

## The Goals of the Middle School Years *C2C Podcast Episode #18*



- Jody: This episode is all about the middle school years. As homeschoolers, grade levels are often not as precise as they are in public or private schools. Instead, we tend to look at educational and developmental seasons. Now, Jenni and I divide the homeschool experience into four main seasons, the pre-academic phase, which is like birth through pre-K-ish, the elementary years, which is kindergarten through fifth grade-ish, like the "ish-es" here, and the middle-school years, which is what we're going to focus on today, which is sixth through eighth grade-ish. And then there's the high school years, which we will talk about in next week's podcast. So today, we want to focus on the goals of the middle school years, but C2C education is all about first understanding the goals and then reverse-engineering them to create an awesome practical plan.
- Jenni: So, Jo, before we jump into this, I would love to just talk briefly about these Facebook live videos that we've been doing in the Facebook group every week in our Facebook group, Homeschooling From Cradle to Calling. So if you're not in that group and you're listening go to Facebook just to a quick search on "Homeschooling From Cradle to Calling" and request to join the group. Um, and then once a week, we do a Facebook live video on a specific topic. And we'll do, like, fairly practical things.
- Jody: Well, I think one of the biggest, awesome ones that we have and people are continually looking at it is "How to Homeschool."
- New Speaker: Yeah. And we did one on, um, how to help your kids make money. Um, we did a specific one on, um, the 50 States and how to study the 50 States. So we do kind of specific things in those- we're a little more specific and focused than in this podcast. So...
- Jody: And if you have a hard time finding one, you can go in and ask to be tagged and we can help you find it and tag you in the specific Facebook Live that you're wanting to watch.
- Jenni: Plus, you can ask questions.
- Jody: Oh yeah, totally.
- Jenni: Sometimes we'll do giveaways, even during the Facebook - if you tune in, live. So, and then also, um, if you want to keep up with what's happening with us, go to our website, From Cradle to Calling, and just sign up. We will never sell your email. We're not going to inundate you with a bunch of junk mail. Um, we're not going to make you feel like we're selling you crap. I can't stand that when you sign up for

somebody's... 'Cause you really liked their information and you want to hear what's happening and you want their insight. And then all you do is get ads from them. That's not going to happen.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: So, um, today, Jody, we are talking about the middle school year goals for homeschooling and the middle school years is such an exciting time. And I want us to break this down first to the goals and there are, let me count, we've got one, two, three, four, five. Five major goals for this season. The first one is purely academic. And Jo, you and I feel like the major academic goal of this particular season is kind of twofold. It's learning to develop study skills, because- I mean, okay, this is really especially true for kids who believe they're going to end up going on to higher education, but sometimes in the middle school years, you're not sure yet. And we always have to know how to learn. We always have to know - studying is just the tools of learning. It's just the process for learning.

Jody: Well, the study skills, um, that, obviously we feel are important, really have a lot to do with, too, um, just what- like, annotation, understanding how to annotate and...

Jenni: Written material.

Jody: Right. And even, like, being able to take notes, like, in a sermon or when you go to see a lecture and it's not necessarily, like, just a sermon, but you know, how often do we do go to seminars or take classes even if you're doing a continuing Ed or you - it's just something you want to know further about. Maybe you're trying to learn about emotional intelligence and you go hear someone speak. You're not going to remember that.

Jenni: Right.

Jody: So, how do you write that down so you can remember? So, those skills are super important.

Jenni: And then what do you do with it once you've written it down? How many people have years of sermon notes in notebooks that they never look at?

Jody: Yeah, I had that.

Jenni: So what do you do with them, right? So that's part of what I think you start teaching them in middle school. It doesn't end in middle school, but it definitely starts in middle school. The second thing that you and I, Jody, really feel like starts in middle school is formal writing. I know right now, the public school is teaching kids parts of speech in kindergarten. And I have to tell you, I think that's crazy.

Jody: They're crazy people.

