

Middle School Years Without Tears: Getting Ready (At Any Time) For Wonderful, Awesome, Successful, and Thrilling Middle School Experiences!

Lizabeth Jenkins Dale

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What is a middle schooler? A human being who is “swinging between childhood and adulthood...dealing with a rapidly changing body...dealing with new massive amounts of hormones...creating an individual and personal code of conduct...expressing oneself sexually to varying degrees...” No wonder the years between ages ten and fourteen are fraught with anxiety, confusion, and high emotion.

Yet, asserts Lizabeth Jenkins-Dale, these years can also be a time of growth, opportunities, and fun. “I still promise you,” she writes, “that middle school can be filled with wonderful, awesome, successful, and thrilling experiences!”

Her book is filled with such energetic reassurances, written in a casual, conversational style. Jenkins-Dale holds a Master's degree in Education and was a teacher for seventeen years (ten in middle school; the rest in elementary) and also a stay-at-home mom, so her positive promises come from considerable expertise and experience, as well as genuine affection for human beings in this stage of development.

After discussing just what a middle schooler is, what's fun about middle school, and how to handle the jitters, Jenkins-Dale gets to the heart of her book, a chapter called “The Single Most Important Key to a Wonderful, Awesome, Successful, and Thrilling Middle School Experience.” The key, she says, is “a complete positive view of middle school.” Using the power of positive thinking and the law of attraction, parents and children can transform a difficult, rocky road into a smooth, joyful journey. Drawing on the work of Dr. Joe Vitale (*The Attractor Factor*) and Rhonda Byrne (*The Secret*), Jenkins-Dale lays out very practical techniques for achieving this transformation.

The positive thinking practices can begin even before school starts. To begin, the author recommends writing down two separate lists: one of the negatives that are expected or feared, and one of the positives that are anticipated with more excitement. Then she suggests focusing on the positive list, adding statements about the emotions that accompany these thoughts, and comments of celebration as the experiences occur. For example: “Positive: I'll be making more friends. Feeling: It feels a bit nervous and exciting at the same time! Celebration: I met my friend Jordan, the second day of school!”

For addressing the negatives, Jenkins-Dale advises turning them into positives, then writing down the feeling that accompanies the positivity. “I'm gonna get lost” can be turned into “I know within two weeks I will be at ease” and then “I feel very confident...because...it feels like home now.”

The book offers dozens of similar exercises and techniques for exploring how to focus, manage emotions, feel gratitude, deal with difficulties, and more. The writing is straight forward with a conversational tone that parents will find accessible and understandable. The author holds her beliefs deeply although the concept of positive thinking to guide your life may seem esoteric and out of the mainstream for many, the book remains grounded in the realities of this period of growth.

If parents and children expect and project goodness, they will receive and experience goodness. “Most of the preparation for middle school,” she writes, “is about *feeling* your way to a wonderful, awesome, successful, and thrilling experience.”

KAREN MCCARTHY (July 5, 2011)

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