

FACTS
for Parents!

UNDERSTANDING *the* MIND *of a*

MIDDLE SCHOOLER

*Using Brain-Based Science to Help Students & Parents
Make the Most of These Important Years*

Middle School.

It's a new and exciting season — one of remarkable growth and change for your pre-teen. They are learning how to better self-advocate, distinguish their strengths, and identify personal interests. As a parent, you know that these are important, and sometimes challenging, years. You want to be an anchor for your child — a consistent source of love and support as they build their identity.

But that responsibility can sometimes leave you feeling unprepared and anxious about what's ahead.

If middle school is on the horizon for your family, you've probably asked yourself these questions:

What does the best learning environment for my child look like?

How can I stay connected to my child now and throughout their teenage years?

What can I do to ensure my child is safe, physically, socially, and emotionally?

Will my child maintain strong connections to our family values as they grow in independence?

Understanding how your student's brain is developing is an opportunity to know how to stay connected with them and encourage positive growth during these formative years. This e-book was designed to help moms and dads like you who want to be prepared for what's ahead, so your family can look back on these years with fondness.

We'll look at important topics and questions, such as:

Physiologically, what happens to the brain in early adolescence?

Your pre-teen will have strong (and competing!) desires — how can they be met in a safe, fulfilling way?

As a parent, what are some strategies for keeping an active (but not overbearing) role in your middle schooler's life?

If you are searching for a meaningful middle school experience that offers more than a bridge between elementary school and high school, take the next step and **schedule a meeting with our admissions team.** We look forward to meeting your family and exploring opportunities for your child to learn and lead at Fredericksburg Christian School.

Sincerely,

Krissy Donahoe

DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS

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FREDERICKSBURG
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Educating Christian Leaders for Life

FACT

During the middle school years, the area of the brain responsible for *decision making* is under construction.

Fiction



Middle school students have little control over their behavior until the prefrontal cortex is fully developed.

The bulk of brain growth that occurs in the pre-teen years is in the prefrontal cortex, commonly known as the decision-making zone. Fully developed around age 25, it helps us predict the consequences of our actions, mediate conflict, and set goals.

While the prefrontal cortex is still being developed, students are working through how to navigate relationships, avoid being overly impulsive, calculate risk, and make wise choices that will help, and not hinder, their future opportunities. Many parents feel that their pre-teens are emotional and at times even irrational. This is because they are relying on another part of their brain — the amygdala — to process and problem solve. As the prefrontal cortex continues to develop, they steadily become more equipped to make sound decisions. Parents, teachers, and other mentors can help middle schoolers develop skills that enhance this growth.



How we help:

Foster Critical Thinking

Project-based learning capitalizes on this period of rapid brain growth. We take a small-group approach, which provides the ideal environment for middle schoolers to think through and discuss the causes and effects of words, actions, and ideas.

Encourage Goal Setting

Students are continually encouraged to reflect on what they are learning and set new, measurable goals. This occurs in many settings — our Chapel program, the classroom, guidance meetings, the athletic field, Leadership Club, and others.

Bring Learning to Life

Students learn through real-world experience, utilize the latest technology for research and presentation, and participate in peer review and small-group projects. Our hands-on program resonates with all learning styles — auditory, visual, and kinesthetic.

FACT

The average attention span of the middle school student is *less than 15 minutes.*

Fiction



Middle school students are unable to stay focused long enough to deep dive on any subject.

Remember when your toddler was into everything and seemingly couldn't sit still? ***Parents don't often anticipate their children going through a similar stage in early adolescence, but thanks to brain research, we know it's true.*** Some researchers have even pointed out that increasing technology use throughout childhood has shortened teens' attention spans, making it difficult for them to maintain interest in a single subject or activity for more than 10-12 minutes.



How we help:

Vary Learning Modes

Intentional varying of learning modes within a class period, week, and unit keeps middle schoolers active and engaged. Students are given a voice in their learning by choosing topics of interest for reading, papers, projects, or other activities.

Avoid Screen Overuse

Technology is a powerful tool for learning, but middle school students need hands-on learning and human interaction more than ever. We are mindful of digital health and safety, and reserve screens for opportunities where they are truly beneficial.

Employ Differentiation

Small class sizes allow teachers to truly know their students, including their unique learning styles, strengths, and passions. Middle schoolers have a strong capacity for focus when they are coached intentionally.



FACT

Young teenagers need guidance *as they learn to navigate* relationships and social pressures.

Fiction



Middle schools are plagued with bullying and unhealthy relationships.

Middle schoolers are at an age where they are most insecure and often allow emotions to drive their decisions. At times, you might feel your pre-teen is a walking contradiction of competing desires as they simultaneously fight for independence and yearn for approval and love. ***By listening to them and validating their feelings, you can show them that you want to understand them.*** This type of active listening not only models the attributes of a healthy relationship, but it can help them find a way to accept their struggles as opportunities for growth — making them more confident in their identity, and less susceptible to social pressures.



How we help:

Create Safe Spaces

Environment matters, and students in middle school crave a sense of community, safety, and security. Our faculty and counselors model a biblical view of relationships and enforce a code of conduct that promotes healthy words and actions between students.

Partner with Parents

Ongoing communication with parents (conferencing, email, phone calls) creates alignment between home and school. When students know that their family and teachers function as a team, they feel known and supported, and are more likely to reach out for guidance as needed.

Build Authentic Relationships

Because their classes are small, teachers are able to monitor how students are feeling, pray with them, or refer them to our guidance office for additional support. Events like our Student Retreat deepen friendships and create bonds that last long after middle school.