Jenni: I really do. You know what? Grammar, English, gram- American English grammar is so abstract and complex. I always use the pronoun as an

example. I mean to really fully understand a pronoun there's so much you have to understand. In a lot of cases, you have to be able to identify whether the word is functioning as a subject or an object to know which pronoun is appropriate, right? And that's complicated at times. I mean, the subject isn't quite as complicated, but then you also have to know, well, this might not be the subject of the sentence, but it's the subject of this particular clause. Well, that brings up the question: What's a clause? What determines a clause? It's never ending, and then you have to understand like, am I using- Is it proper to use a pronoun now because the pronoun refers to an antecedent, which is a noun that immediately proceeds the pronoun. This is complex stuff. So, um, and we see lots of mistakes in grammar with pronouns, because it's complicated.

Jody: Well, and also in writing, what's super important is communication and we want to be clear. And how many times, we were just talking about this earlier today when we get texts from people and if they're unclear, they meant one thing, but what their text or communication actually said was very unclear and you get a misinterpretation. So it's so important...

Jenni: Or confusion at the worst.

Jody: Yes. So writing is so important. It is a leg of communication.

Jenni: An important one, especially in today's day and age with all that we do in text. I don't just mean like text messages, but how much we write through social media through email through.. I mean, so, um, we believe writing is super important, but we believe that in the middle school years is the best time to begin formal writing education. Prior to that, you know, getting kids to read really well, teaching them actual penmanship and how to form letters. Um, we love the Charlotte Mason approach of copy work and then eventually that morphs into dictation. All of that is great elementary school years writing, uh, memorization of poetry and Bible verses and things like that are great foundations for writing. But ultimately the middle school years is an awesome time to begin formal writing education where you, um, break down the mechanics of language and talk about how to, um, put that out in writing. And then that continues through the high school years, because there's all sorts of rhetoric that has to happen in the high school years.

Jody: You just reminded me talking about just the word "writing" in itself. I had a mom who she wants to homeschool. She pulled her kid out of school and she wrote to me and said, um, "So I'm going to do X, Y, and Z, blah, blah, blah. What do you think about that?" And um, we're not- they didn't do cursive in school and I said, "But don't you want to?" and she goes, "I do!" I go "Then do it".

Jenni: Yeah. Why not?

Jody: Let this child be able to read the founding documents, right?

Jenni: And they're all written in cursive, FYI.

Jody: So let's teach our kids cursive.

Jenni: Yeah. I know. When my kids get a letter from a grandparent, my younger kids they're like, "Uh, mom, you need to read it to them because they haven't learned cursive".

Jody: It's like a code.

Jenni: It is. It's a different language.

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: So one of the things, I think, we have to keep in mind during these years, especially, or at least beginning in these years, is that again, we say this all the time, Jody, but our kids are not containers that we pour information into. And especially at this age, um, we read this somewhere. I wish I could give credit where credit is due for this second part that I'm about to say, um, I want to say it may have been Tim Elmore, but I'm not a hundred percent sure, but we read somewhere education should not be information-based as much as interpretation-based. That is not our own concept. Um...

Jody: We need to put that in our notes. Seriously, 'cause it's so good. Like that's a quote that needs to live on forever.

Jenni: We have to try and Google it and see if we can figure out who originally said that, but it's really, really good. And it's really, really true, especially in this timeframe.

Jody: It's very socratic in the way of, you know, deep thought and let's discuss it,

Jenni: And question.

Jody: Yeah, what's your interpretation of that? What do you think?

Jenni: Why do you think this is and what do you think that this implies? And if this is truth, what does it mean for these other assumptions that we have? And...

Jody: So maybe the Homeschool movement should be the Socratic teaching movement. Get these kids to ask questions and think!

Jenni: I watched this really interesting, um, documentary series on Netflix about.... It was called something like "The Great Thinkers of the Ancient World," and it really only discussed three specific ancient, um, thinkers, but Socrates is one of them. And there's this whole like, uh, still in Greece today, there's this whole socratic group and...

Jody: I love that.

