



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Eight truths middle schoolers should know

It's rare to hear anyone say they *loved* middle school. Even people with positive memories never tout it as the best years of their life.

Simply put, it's an awkward season. It's a time of constant changes, social shake-ups and swinging emotions. If I've learned anything from my work with adolescent girls, it's how hungry this age group is for comfort and reassurance.

So, middle school kids, let me assure you that life picks up. There's a bigger, more promising world beyond your current of passage. In the meantime, I have a few truths to center you. I hope they bring you peace and a little friendly guidance.

Truth #8: Today's most awkward moments will be tomorrow's funniest memories. Keep a sense of humor.

Those braces on your teeth that collect food? That acne on your face that miracle creams can't cure? That giddy rush you get when your crush walks by and you can't think straight? One day these things will be really funny! They'll be the memories you rehash over and over with your siblings and oldest friends.

Eventually you'll have a dazzling smile, clear skin and someone to love. Your current problems will have closure. So stay mindful of the big picture, and remember that even your worst experiences will pass.

Truth #7: You don't want to peak in middle school (or high school or college, for that matter).

The worst goal you can have is popularity. What often makes adolescents popular – running with the fast crowd, dominating peers, living a superficial lifestyle – eventually leads to problems.

A successful person gets better with time. You go from being version 1.0 of yourself to version 2.0, 4.0, 6.0 and so on. But when you chase popularity, you peak early. You stop growing because you're stuck in instant gratification mode.

Seek to peak later in life. Make good choices that set you up for a bright future. If you're not a superstar now, that's okay. This simply means there are better things ahead.

Truth #6: Technology makes it easier than ever to ruin relationships and reputations.

We live in an age where people post everything online – feelings, emotions and pictures. Technology used wisely is great, but too often, it's used impulsively. Our fingers jump ahead of our brains, and within seconds, we can trigger pain and misunderstandings.

So please, think twice before texting, emailing or posting on social media. Cool off before giving someone a piece of your mind, reacting out of jealousy or anger, embarrassing someone or sending an inappropriate photo. Use the Internet for good, not as a dumping ground.

Truth #5: Surrounding yourself with good company is imperative.

Yes, you're called to love everyone, but not everyone deserves a place in your innermost

circle. Some people you love up close and personal; others you love at arm's length because inviting them into your life invites disaster.

Sooner or later, a bad influence *will* rub off. You'll either make choices against your better judgment or wind up in a bad predicament.

Your closest friends should lift you up. They should have goals, values, and a genuine desire to see you reach your full potential.

Truth #4: It's okay if you don't have your life planned out.

You probably know kids with immense talent and drive. They've trained for years and know exactly what they want in life.

Deep down, you may fear you're getting left behind. Why do they have their act together, and you don't?

But even the best plans will face curveballs. Even driven kids will wind up on different paths than they originally envisioned. So if your future isn't mapped out by ninth grade, take heart! You're young and have plenty of time to explore your interests. Just set goals for yourself, use your gifts and head in a good direction. Set a positive trajectory so that when you do discover your "thing" you're ready to soar.

Truth #3: Applause can be misleading. Even a huge mistake can get you cheered on wildly.

Through social media, popularity is quantifiable. You can gauge your performance by how many "likes," comments and shares you get.

But remember, numbers alone can be misleading. To get the full picture, you must measure numbers against the truth. After all, Jesus Christ had 12 followers. Adolf Hitler had millions. These figures speak for themselves.

Live for the quiet peace inside you. What makes you feel good about yourself? What helps you rest easy at night? You know the truth by how you feel deep down. And when you seek your applause from within, you don't need the applause of public approval.

Truth #2: There's a difference between helpful advice and hurtful criticism. Be careful who you listen to.

Some people want you to succeed. Others don't. Develop a strong filter for whose words you take to heart – and whose words you ignore.

Truth #1: You're awesome.

Truly, you are. And all these crazy changes are leading to something amazing. In the grand scheme of life middle school is just a blip, so keep it in check. Have fun, dream big and make good choices. One day you'll look back and laugh at the absurdities, and if you're lucky, you'll enjoy some humor in it now.

Kari Kubiszyn Kampakis is a Mountain Brook mom of four girls, columnist, and blogger for The Huffington Post. Her first book, 10 Ultimate Truths Girls Should Know, is available on Amazon and everywhere books are sold. Join her Facebook community at "Kari Kampakis, Writer," visit her blog at karikampakis.com or contact her at kari@karikampakis.com.