

Rachel Winchester [00:00:01]:

While it's good and right to increase academic rigor as children get older, sometimes parents wanna turn up the heat too fast as their kids enter middle school. Developmentally, this can be a challenging time as kids are straddling the line between childhood and adolescence. But these years can actually be really sweet. You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast with Carole Joy Seid. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Carole has been teaching people her literature based approach to education for over 30 years now with great success, and I'm Rachel. I learned about Carol's method 15 years ago, and I'm now using it with my own 3 children.

Today, Carole and I talk about how to implement a homeschool made simple approach during middle school through work, study, and service. Listen in. Well, today we are back to talk about the next phase of child's development and in their educational journey. We're gonna talk about middle school today. Carole just told me that she actually loves middle schoolers and that age of life, so we are here to talk it up and to really encourage you to savor these years with your child. What's kind of your thought about that, Carole?

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:15]:

Well, I love middle school kids. Junior high is what I call them in my generation, but I love them because they're neither one or the other. And we talked about the last, I think, second to last, maybe 1 workshop because a middle school child, one minute, they're ready to get married, and then another minute, they just wanna sit on your lap. And it just keeps breaking up and changing because they're just between and betwixt, and we need to go with their signals and their flows. Sometimes they really do wanna be babied and pampered, and other times they're, like, ready to shave. And so just always leaving that flexibility and that freedom for them when they need to come back to the arms of their parents and then also when they're ready to go out on the highway and make their way in life. That is normal and it's part of child development. I think staying close where you have one leg in your family and one leg out in the world, but you can always pull that leg back in and go back to the the hobbit hut.

I think that's really important. Creating space for them still to be young and to be childlike, and that out of that nurture and attachment and even babying actually comes independence and confidence. It's counterintuitive because we think that we just need to say put on your big girl pants and get out there. But actually it's the opposite. The more we nurture children, the more confident and independent they'll become. And I've seen this over and over and all the years I've been working with families. So it's a

sweet age and usually a very formative spiritually period in children's lives where their theology starts to develop. They start asking hard questions.

They're not just living off the fumes of your relationship and your theology with the Lord, but they're starting to question things. And the Lord says, come. Let us reason together, says the Lord. And so he welcomes our reasoning and our questioning because Christianity is a truly reasonable faith and it stands up to being asked hard questions. And so it's an exciting period, I think, in kids' lives.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:29]:

Yeah. And just to be clear, we're talking about the age between 12-14. We've ended the elementary episode talking about 5th grade and 12 or 13 year olds. So, really, middle school is that pre teen, early very early teen years, those years where things are just feeling a little what's happening? Yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:53]:

It's transitional. It was it's a transitional period, and that's why it's important for our listeners to go back and listen to the whole series that we've created here for this month because these things build on themselves. And if you've done what we've said in each period, you're gonna come out very successfully, I believe. But you can't just airlift into a period of child development without laying the foundation coming up to that period because we wanna be experts on our kids. It's like the owner's manual. We wanna have read the owner's manual. And as parents, I think sometimes we let other people do the homework and we think that's good enough, and it's not. We need to own this and have an apologia for how our children develop and know.

Because of that, if we're confident in that, then we're not blown by every wind of doctrine that comes through or every person at the support group who intimidates us. We really know what we believe and why we believe it, and I think that sets us up for success because our children know if we're insecure and if we're nervous. And if we're confident, they're gonna be confident about, you know, I can't read yet. No problem. As long as you read by the time you get married, we're good. So, you know, if they if they feel that confidence from you, they're going to translate that. So as a lady in Nashville used to say in Franklin, she used to say, like Carol says, this stuff works. And she was raising a teenager who'd come up this with this method, and and it does. It does work.

Rachel Winchester [00:05:24]:

I have a little story. My own personal experience with homeschooling as a student, I was homeschooled during middle school. I went to school at a private Christian school

through 6th grade, and then it wasn't because my parents were just, you know, an educational decision so much as a circumstantial. You know, my dad's mom changed, and they didn't send us to the private school anymore, but they didn't wanna send us to the public school, and so they kept us home. But it was the perfect time for me to be homeschooled because I was getting caught up in so much cattiness and just the drama that starts to happen in 6th grade. And and even it can happen earlier too, but it really turned up in 6th grade for me, feeling jealousy toward other girls and boyfriend situations and just all the things. And it was so comforting for me to be at home with my family for 7th 8th grade. I was home, and I have 3 younger siblings, and my dad was actually our primary teacher.

It was so safe. I didn't have to worry about where my shirt was from or what brand it was. Nobody cared about that. We were all listening to the same music. We were all doing the same stuff every day, and I think it completely changed the way I went into high school. I ended up going to a public charter school for high school, but I entered there in such a different place than where I was headed in 6th grade.