Jenni: The interviewer was talking with one of the people and I was blown away. He just kept asking her... Everything she said prompted another question. And she was really amazed by it like, "I don't know. I don't

know why I think that", but it really helped her to realize that we don't know how to dissect- That's what analysis is. It's breaking things down to its basic components. And that's what we want to teach our kids to do. I want to teach our kids to take information and learn how to break it apart and then figure out, and this is what he talked about. He talked about the ability to break something into its core components, but then once we have it broken down into those core components, which is hard as it is, then re-synthesizing that with other information into a new whole, that sort of education. Right? And this is a massively critical thinking heavy process that we want to teach our kids to do beginning in the middle school years. So this is really our academic goals are how to study and that's all part of that. Right? And then, um, the beginning of writing would be middle school. Did you need to say some and Jo? 'Cause you started to and I cut you right off.

Jody: Oh no. I actually just had a thought and my thought was I had a pastor once to tell me, 'cause I ask a lot of questions, and I had a pastor say to me once - we were friends at the time - and I said, um, the pastor said to me, "You ask a lot of questions, like too many questions," and I quickly realized, that was not the pastor for me.

Jenni: No, because...

Jody: I don't want to blindly follow,

Jenni: You know, I was raised in a Jewish family and one of the things that, I think still in a lot of ways, carries into the Jewish culture, at least in the one that I grew up in, um, dates back to the early Yeshiva days where they still do this this way. But the way that they were educated was very Socratic. They would take- I mean, all of the Talmud is...

Jody: I love when you say Jewish words.

Jenni: The Talmud. Um...

Jody: No, all of it. It's, like, there's a little accent in there. I like that.

Jenni: Um, they just take, um, verses from the Torah and then it's like one verse and then all around it, is like questions and commentaries from different....

Jody: So cool.

Jenni: A great way to see this in action is to watch the movie "Yentl." And if you watch the movie "Yentl," you can see how the way that they educate it was the, um, the rabbi would come out and he would ask a question and instead of answering it, the students, although they did sometimes try to answer it, would often ask more questions and they were really judged on the quality of their questions, even more than the quality of their answers.

Jody: So, one of the most fun things to do is to watch "Yentl" with Jenni Stahlmann. 'Cause she stops the movie and we have conversation and

she explains a lot to you and you're like, "(gasp) I didn't know that!" It's super fun.

Jenni: It's super fun. It is such a great movie, too. Okay. So our second goal of the middle school years is to help our kids become responsible and self-governing. So if we remember back to our podcast on the goals of the elementary years, we said first of all academically, we said the goals of the elementary years were to develop the tools of learning and a love of learning. Right? And so the goals, academically, we said for middle school is to begin to develop um, study skills, how to actually study a topic and begin writing. The goals of the elementary school years, um, life-skills-wise is to develop independence. Once they are in middle school, they should have that independence and now they have to learn to be responsible and self-governing in their independence. Right?

Jody: Independence means non-controlling.

Jenni: Yes, we can't be controlling. And we have to- really, we should not be resp- by the element- The middle school years, that is, we should not feel responsible for most of what pertains to them, so...

Jody: No helicopter parenting here.

Jenni: No. And especially in those middle school years, they really need to understand how to become responsible for their belongings. They need to become responsible for their...

Jody: For your belongings.

Jenni: ...their schedule. Yep. The house, as a whole, we always say that our family is a community and we are all responsible for the maintenance and the betterment of our community of every community we're a part of. Um, so this takes time. This is really about organization and it's about time management. Um, it's about self-control...

Jody: Self-awareness.

Jenni: Self-awareness and self control. And, um, it really is a process. So it doesn't mean that in the middle school years, we just begin to expect this of them.

Jody: No, this is not like they take a magic pill and they're suddenly responsible and self-governing.

Jenni: Whoops! Sixth grade.

Jody: It's a training ground.

Jenni: It's a training ground. And the middle school years is the best time, I think, we think, to develop those skills. And there are tools we can give them. We want them to begin to keep a calendar. You know, here's the deal. It doesn't matter if your calendar is in your phone. It doesn't matter if your calendar is a paper calendar. The bottom line is

organized people have a calendar. That's just it. I know this is like a fight. I'm saying this defensively.

Jody: Responsible people, because they're organized.

Jenni: Because, I know- I've seen so many people say like, "Well, I don't need a calendar. I just keep it in my head." You can't.

Jody: Oh my goodness, mm-mm. Nope.

Jenni: You can't keep it all in your head. And we can't teach your kids that.

