Think back to when you were in middle school/junior high. The paralyzing self-consciousness. The daily peer pressure. If you’re like most people, you wouldn’t relive it for anything in the world. Not because it wasn’t a wonderful time of new growth and discovery, but because it was the one time in your life when insecurity reigned supreme.

Middle school children are caught in the middle of childhood and adulthood. It’s an exciting, but very difficult, period of their lives. But with the right guidance, they can be poised to become tomorrow’s leaders. All they need is a little help from someone like you.

Second of Six
This is the second of a six-part series about Service Leadership groups. Pull it out and share it with your club. See the rest of the series at www.kiwanismagazine.org.
Make-up Matters
Middle-schoolers are more concerned than ever with how they appear to others—especially those of the opposite gender. As they mature, the girls begin to wear make-up and perfume, while boys break out the hair gel and Axe body spray.

Super-connected
Most middle-school/junior high students are linked to their family and friends through a universe of networked relationships. Text messages, Facebook, MySpace and other social networking tools have created a super-connected, electronically-mediated middle school universe.

Book Smart
It’s a misconception that middle-school kids don’t read anymore. A great deal of them devour books. They love everything from the Harry Potter series to coming-of-age stories like Louis Sachar’s Holes. The Twilight and Gossip Girl books are popular too—especially among girls.

Daydream Believer
Nobody daydreams like middle-schoolers. As they awaken to the larger world around them, they are wonderstruck by life’s possibilities. This manifests itself in a tendency to daydream—about the future, relationships and anything and everything else.

Make-up Matters
Middle-schoolers are more concerned than ever with how they appear to others—especially those of the opposite gender. As they mature, the girls begin to wear make-up and perfume, while boys break out the hair gel and Axe body spray.
Make-up Matters

Middle-schoolers are more concerned than ever with how they appear to others—especially those of the opposite gender. As they mature, the girls begin to wear make-up and perfume, while boys break out the hair gel and Axe body spray.

Under Pressure

To some degree, elementary school was fun and games. But in middle school, achievement-oriented kids whose parents value good grades are feeling more stress than ever. It’s not hard to see why. They already are taking college-prep tests and asked questions about their plans for adulthood.

Hip to Be Square

The generation gap is shrinking. Consequently, today’s middle-schoolers are more likely to regard their parents as “hip” than did prior generations. Sure, they’re still embarrassed when mom or dad say something “uncool” in front of their peers, but it’s no longer an “us-versus-them” mind-set.
What’s in it for you?

Jeanne Irrer, a Builders Club advisor from the St. Johns 707, Michigan, Kiwanis Club, believes there’s something truly special about working with middle-school kids. “They just have so much imagination at this age,” she says. “They’re never afraid to tackle a new project.”

Whether it’s handing out flags on Memorial Day or serving hot dogs and hamburgers on National Night Out, she says her Builders Club kids embrace service with special enthusiasm. “They want to get out there and have fun,” she says.

Irrer, a retired newspaper salesperson, says the kids’ zeal for life enriches her own. Moreover, she gets a sense of satisfaction knowing she’s making an impact on kids at such a crucial juncture in their lives.

Middle school is the initial period of a child’s transition into young adulthood. For that reason, it’s important they have access to the guidance and leadership that will equip them to provide the same leadership for the next generation.

“Helping kids—that’s what this is all about,” Irrer says. “We hope to teach them the importance of helping others, and in doing so, build the leaders of tomorrow.”

Resource

Tag, You’re It!
50 Easy Ways to Connect with Young People

By Kathleen Kimball Baker

For many, having a conversation with a real-life middle schooler is easier said than done. This book provides a wealth of advice on how to start conversations and make meaningful connections with tweens. From sharing your favorite music to meeting their friends, each idea is supported by a research study or expert opinion. Talking to kids may seem daunting—but this book certainly makes it easier.