



"I'm not a baby anymore!" Meet Jenny. She's an eighth grader whose parents have just given her a curfew of 10pm for tonight's plan with her friends. Jenny is 5' 6", a tall drink of water for her age, and captain of the school volleyball team.

She has entered the age where her friends' opinions matter more than her parents' and where gossip and "drama" are the norm. But while her exterior changes have leveled off a bit, her interior world is now upside down. She's starting to wonder who she is, what she wants and how she should act. Her emotions are on the fritz. She lives in front of the mirror. And on top of it all, she's trying to make her parents understand that she needs her independence.

But her parents aren't fooled by the grown-up act. They know Jenny inside and out. They know that her pushing them away isn't personal-it's just a phase. They know her protests against their boundaries aren't a full-fledged rebellion. She wants them to realize she's growing up-which they do-and she's trying to assert her autonomy...but she still needs and wants their support, protection and love.

Does Jenny's profile sound familiar to you? You've probably heard her same protests from a middle school girl in your household more than once.

But, do you know what Jenny's parents know?

Here are some practical parenting tips for dealing with a middle school girl:

1. Find a way to explain the changes she's going through and help her root her security in something deeper than the surface (her family's love and acceptance, God's love above all).
2. Help her keep a balanced schedule that includes physical activity to help her get used to her new body as well as plenty of sleep so she can keep up with all the changes.
3. Don't be phased by moods or rebellion. Just love her and make sure she feels it. Listening to her is a great way to do this.
4. Let her have her space, but also keep close to her. You should give her age-appropriate privileges so she feels grown up but do not give her free reign. You're the

parent. You can and should set boundaries. Despite what she may tell you, boundaries are a great way to show her you love and value her.

5. Have high standards for her behavior and make sure they're clear. She'll only rise as high as you set the bar.