Carole Joy Seid [00:06:59]:

Yeah. You weren't in a pecking order. You weren't being undermined all day long where your confidence is being pulled out from under you like a rug. You were in a safe nurturing environment where people were for you instead of against you. One of the million reasons that we homeschool.

Rachel Winchester [00:07:16]:

Yeah. That's just my personal experience, but I wanted to revisit some of these three things that we've been talking about each time, work, study, and service, and talk about, okay, how do do these things change in these middle school years? How does work change? What might change in study? And what kind of service opportunities could middle schoolers have?

Carole Joy Seid [00:07:40]:

Yeah. So let's start with work. I would say this is when hard manual labor really comes into play, particularly for our boys, but girls enjoy it as well. And this is when kids can work alone. They have the gumption to do that as well. So it becomes a wonderful honing of their character through hard work. And then the service piece also, the this is when you really can be a huge contributor to society, both at church, neighborhood, jobs, missions. This is when kids can really earn their stripes because they they make a difference.

People aren't feeling sorry for them and giving them a job. It's that they're really contributing, and they have ownership for it. And they take initiative, like, well, have you thought of this, or do you think you need this? Or would you let me do such and such? That's where they really start to build businesses. Doctor Moore and Dorothy wrote a book called *Minding Your Own Business*, and that was the premise of the book is kids can start their own businesses and become teenage entrepreneurs and tongue in cheek millionaires, which they can. And it's really it's a really fun period of time because your children are able. And then for academically, this is normally when kids are reading fluently. That's kinda what we wait for, and then we can just really let them take it to the top. They're reading Dante.

They're reading Saint Augustine. They're reading Shakespeare. You know, whatever they're reading, they can do pretty much anything at this point in time. And it's it's a really rewarding period of history in a child's life where they start to really bend that twig the way it's going. You know, I just wanna do this the rest of my life.

Rachel Winchester [00:12:44]:

So in the middle school years, are they doing school with the family? Do you want them to be integrated?

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:52]:

Yeah. So in the in the middle school years, yes. They're integrated. Yes. They are. And then normally in high school, they start to move into getting up before everybody and doing math or science. But in junior high, it's more of a, we're part of this together. But they'll start to extend their wings and develop some independence.

Rachel Winchester [00:13:14]:

Maybe they have, like, a one off.

Carole Joy Seid [00:13:16]:

One subject that they're doing by themselves. Yes. Or even being farmed out for maybe one subject that you don't feel qualified to teach at home. Such as, like, a science or a higher level math sort of? Yes. Exactly. Particularly science. I mean, when you get into high school, that's normally when I do recommend you farming your kids out for science. Junior high normally is when we do really great nature notebooks, and they're still at home with the family.

So I don't recommend you going into these high level sciences for junior high, but I do, of course, for senior high. This is when we make children naturalists in junior high so

that we can go on to make them scientists in high school and college if they're going that route in college.

Rachel Winchester [00:14:01]:

That makes sense because then they have the abilities to draw really detailed drawings and that sort of thing, and they could write detailed notes. They can actually make it something really nice.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:13]:

Yes. And it's when they really fall in love with nature, you know, and this is why Coldwater and, you know, nature experiences wilderness trips, things like that. That's all part of these junior high years where you're really shaping your child's familiarity and confidence to be in the wild and to be in God's creation, that we're not afraid of God's creation. We respect it. I'm not saying we, you know, we don't we're not cavalier about it, but it's creating that bond with God's creation that will shape them for the rest of their lives. Whether they would rather be inside where there's electricity or whether they are happiest out sleeping under the stars. You're gonna shake them in junior high for that.

Making it a place they go for restoration.

Being in nature will bring you to another level in your spiritual development. I mean, particularly doing really hard things. One child said to me that Coldwater is hard. And I said, I know. It is. And that's why we do it, because it is hard. And in our families, we do hard things. That's part of the homeschool philosophy of living.

And so this these junior high years are key for shaping our kids and also their love of independent reading and independent learning and owning their own education. These all take place in junior high, and then when they move to senior high, they've got it. Nobody cares what your kid's getting grades or even what they study in junior high, so don't let that be a big determination of how you do junior high. But for me, it's more a time where you're giving them more and more responsibility, more and more ownership, independence, opportunities to serve and work on a much higher level, and that will really set them up for being very independent for high school and really independent for college, if they're going to college or trade school.

