

An Introduction for Families



Adolescence: A challenging developmental stage

The middle grades years are a time of enormous physical change. It is also the dawn of the capacity to think conceptually, and a time of great curiosity about life, the world, and peers. It is a time of preoccupation with self, when many young adolescents are full of self-doubt. It is a time when some young people declare their families to be irrelevant to what's *really* happening, although in fact family support is crucial for them.

The *Developmental Designs* approach encompasses both the academic and social needs of adolescents. It provides structures for teaching the whole child, so that academic growth is enhanced, not limited, by the social and emotional realities of young adolescents. The *Developmental Designs* academic day includes active and interactive learning relevant to young people's interests and needs. The approach to behavior management is based in our belief that all children want to be good and can succeed. The goal of correction is to help children build self-control.

Based on developmental science, the *Developmental Designs* approach addresses four essential adolescent needs:

Relationship: *I want to connect with others.*

Autonomy: *I want to be independent.*

Competence: *I want to do well in school, and to feel like a worthwhile, significant person.*

Fun: *I want to have a good time!*



How Does the *Developmental Designs* Approach Look in a School?

The *Developmental Designs* approach offers a set of strategies designed to keep young people safe, connected, responsible, and engaged in learning. These strategies fall into three basic areas—Relationship, Social Skills, and Engagement. When educators integrate these areas, learning is optimized.

Relationship

The *Developmental Designs* approach makes respectful, caring relationships a high priority. Every day begins with an advisory period in which students circle up to greet each other, share what's happening in their lives, and do activities together that purposefully teach social and academic skills. This morning meeting (we call it the Circle of Power and Respect) helps students transition from home to school and establishes a clear path into the learning day.

During the day, teachers continue to build relationships through their language and through face-to-face meetings, team work, and reflection.



Social Skills

Transitions between classes are taught and practiced, as are all the routines of the school day. Nothing is taken for granted; everything is modeled and rehearsed. The goal is the development of self-control through proactive strategies that put the emphasis on the prevention of rule-breaking. If students know better, they will do better. As middle grades students try out their new freedoms, mistakes are expected. Each mistake is dealt with in a respectful way that teaches rather than punishes. The purpose is to clarify the expectations, provide a chance to restore order, safety, and relationship, build new habits, and maintain the dignity of the rule-breaker.

Engaged Learning

The *Developmental Designs* approach is based on the belief that all children with appropriate support can do high-quality work.

Students who succeed in school academically are engaged in their learning. Each class has an opportunity for students to get to know each other, to do meaningful work, and to share and reflect on work afterward. Students ask and answer open-ended questions. They have frequent opportunities to help design and make choices in assignments. There is a balance in each class between teacher-directed lessons and independent and group work on skills and projects. The work is rigorous and carefully orchestrated for success.

You can learn more about the *Developmental Designs* approach at
WWW.DEVELOPMENTALDESIGNS.ORG.

ABOUT ORIGINS

Origins, a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering learning in community, is the founder and sole provider for the *Developmental Designs* approach. It provides workshops, on-site consulting, and publications to teachers and school communities.

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