FACT

Middle school students are eager *to find their place in the world, strengthen values, and develop a strong identity.*

Fiction



Middle school students tend to pull away from family values and toward peers.

Middle school is a very formative season of life. During these years, neural pathways in the brain are still malleable, which means students are quite literally developing their own identities as they ponder questions such as “Who am I?” and “Who do I want to become?” ***What they need most is context to help answer these questions and encouragement as they explore what’s ahead.*** Before they can decide where they’re going, they need a strong sense of where they’re from. This foundation fosters their development in a powerful way, and it is strengthened when alignment exists between home and school.



How we help:

Character Development

Students are engaged in thematic units (weekly and annually) that emphasize specific character traits and Biblical values. Whether in the classroom, during a service project, or on the athletic field, FCS middle schoolers are strengthening their view of what it means to be a Christian with strong character.

Servant Leadership

We place a strong emphasis on actively serving others, and helping middle schoolers become servant leaders. This not only helps students experience God’s purpose for their lives, it provides tangible skills that will be used in high school, college, and careers.

Quality Conversation

Teens with a strong sense of belonging enjoy psychological wellbeing, and this is often fostered through quality conversation. Our Chapel talks and activities emphasize healthy communication habits, staff members counsel our students, and parents are invited to play an active role in their student’s school life.



FACT

It is important for middle schoolers to understand *internet safety* and how *technology* can enhance (not enable) their learning.

Fiction



Technology only distracts middle schoolers and puts them at risk of cyber bullying or dangerous situations online.

Technology can have a positive, or negative, impact on your middle schooler's education and mental wellbeing. ***When used properly, it can be a resourceful tool that propels them forward in their studies.*** If abused, it can leave them feeling tech-dependent and defeated. It can also affect their sleep habits, stress levels, and cause feelings of anxiety and insecurity to develop. Setting up clear boundaries for when and how they use technology, and for what, can guide them to make positive choices.



How we help:

Tech-Enhanced Classrooms

We offer a tech-enhanced environment where students use technology such as iPads and SmartBoards to support their learning. Technology education is incorporated into the curriculum, teaching students how to use their devices efficiently and effectively.

Options to Explore

Middle school is the optimal time for students to try new things and see where they might want to invest more of themselves in high school and college. FCS offers a wide variety of media and technology courses — computer science, programming, graphic design, and video club to name a few.

Student & Parent Education

We have a thoughtful technology policy and a “stoplight system” indicating appropriate areas on campus for device usage. Our technology staff actively trains students and parents so they feel confident and safe with digital learning tools and how they are being used.





Building CONFIDENCE

during a season of rapid growth

What will your child's middle school experience look like at FCS?



Our innovative approach to integrating Christian values in a compelling curriculum allows students to develop in and out of the classroom as they prepare for the challenges ahead in high school, college, and beyond.



Every class is started with prayer and taught from a Biblical standpoint.

While becoming a confident leader, your middle schooler will remain grounded in family values.



Senior Buddies and our Shepherding Program create a vibrant and caring social community.



Meaningful interactions are fostered between middle schoolers and high schoolers, allowing younger students to hear testimonies and learn from the experiences of older students.



Athletic programs are centered around character development.



Your child will be able to participate in service opportunities, diving into projects that impact our local community and those around the world.

A few favorites include:

- Canned food competition
- Raking leaves in local neighborhoods
- Operation Christmas Child



Growing the next generation of *thinkers* and *leaders*



FCS middle schoolers move through a well-rounded academic curriculum that not only prepares them for high school and college, but also builds a strong moral foundation. Our academic program is enriched with thought-provoking extracurriculars that build confident pre-teens who are eager to understand the world of possibilities that await them.

Core Subject Areas

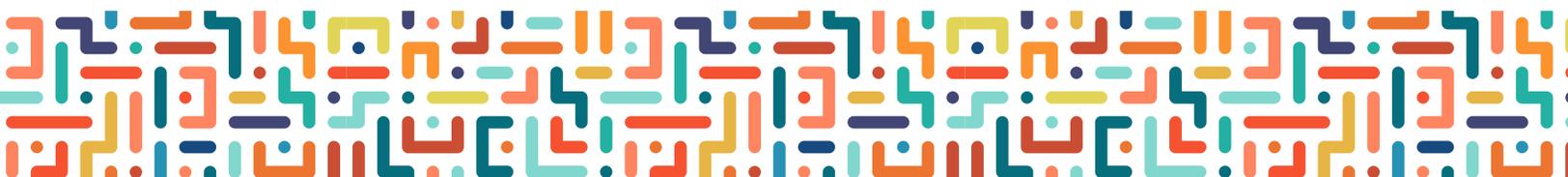
Bible
Language Arts
Literature
Math
Science
Social Studies

Exploratories

Art
Band
Choir
Computer
Drama
Orchestra
Spanish (8th grade)
Yearbook (8th grade)

Activities and Clubs

Book Club
FCA
Interact Club
Leadership (8th grade)
STEM



Ready to *make the most* of middle school?

Explore all Fredericksburg Christian School has to offer!

Visit fredericksburgchristian.com/admissions

Learn more about our admissions process

See what parents say about their transition to FCS

Register for a tour of our school



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You can also contact us at (540) 373-5355 with any questions.

LOWER SCHOOL

Preschool & Elementary School

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UPPER SCHOOL & BUSINESS OFFICE

Middle School & High School

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