AD Rachel Winchester [00:16:12]:

Here's the thing. If you're not experiencing peace in homeschooling, it's time to press pause and get fresh perspective. Giving your children an amazing education doesn't have to add stress and pressure to your life. Homeschooling can be enjoyable. How do I know? Because there is research that lets us know what works in educating our

children. Doctor Raymond Moore coined the term better late than early to encapsulate what the research showed. An unhurried childhood will serve your kids well. And let's be honest, it's better for the whole family.

But in order to give your kids that sort of education, you're going to have to quiet the voices in popular culture and listen to the research. Listen to the stories of people who have gone before you. Learn the framework and get the tools you need to succeed. If you want to learn our literature based approach to education and get the book lists that are the key to your success, join us in 2024 at a live event. You can learn more by visiting our website at homeschoolmadesimple.net/seminars. Now back to the show.

Rachel Wincheter:

So I think in our state, we have to, like, 7th grade or something, you have to start adding another subject, maybe grammar, I think it is. Would that be when you start to do that sort of thing?

Carole Joy Seid [00:17:27]:

Well, grammar is what I want you to teach in junior high, so that's interesting. Yeah. Grammar is the most abstract of all subjects, grammar and math, and they're the most universally hated based on research. But the reason they're hated is because they're so abstract, and we introduce them to children when they're not ready for them. If you wait till junior high, preferably 8th grade to teach grammar, teach it like you mean it. I like Winston grammar. It's a manipulative kind of card game. Then you give them an opportunity to be good at something right out of the chute, And that means usually success and a warm feeling toward it as opposed to I hate this, and I never wanna do this as long as I live.

Rachel Winchester [00:18:07]:

Would spelling be lumped in that if you notice that as your child is doing more writing that they don't have that acumen for spelling, or would that be earlier that you've noticed that?

Carole Joy Seid [00:18:19]:

Yeah. That's a good question. I think you're right, Rachel. Spelling is one of the last things normally that kicks in. So I usually say wait till your child is about 13 or 14. If they still can't spell, we'll look for some other heroic measures. But spellers become spellers through reading, and you can only memorize so many words. So how much are they reading is the question.

By junior high, they should be reading, I would say, easily, 3 hours a day. So if they read in the morning when they wake up, if they read an hour after lunch during quiet time, and if they read an hour before they go to bed at night, I mean, that's 3 hours. Building in silence and solitude, letting them, you know, maybe have some sort of employment, these are all things that take place in junior high and shape us.

Rachel Winchester [00:19:05]:

Yeah. As you're saying that, I'm thinking about one of our board members recently told us about how her children, even as they've graduated and moved out of the house, they still have this sort of liturgical rhythm of the way that they live and just you saying, if there's a pattern of reading at certain times of the day, if there's a pattern for being outdoors, if there's a pattern for reading God's word each day, you know, you're giving them these things that are just anchors in their life that then as they add the complexity and stuff, they can just have these things to come back to that are really restorative and healthful, you know, for their whole lives. They're things that you want them to keep doing.

Carole Joy Seid [00:19:47]:

Yeah. I heard a story of a man that went through a very, very hard time in his life and was living in the world and just a mess. He made a mess of his life. But one Sunday morning, he woke up, and this muscle memory of his heart said, well, Sunday morning, we go to church every Sunday morning. We always go to church on Sunday. And he got dressed and he showed up at the front door of a church, and he came back to the Lord, and his whole destiny was changed because his parents had instituted this pattern that was so deep in his DNA that as far as he was as a prodigal son in the far country, that DNA was still true. He had to learn the hard way, but it redeemed later on. It came back just like teaching children scripture to music and all the things we do because those things are imprinting in them for life.

And reading about the POWs during the Vietnamese war that were being tortured in what they facetiously called the Hanoi Hilton, And they were separated from each other. They were tormented mentally, all the things that happened. And several of the men began to tap, you know, I think using Morse code, and they were tapping the Sunday school songs they'd learned as little children. When they all were released at the end of the war, they said those were the things that kept them from going mentally insane under the torture or the things that several of the POWs brought to the group from their early childhood memories about the war. And people who weren't even believers became Christians through these guys tapping spiritual truths they've learned in, you know, missus Smith's Sunday school class at the age of 10 or 9 or 7. The power of those early years. Of course, the Catholic church has always said, give us a child till

they're 7, and they'll be a Catholic the rest of their lives, those early years and how we imprint. And I think junior high is another very formative period because, again, they're in that transition into being big kids, but half the time they're really little kids.

And when they're little kids, they're so smart. They're so perceptive that you can expose them to really high level thought, but they're still tender. They haven't hardened their hearts like an older kid would do, and so it's it's a key time. I've taught Bible and and history to junior high kids in a Christian school, and they're just so dear. You know, they loved me. They make these really strong attachments, and I would say really tough things to them about the Lord and about the scripture and really challenge them, and they just loved it. They love to be challenged. They love to be treated like they're older and more mature than they are.

