is a sexual act with a child that is performed by an adult or an older child.   
The developmental immaturity of the child is ignored and needs are disregarded. For example, a young girl who begins physical maturation early may be considered to be sexual although emotionally and cognitively she is not equipped to understand the sexual behavior and its implications.  
  
  
David Finkelhor describes the long term consequences of childhood sexual abuse.   
Traumatic sexualization refers to the way in which a child who is sexually abused may learn to use sexuality and seduction as a major way to communicate with others. The person may devalue other aspects of who they are and have difficulty thinking of sex and love as part of a relationship.   
A sense of betrayal and lack of trust is particularly strong in cases of incest. The child learned that secrecy and denial of the experience is expected and that those who are supposed to care for you can also be those who abuse you. A healthy understand of an appropriate parent/child relationship is lacking as trust is undermined.  
A person may also experience a sense of powerlessness or an inability to set limits with others. This may mean being involved in other abusive relationships or in being unable to say no to demands on time or money or other resources.  
Finally, the person who is abused may feel stigmatized or looked down upon by others. This makes it difficult for the person to ask for help or find support or to be taken seriously in a compassionate way.  
  
  
Next, let’s turn our attention to family structure and relationships. There are a variety of family forms, from two-parent intact families, to single-parent families, to cohabiting families. Which structure is best?   
One way to address this question is to understand the tasks performed by families.   
Family tasks include providing food, clothing, and shelter for children, encouraging learning, developing self-esteem in children, nurturing their friendships, and providing a harmonious and stable environment for family life.  
  
  
Divorce rates in the United States began to rise in the 1970s and increased steadily until it peaked in the early 1980s. This has been accompanied by great concern over the impact divorce has on children.   
Divorce doesn’t affect all children in the same way. The impact of divorce on children depends on the degree of conflict prior to divorce, the amount of financial hardship experienced by the children, the actions of the divorcing couple toward the child, and the level of adjustment of the custodial parent.  
  
  
Judith Wallerstein outlines some short-term consequences for children following divorce. These include a feeling of loss or grief over family members who are no longer part of the child’s life, a reduced standard of living, adjusting to transitions such as changing schools or moving, and experiencing relief from conflict that may have been experienced prior to the divorce.  
  
  
Adults who experienced divorce as children may have greater anxiety about their own relationships. Or they may have unrealistically high expectations for a partner-seeking the perfect mate to avoid future divorce. Of course, it’s hard to find perfection.   
Peggy Drexler suggests that many of the long term consequences for children are tied to financial hardship rather than divorce. For instance, there may have been less financial support for schooling that then translates to lower occupational attainment following divorce.  
  
  
Newer research on the impact of divorce on children has focused on some positive consequences.   
Hetherington found that most children of divorce lead happy, well-adjusted lives. These well-adjusted adults went unnoticed when researchers focused solely on looking at people with problems and used hindsight to suggest that their problems were due to divorce.   
Many daughters find that their communication improves with their mothers, typically their custodial parent.  
Parenting becomes more democratic and children have a greater role in family decision-making as they mature.  
Drexler found that sons felt freer to escape negative role models if their mothers were in dating relationships than if those negative models were marital partners.  
And sons being raised without fathers showed more emotional independence and freedom to express emotions being in a single-parent family.  
  
  
The psychological health of the parents, especially the parent with whom the child spends the most time, is key to helping children adjust.  
Here are a few tips for parents going through divorce.   
One is to take care of your own mental health. Find others that can offer support and understanding.  
Allow children to express their grief over losses.   
Cultivate a healthy, conflict-free relationship with the other parent for the sake of the children.  
And try to establish a home environment that is healthy, positive, and comfortable.  
  
  
Repartnering refers to parents developing new relationships after breaking up.  
Remarriage is one type of repartnering. Sometimes, repartnering can be an even harder transition for children than was the divorce of their parents.   
Parenting that may have become more democratic in a single-parent household, may now become more authoritarian when a new partner becomes part of the family. This can be a difficult adjustment for children.  
Step-parents may want to take on parental roles right away, but children may want to establish friendship first.  
  
  
Repartnering can also mean changes in the amount of time and attention biological parents show their children.  
The greatest involvement with children may occur before either parent has established a new relationship. The least involvement seems to occur when the father has established a new relationship but the mother has not. The father may be spending more time with his new partner and children. And there may be greater tension between mother and step-mother than between father and step-father due to the emphasis on involvement in maternal roles.  
  
  
Repartnering also brings about dating concerns. Does a parent have time and money to date? Should the parent have a new partner meet their children? If so, when? What will be their role? Should the new partner spend the night?  
Cohabitation is one way of repartnering. The partners live together but are not married. Cohabiting families must consider the roles of partners, the financial contributions to the family and to members outside the household, and the effects of breaking up on children who may now have to sever ties they’ve established.  
  
Stepfamilies or blended families have been increasing since divorce rates began to rise. But stepfamilies were also common in western society in the 1700s and 1800s.   
The stepfamilies of today, however, are typically created through divorce and remarriage rather than due to the death of a spouse.   
Sociologist Andrew Cherlin has described stepfamilies as an “incomplete institution” because the rules and guidelines for life in stepfamilies are unclear.  
Stepfamilies may experience greater difficulty than single-parent families as they try to establish new rules and roles and deal with mixed loyalties and relationships.  
  
  
Stepfamilies have some characteristics that need to be considered.  
Stepfamilies are structurally more complex. There are more members involves and their loyalties may be divided.  
Many stepfamilies are established at the same time members are grieving over previous losses following divorce.  
Love between members of stepfamilies has to be cultivated; it cannot be assumed.  
The roles that stepfamily members play, whether this is a new step-parent or a non-custodial parent, are often unclear and have to be established.  
And sexual attractions may occur and need to be monitored. Modesty and caution when showing physical displays of affection are recommended.  
  
  
This is an effort to establish some guidelines for stepfamily members. Here are a few tips.  
One is to establish neutral territory or routines for the new family rather than having members adjust to the previous family’s location or routines.  
If you are a stepparent, don’t try to fit a preconceived role.   
Set limits so that the new couple can establish their new relationship without unnecessary interference or efforts to sabotage the relationship by the children.  
Respect past loyalties. Recognize that your partner and their children have a past that should be recognized and respected.  
If a child is upset with the other parent, be neutral about it. Don’t get in the middle of this or you may be resented later for interfering or speaking badly about their parent.  
If you are a stepparent, don’t expect instant love.   
Stepfamilies go through developmental stages, according to Papernow.   
This process can take up to 7 years.   
Fantasy about the perfect family, being immersed in the new relationships, and ‘mapping out’ the new territory are found in the early stages of stepfamily development.  
In the middle stages, members begin to recognize their differences and express conflicts more openly. Stepparents may begin to take a stand on their role and position in the family.  
In later stages, a lot of the hard work of establishing the family’s roles and rules has been accomplished and the members make closer contact with one another. Acceptance of one another and the family is found.  
Many stepfamilies, however, find it difficult to endure long enough to complete theses stages.