Jody: You're lying to yourself.

Jenni: Yeah. I mean, I have an extended family member who's notorious for this. And so, um, they planned a...

Jody: We all have one, right?

Jenni: ...baby shower for me with one of my children and had invited people had my friends involved in the planning of it - at the last minute. It actually was the first time anyone was actually ever going to surprise me. I hate surprises, but I really literally had no clue about this one. Um, and she canceled the shower, literally, like the week of. People had already bought gifts. It was a whole big to-do. And why? Because she had a wedding that weekend that she didn't write down and a wedding trumps the baby shower, even though she was the one throwing the shower. So, um, calendars are really important. So we keep our- teach our kids to keep a calendar. We love the bullet journal system or a modified version of the bullet journal system. There's a wonderful paper management system that we learned from Lisa Woodruff at, I have to see if I'm saying this right, Jody, I'm going to look it up. I think it's Organized 365. And I always know, I'm not sure if I'm getting that if it's... I think it's Organized 365. Yeah. It's a podcast. It's a website. Um, and it's awesome. It's an awesome, awesome resource. Um, but she has this concept called the Sunday Basket that we utilize to manage paper and that we teach our kids to use to manage paper. Jo, you and I also have our kids, um, use bags.

Jody: I use the bags.

Jenni: Me too. My-

Jody: I have to, I have to. I have a bag for everything. We have art class. We have our homeschool board group.

Jenni: Same thing.

Jody: We have our stuff that we do. Like I have a bag for everything. I have a personal bag that I will take when we go on outings. Like, I have a bag for stinking everything.

Jenni: Me too. My daughter is taking, um, an art class with our local homeschool co-op this year. And it's a high school art class and it's really,

um, kind of advanced, I think. And they're using a lo- I just want- Can I complain for a second? I- No, it's not really a complaint. I'm super excited about this class and I'm so grateful for the class, but if you can indulge me for one second - WOW - \$200 in supplies.

Jody: That's an art class. Whoa!

Jenni: Lord, help us! But that's a lot of art supplies, as you can imagine. And so the first thing I said to her was, "Go in your closet and find a bag that's go-" when she had it all in front of her like, "look at the size of it. You want a bag that is going to comfortably fit everything with a little bit of wiggle room. Um, and if you don't have one, let me know immediately so that we can make sure we get one," because then that stuff lives in that bag and all she has to do when she comes back from co-op is just take a couple of minutes to quickly sort it, organize it, make sure it's all good and clean. You know, Jody, this was your brain child. We do take an art class, you and I, that we love. It's like...

Jody: Love.

Jenni: ...joy of our month. And we do go once a month and it's an art journaling class that lasts for hours and we just love it. But Jo, you had a brilliant idea, and this now lives in my art bag - is you bought us nail brushes. Because, man, we get some paint.

Jody: Nasty paint in the nails.

Jenni: And stuck on our skin and you just take the brush and it scrubs right off. So that lives in my art bag, along with my journal and my- and I- we use, um, an apron and I keep that in there, too.

Jody: Okay. So one of my favorite, well, our favorite, company for bags is Thirty-One.

Jenni: I love Thirty-One. They're pricey, but I love them.

Jody: They're so fun.

Jenni: Actually. One of my favorite places for bags, the Goodwill.

Jody: Yeah.

Jenni: You can just get such cool different kinds of bags. Okay. So, um, uh, give your kids a key to the house in middle school and teach them to be responsible with it. Give them a wallet and have them keep - if, um, if you don't belong to a co-op, if you belong to a co-op, you might be able to get a student ID card through that. If not, make one. You can probably even Google like "homeschool student ID card," I think, are templates out there.

Jody: Well, there's free companies. I can picture the symbol right now. I did it for years when my kids were younger. You get a free, um, homeschool card from them.

