Preparing Your Child for Middle School

Companion Pack: Handouts, Family Activities, and a First-Semester Conversation Calendar

This pack accompanies the presentation. It is designed to be printed, cut, and handed out. Everything here follows the same rule the talk does: small, warm, and repeated beats grand and rare.

Part 1 : Handouts to Print

Handout A: The Fridge Card (one page, for the family)

Print, trim, and put it where everyone sees it.

Five habits we are keeping

1. Devices charge outside every bedroom overnight. Parents included.
2. One screen-free meal together, as often as we can.
3. A weekly fifteen minutes, just them and one parent, no agenda.
4. One tiny shared prayer. A single line in the car counts.
5. We model it: we apologize without excuses, and we ask for help without shame.

Our family code word: _____ *Text it or say it and it means: come get me now, no questions.*

Their three trusted adults (besides us):

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

The sentence we say often: *You can always come to us, with anything. We will love you first and sort it out second.*

Handout B: The Parent Pocket Guide (double-sided, for parents only)

The things worth saying before the first day, not after the first crisis.

On their body. Talk early, plainly, more than once. Puberty, whichever changes apply to your child, periods, voice changes, breast development, body odor, mood swings, skin. Early or late is

just their clock, not a scoreboard. The parent who explains it first becomes the person they ask next.

On pornography. It will likely reach them, often by accident, around this age. Rehearse three calm sentences now: this is not what love or the body is for; seeing it does not make you dirty; you can always tell us. Your calm is the whole lesson.

On AI and images. Beyond homework shortcuts: companions built to feel like a perfect friend, and apps that fake explicit images of real kids from a normal photo. If it ever happens to them or a friend, it is done to them, it is never their fault, and step one is telling you.

On low moods. Watch for a two-week shift, not a bad day: lasting sadness or numbness, lost interest, sleep or appetite changes, talk of being a burden. Asking directly about thoughts of self-harm does not plant the idea. Silence is the greater risk. You are the bridge to help, not the treatment.

On safe and unsafe adults. Most harm comes from someone already trusted, not a stranger. One rule cuts through it: no adult who truly cares about them will ever ask them to keep a secret from you. Promise them they can report any adult, be believed, and never be in trouble for it.

On pressure. Anyone who genuinely loves them will never pressure them. Pressure is not love. It is the opposite of love. That covers friends, romantic interests, and screens in one sentence.

Handout C: Their Card (optional, for your child)

Only if it fits your family. Keep it short and un-preachy.

- Your worth was settled before you were born. No one at school can revise it.
- A crush is not a command. Feelings are real, but they are not instructions.
- A friend who gossips to you will gossip about you.
- You do not need everyone to like you. You need a few people who know you and choose you anyway.
- If something feels wrong, that feeling is information. You never have to be polite past the point of safe.
- You can always come home. To us. With anything.

Part 2 : Follow-Up Family Activities

Pick a few. None should feel like a lesson.

1. **The code-word dinner.** Over one meal, choose the family code word together and role-play one silly scenario where they use it. Making it playful now makes it usable later.

2. **Name their people.** Sit down and actually write their three trusted adults on the fridge card. If they are old enough, add their numbers to their contacts together.
3. **The charging station.** Set up one spot outside the bedrooms where every device sleeps at night, and put the first one there together tonight. Yours goes there too.
4. **One saint, their choice.** Watch a short video or read a little about young saints like Carlo Acutis, Pier Giorgio Frassati, or Chiara Badano, and let them pick one as a companion for the year. Low pressure, their call.
5. **The "what would you do" drive.** On a car ride, offer one scenario from the deck (a group chat starts without them, someone sits alone at lunch, a peer says "if you really liked me you would") and just listen to their thinking. No grading.
6. **Build the week.** The next time they have two or three things due close together, sit down once and build the actual plan with them, so they own the template for next time.
7. **Model the repair.** The next time you get something wrong with them, apologize out loud, without a "but." Let them see it. This is an activity even though it does not feel like one.
8. **A shared one-liner prayer.** Start a single-sentence nightly or car prayer. One thing you are thankful for, one thing you are handing over. Keep it small enough to actually last.

Part 3 : First-Semester Conversation Calendar

One question every week or two, over the first semester. Not a sit-down. A car ride, a walk, a moment at the sink. Ask one, then stop talking and let them fill the silence. If they give you three words, that is a win.

Weeks 1 to 4 : Landing (identity and friendship)

- When do you feel most like yourself at your new school?
- Who have you eaten lunch with this week?
- What is the difference between a friend who is fun and a friend you can trust?
- Have you changed how you act around any group? How did that feel?

Weeks 5 to 8 : The daily grind (school, screens, sleep)

- Which class makes you feel most alive, and which makes you feel most defeated?
- When something is hard, is your first instinct to push through, shut down, or ask for help?
- How do you actually feel after a long time on your phone?
- Are you getting enough sleep? What is keeping you up?

Weeks 9 to 12 : The inner world (mood, pressure, faith)

- What has been the best part of this semester, and the hardest?
- Is there anything you have been worried about but have not said out loud?
- Has anything about faith or church stopped making sense lately?
- Is anyone pressuring you about anything, in any direction?

Weeks 13 to 16 : Trust and safety (the ones that need the most groundwork)

- If something were really bothering you, would you tell us? What would make you hesitate?
- Who are your people if you ever could not reach us?
- Has any grown-up ever made you uncomfortable, or asked you to keep a secret from us?
- What is one thing you wish we understood better about your life right now?

The recurring closer, any week they seem off: *You know you can always come to us, right? With anything.*

A Note on Sensitive Topics

Several themes in this pack (low moods, self-harm awareness, pornography, and grooming) are heavy. Handle them calmly and briefly. If any of them feels close to home for your family, a pediatrician, a school counselor, or your parish are good, low-stakes first calls. In the United States, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988) is available at any hour, and the National Alliance for Eating Disorders runs a helpline for eating-related concerns. Keep those handy before you need them.