Rachel Winchester [00:22:37]:

What would be your encouragement to parents of middle school kids?

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:41]:

Yeah. I think just keeping your hand on the pulse, knowing your child well, that there are times they wanna be babied, and there are times that they really thrive in being challenged and pushed and knowing which time is which. And that comes out of attachment from you. You've gotta know your children and not expect other people who are not even bonded to them to know your children better than you. I hear so many parents say to me, well, I just can't do a thing with this child, and I'm just gonna send them to school. I'm like, woah. What you're saying is you expect someone to do for money what you can't do for love. This is a time where prayer and fasting, I think, is really key in raising our children where we get divine insights from the Lord, scriptural direction from the Lord, that Rhema word that he gives us for each child, which is gonna look different from another.

Also being very careful that you help your child find their own identity in this period, that they're not living in an older brother or sister's shadow, or that they're not living your life that you wished you had. Do you always want to be a baseball player? So by gum, this one's gonna be a baseball player, whatever it is. But really helping your child find their own identity before God and helping them see what a beautiful calling and the gifts that God has given them, which are completely unique to anyone else in our family. I think that's also so important for them to just really know who they are. It's important for them to feel like they're accepted and respected for who they are and the gifts and the callings of God that he sent and placed on them. Really admiring your kids, letting them fail, that's another important part of the junior high journey, letting

them try things. You know? Well, I thought I was gonna be a Olympic gymnast, but I can't even do a somersault. Okay.

Let's move on. Let's let's try horseback riding or let's, you know it doesn't have to be what you thought. This is the time to experiment. There's no loss here. We spent a couple dollars on some lessons, and it was a disaster, so no biggie here. Let's try something else. I think you'd be really good at track and field. Have you ever thought of that? Helping your kids to make those discoveries in a safe, nurturing environment where, like you said, the hens aren't pecking at you like when you came home, but it gave you a a safe haven to explore who you were, thoughts, concepts that you had.

I think that is the key for junior high. But if you're in a public or even private school setting, that is the most dangerous, most emotionally weighted period of time where nobody's taking any risks. Because as I like to say, nobody asks other 12 year old girls to teach your daughter how to be kind. These are not tools that these girls have. But if they're with you, if they're with other trusted adults, boy, they can just blossom like a rose. I like to tongue in cheek say, if you have to choose between junior high and high school or preschool and elementary school, homeschool for junior high and high school, and send them to school. I don't really mean that, but you know what I mean. Just because it's just such an important time when life makes up its mind in our kids' lives.

Rachel Winchester [00:26:02]:

Yeah. And today, the social contagion can come into your home, into their lives through a phone and through a screen of just you know, I think about at least I was able to leave school or you could just have that boundary and you could really be safe with your family even if you were having to go back into that scenario. And so I think parents really feeling that authority and parental responsibility to protect their children, even if they are at home, you still have the responsibility to make sure that they're not experiencing that contagion through technology.

Carole Joy Seid [00:26:39]:

Good point, Rachel, that we are gatekeepers, and we need to to be very confident. I was just at one of my board member's house. They have 8 kids. And when people come over to their house, they have as you walk in the back door there, there's a little counter, and that counter is the phone station. And they say to the kids, feel free to plug your phone in over there, but that is where the phones belong, and everyone who walks in their house knows the rule. Being parental, that hasn't kept anybody from wanting to spend time at their house. People, when you're confident, they'll read your confidence, and they won't push back on it. In one of the books that Bill Sears and his

sons wrote, I think it's called the healthiest kid in the neighborhood, they talk about creating family culture.

And one of the things they do is we don't eat foods with any food in it, any ingredient that we can't pronounce, and we don't eat foods with numbers and letters in their ingredients. So it becomes almost a source of pride. And as pastor Chuck's mom used to say, any dead fish can float with the tide, but it takes a live fish to swim against the tide. That's what we need to be as parents and proud of it, and our children will take their cues from us.

Rachel Winchester [00:28:01]:

That's great. Well, I think this will really help middle school parents and can be a difficult time to navigate, and so we get asked about it a lot. So I think this will really help people to focus on what's important and not worry about the other things.

You've been listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast with Carole Joy Seid. If you want to learn more about the Homeschool Made Simple approach, you can visit our website, homeschoolmadesimple.net/ebook to get our free ebook about the 5 essential parts of a great education.

Thanks for joining us this week on the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. Be sure to join us next time as we help you homeschool simply, inexpensively, and enjoyably. Blessings.