Jenni: Yeah. You go take it over to Staples, get it laminated. Um, have them keep that in their wallet, you know? So, and then teach them to start carrying their wallet with them. So, if you're at the store and your children see a little knick-knack they want to buy and they say, "Mom, I have \$5 at home. Can you buy this for me and I'll pay you back?" This is the time in their life to say, "You know, honey, if I went to the grocery store and I left my wallet at home, the grocery store wouldn't let me walk out without my - with my groceries. I couldn't tell them I'm going to come back and pay them later. So you need to get in the habit of taking that stuff with you and keeping your belongings on you." Um, okay. So we have, uh, the second goal is to become responsible and self-governing. The third goal is to develop passion and tied into that, we put these two things together, because they're often very connected, but a sense of identity. It is not unusual for homeschoolers to go through wacky fashion stages. I'm going to tell you right now, I did raise a few eyebrows in the Christian homeschool community when my son was in middle school, because I had one kid who really wanted to experiment. Now, my rule was you had to be - you couldn't show any body parts. Like we couldn't be immodest, right? I'm not going to let them, you know, show any, uh, use any bad words on their clothing or anything like that. But I did let my kid dye his hair purple. You let Chase have a mohawk.

Jody: And dyed hair. Dyed red hair. Yeah - like bright red. Straight down the center.

Jenni: Yeah - and...

Jody: The people were horrified.

Jenni: Yeah, I let him have a lip piercing. That was a big- that raised some controversy. But let me explain this. First of all, everybody, if you have a biblical conviction, then sit your kids down and say, "For whatever reason, we feel convicted about this as a family." And so I find if you talk to them, right Jo, they kind of come on your team. But if you're just worried about what the other people are going to think, we want to teach our kids to be able to stand up against the- go against the norm. Because you know, as believers, they're going to have to stand up against the norm, especially nowadays in society.

Jody: It's called being brave.

Jenni: They're going to have to be brave. And as long as it's not permanent, I didn't let my kids do anything, permanent.

Jody: That was my rule - yeah.

Jenni: Hair grows back. So...

Jody: Piercings close...

Jenni: Piercings close , um, except for gauges, some gauges don't - I always told my kids, they weren't...

Jody: Those made me want to vomit when I saw them.

Jenni: Yeah, and so, I mean, I wasn't going to let them do anything that wasn't going to close because you know...

Jody: We don't need any like tribal, like ear lobes hanging down to their knees.

Jenni: Singing: "Do your ears hang low? Do they wobble to and fro?" Right? So, um, yeah, we were pretty, uh, I don't want to say we were strict about things that were permanent. We had a pretty hard and fast rule that they couldn't do anything permanent, but they could certainly experiment with, um, their identity. And this has to do with developing passion, because at the time, um, this particular kid in my house wanted to be an animator. He was, he wanted to be either an animator or a filmmaker. And he was in that creative world. In fact, we were able to get him an internship, because the middle school years are a great time. If we're going to help them to develop passion, we take their interest -'cause you remember at the elementary years, were developing interests. But by middle school, we're starting to take one or two of those strong interests. And we're going to actually now do the work of developing passion. Passion is not something you discover.

Jody: No, it's work.

Jenni: It's work. You have to develop it. An interest you discover. So, um, this was an interest, um, animation and filmmaking, and we were able to get him an apprenticeship with an animation studio. Um, you can do job shadowing at this time. Um, you can do internships in middle school and he was in this really hyper-creative environment. These people are all graduates of art school. And so he wanted to put on that persona and see if it fit him. We need to give our kids some opportunities to do that.

Jody: Well, we have to be careful with like accusing them of trying to be someone else, because actually you kind of want them to try on someone else, in a sense, so that they can see if they like it and if it's really part of them or not part of them.

Jenni: You know, it's - you make a great point, Jody, because when you look at, um, how some of the greatest artists learn to paint and how they develop their style or how some of the best writers develop their style, it was first by imitating the masters. And so you have to study the masters and you have to have role models. And those people are going to be people that, in a sense, you imitate. We love the book called...

Jody: "Steal Like an Artist."

Jenni: "Steal Like an Artist." And that's really what they do initially - and then in that process, they begin to develop their own voice. I had a mom, um, not too long ago come to me, and she was horrified. And she was like, "Oh, how about this? My daughter wants to shave one side of her head. And what would you do with that? What's your..."

Jody: Let her shave it.

