

## Middle School and Freedom

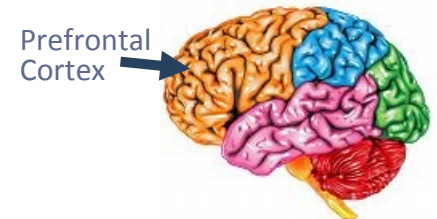
Freedom—a state in which somebody is able to act and live as he or she chooses, without being subject to any undue restraints or restrictions



Is freedom appropriate for middle school students? Absolutely not! At least not the freedom that they are interested in. 12- and 13-year olds desire independence and often times want to experience freedom, but adults know that at their young age, they are ill-equipped to live life without guidelines. At the same time, in today's over sexualized world, middle school students are often exposed to, and some even participate in, activities that could potentially cause real consequences, to the five-dimensions of who they are: physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual/moral.

The Prefrontal Cortex, often called the Executive Center of a person's brain, is not fully developed until the mid-twenties. It's no wonder then when young people do things that make us look at them as if they've lost their minds. They're not fully developed! The prefrontal cortex controls a person's ability to:

- plan
- set priorities
- organize thoughts
- suppress impulses
- weigh consequences



This part of the brain is vitally important but is not matured at an age when young people become more independent, discover new relationships and are being tempted to participate in activities that could harm them in ways they often don't imagine. As adults, it's important to encourage young people that real freedom lies in protecting the five-dimensions of who they are so that they don't have to deal with the consequences of activities that could cause great regret.

### What can you do?

- Be a parent your child can talk to, someone who is available and a good listener.
- Try not to overreact when they bring something to your attention that floors you. Develop your poker face.
- Enforce family rules and regulations. Be a person of your word so that your child knows what to expect if he/she breaks the rules. Rules are good!
- If you have the opportunity to discuss risky behaviors while watching TV, movies or listening to music, have a conversation about what you're seeing/hearing. Don't make it a monolog. If you ask them what they think, they will receive your words more readily.
- Hang in there. Don't give up. Parents don't often see the results of their hard work immediately but with persistence and repetition, your hard work will pay off.