Jenni: ...take on that? And I think, I really think she came to me with the - I think she really believed that I was going to be like, "Girl, you tell her - you set her straight and you tell her how it's going to be!" And I was like, "Okay, so talk me through your concerns. Because sometimes they have valid concerns that I hadn't thought about, you know?" And she was like, "Well, I mean, like, I'm not - my concern is that she's going to be a freak." And I was like, "Well, does that make somebody a freak?" I mean, again, it's that Socratic kind of digging. "What really was it?" And really, at the end of the day, she was afraid that people would view her daughter as rebellious. Now I get that, because that is the concern, like my eight-year-old boy has his ear pierced. Why? He has older sibling's and they've experimented with some of those things and so he wants to see if that's part of who he is. So...

Jody: There's a little bit in rebellion in being different and being creative and being unique.

Jenni: Yeah. There is.

Jody: Not that rebellion of...

Jenni: It's not a sinful rebellion.

Jody: No, it's the, "I want to be my own person. I want to experiment with this."

Jenni: Individuality.

Jody: Yeah and, you know, experimenting has really been given a bad rap lately, because of the innuendos, but we do want to experiment and even like, the color that we like, or the styles that we like, or the clothing that we like or otherwise we're just vanilla and we're tofu, you know what I mean? And we don't want our kids to think like that. We want our kids to question what's going on around them, because does it make sense? And is it godly?

Jenni: Right. And they need to sometimes put these things on. And if we're putting godly role models in front of them, then for the most part, they're going to be able to discern it. And we want them to make these decisions on their own.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: Because at the end of the day, if we determine what's godly and what's not, then when they step away from us, how are they going to have a compass?

Jody: Well, their compass is going to be, "Who can I turn to that's gonna fuel me with an answer?" and that's dangerous.

Jenni: So then we think they need to develop agency at this stage. So agency basically means that they understand what resources are available to them. And they feel empowered to be able to meet their needs, to be

able to learn what they need to learn, to be able to, um, find the resources that are necessary.

Jody: If they have an issue, they can find an answer.

Jenni: Yeah. If they have a problem, they can find a solution.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: And, um, one - there's a variety of ways to do this, but one really cool way to do this, and the middle school years are a great time to start this is to help them think about, um, a business that they can develop. Um, we did a, again, we did a whole Facebook live on this, so we're not going to dig into this, but if you're interested in finding out more about that, go to Facebook and search on "Homeschooling From Cradle to Calling" and join the group. When you get in, just search on the - or if you can just ask us the question and we'll tag you in it, um, on how to start a business. And then last of all, um, our last goal is to, um, develop healthy relationships and understand boundaries. And in the middle school years, that's really what, um, comes out of - I think it begins to take center stage.

Jody: Big time.

Jenni: More so, really, I think developmentally in the elementary years, kids are parent-focused, which is where they need to be and it's great. And that shift starts to happen around the middle school years where they become more of peer focused. I think a lot of parents are afraid of that, especially homeschoolers. Um, but it's important, because when they come out of our home, we want them to be able to relate to their generation. We want them to be able to connect with other people in healthy ways.

Jody: Right.

Jenni: Right?

Jody: And understand those boundaries and friendship circles and...

Jenni: Well, they need to understand, um, where to put people in their lives and what we mean by that is, um, what expectations are acceptable of which people, what expectations are unacceptable? Um, what are their personal rules in relationship? How do they communicate those rules?

Jody: How much information to share or not share.

Jenni: Correct. Very much so. Um, what does it mean to have a best friend? Why? Why even have friends? What are the goals of friendships? So all of this- Jo, this would be a great Facebook live. We should do a Facebook live on this. Um, so that is one of the main goals of the - so those are our five middle school goals.

Jody: Let's talk about the boxes.

Jenni: So every- okay. I'm not typically like your box checker, but to some degree we all are.

Jody: I am.

Jenni: Yeah. And I think most parents are. Um, but even those who aren't still have some of it in them. Um, so there are some boxes that we think that you have to check as a homeschool parent in the middle school years. The first one is our made up thing. We call it at every level of the Daily Do's. These are basically the academic things that you have to do every day.

Jody: We make up a lot of stuff.

Jenni: We do.

Jody: We do.

Jenni: We really do.

Jody: Yeah. We do.

Jenni: Just making it up as we go along. No.

Jody: No, I don't mean it like that. We make up our own names for things, silly.

Jenni: So, um, the Daily Do's are the things that we have to do every day and we have our own idea about what we think some of those should be for middle school. We'll get to that in a minute. But, so the first box that we have to check off with our middle schoolers is that they've done their Daily Do's. And the second box that we have at every level is that we're working on helping to develop their character and their constitution. So by their character, we mean, in a sense, for the most part, how they communicate with and connect to the outside world. So things like, um, being generous, being honest, being honest i s something that you're doing to someone else, right? Um, and then constitution, we're talking about, um, those attributes that will help them to personally succeed, like having grit and stamina, um, you know, employing wisdom and that kind of thing. So we have Daily Do's as our first box, character and constitution is our second box. Our third box, as we mentioned earlier, is developing study skills. Our fourth box, which we think is important at every age, but it's something that I think we have a purpose to do, 'cause it's easy to overlook it is intentionally have conversation.

Jody: Which doesn't look like grilling.

Jenni: We did - they don't want to feel interrogated.

Jody: No, no.

Jenni: If they feel like you're interrogating them, they're gonna feel invaded. They're going to feel violated and they're going to clam right up. But we

want to literally have just open and warm conversation, which also means that we have to listen to them without judging them. So, like, if they say something and we're like, "Well, what do you mean by that? Well, why do you feel that way?" And they feel like they're being attacked. Even if their thought is scary, we have to approach it in a way that makes them feel empowered and like we're on their team. And not that we are, especially in the middle school years, 'cause this is the time, man, when they start to clam up, if they feel like they're either going to be interrogated or judged.

Jody: Well, and this brings, um, this would be another great Facebook live, actually is talking about the inner lawyer and the inner genius. And what we want is that inner genius to come out where you can brainstorm and you can really discuss why and how and who and what as opposed to the defensiveness.

Jenni: So what Jody means for those - yeah. Who have not heard this before, is we say that there are two people who live inside everyone. One, we call the inner lawyer. And that is that part of us that when threatened, comes out to protect and preserve, which means no growth is happening. It shuts down. It basically just wants to end this as quickly as possible with the least amount of damage and get out. Right? Um, that's not what we want to happen in our conversation, especially if there is a problem.

Jody: But that's what the interrogation does.

Jenni: It's also what the criticizing does. So for example, um, middle school years is a time when, um, a lot of kids, at least toward the end of middle school, often start to become aware of the opposite sex and they will mention...

Jody: You just brought up a bad subject, I have a feeling.

Jenni: Well, here's what happens. They make the mistake of mentioning it somehow in some way to their parents and they get read the Riot Act.

Jody: Yep.

Jenni: And they get the big smack down and...

Jody: "You are not allowed to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend! That is not allowed!".

Jenni: Well, the parents get really - they - I don't even know that they're that direct. They're like, "Why are you thinking that? What? Do you like him?" You know? And then the kid's like, "Uh, no, no, we just want to be friends."

Jody: I'm sure I've done this thing we speak of.

Jenni: So, um, it's not something to be afraid of. It is definitely something that has to be worked through. It does take work. Um, but it isn't something to be afraid of. It's some- It's a part - It's like- okay, it's not my favorite.

Let me just say that. It's like that and potty training and teaching them how to drive. Three least favorite things.

Jody: Right. But, okay. Let's just say this. We didn't start out having this, um, this mindset. We have, um, matured and grown and evolved in this, because it didn't turn out so well.

Jenni: You know what, I have to tell- I'm going to ask you a question, Jo. I have to tell you initially my reasons for not - for being afraid of the whole, you know, dating thing, first and foremost, there was the book "I Kissed Dating Goodbye" and it was - and it really had to do with teachings in the church that said like "dating is terrible and it should only be courtship" and...

Jody: It's like you're tasting the flavors of the cake and you can't be doing that.

Jenni: Well - and yeah, and it made us feel like it was all about fornication and sin.

Jody: Right, and it's not. It's about getting to know, uh, having a relationship and how do you talk to the opposite sex? What does that look like?

Jenni: And how do you develop healthy, um, godly boundaries and, um, what is - how can you allow this step to begin to bloom in your life without crossing into sin? And so I was afraid of it and I think - so two things were going on. I think one was fear. I was afraid, like, if I allowed my kid to talk about it, I was going to open some kind of door I couldn't close.

Jody: Well, and I think I was afraid of them following in my footsteps of a poor childhood of not making good choices, myself.

Jenni: I think the other part came, really, from my own teaching in the church. I think I heard other people around me talking about how this is the big "no", and it's taboo. And I thought, "Oh my gosh, if I..." So I remember, for me, it really started with a celebrity crush. And at first, um, you know, I was initially intimidated by the thought of it. And I knew that it was taboo in my social circles, but then, I started to think, "Wait, this could be really good." We don't know this person. I don't have any - big celebrity. I don't have any - there's no danger of my child...

Jody: There's a little bit of a placeholder.

Jenni: ...connecting to that person. They don't know them. Um, and I could begin to talk about what is appealing. And I started to say to her, "This is really cool, because you're getting to see some insight into who you are and what you like and what you want and expect in the person you are going to find." And so it allowed great conversation to happen. It also allowed, um, connection and intimacy to form between her and I, because we could talk about something that was kind of thrilling to her in a safe way. Right? So relationship skills is super important at this time. Um, so - and conversation and then that tying into that is also one of the boxes is relationship skills. And then as far as, um, life skills go,

um, again, we said responsibility and agency, so we can set some goals in that and create some boxes that we check off, like, you know, can they manage their own belongings? Can they pack their bag before we leave for co-op and make sure everything's there without me overseeing it? In the beginning, in that beginning of middle school, we have to sit with them the night before co-op and we have to help them write out a list of all the things they need to pack and make sure they put it by the door. Right? And we have to check it and make sure all this stuff is there. But our goal might be after that first year of doing that for them to be independent in that.

Jody: It's super fun to do that, too, because I think one of the things that comes out of that is watching them be able to look ahead and see what's coming to kind of give them, like, to think ahead and to have a big picture, to see the end of the road, in a sense. And that's some of it that takes some time to develop.

Jenni: Yeah, absolutely. So let's just breeze through the Daily Do's that we like for middle school. At every level there's Bible and worldview. This is a great time, um, to begin to study, um, scripture. I mean, it's different than just learning the Bible stories like we did in the elementary years. One of the studies that we love for middle-schoolers is in the book of Proverbs, having our kids begin to make a list, read through Proverbs, study it and make a list of everything that God says about wisdom and everything that the word says about the fool. And you begin to understand there's all different types of the fool, right? When you begin to study this out, um, and, uh, another thing that they can start doing at this time is they can begin their own Bible reading plan. I mean, I know, Jody, you and I utilize a Bible reading plan in our own walk that, you know, we read daily. Um, we think that worldview is really important and Summit Ministries has some great tools for worldview curriculum. It's also a great time to start digging into, um, conversation about their worldview. There's a wonderful book I'm reading now, called "Mama Bear Apologetics." Um, the general editor is Hilary Morgan Ferrer. I don't know if I'm saying that right. F-E-R-R-E-R. "Empowering your kids to challenge cultural lies." It's a great book to begin conversation in the middle school years. Um, another great study for middle schoolers is to just study the words of Jesus, like all the words in red...

Jody: Yeah, that's cool.

Jenni: ...and make a list of the words that Jesus says that are contrary to conventional wisdom, right? It's really going to get them to think on a deep...

Jody: Like, "listen to your heart, follow your heart?"

Jenni: Which Jesus never says, right?

Jody: No, but that's what people say, "follow your heart."

Jenni: Right. But like things that Jesus says like, "Love your enemies does not jive with conventional wisdom." Right? Or "He who's first is really last."

Jody:

Right.

Jenni:

Right? Or "He who loves his life will lose it." Like, these are all things that contradict conventional wisdom. And it's really, kind of, cool in the middle school years to have them begin to identify those things and break it down and talk about like, what does the world - I think the "follow your heart" is one of the things they talk about in the "Mama Bear Apologetics," they break down that big cultural lie. Okay. So first Daily Do, Bible and worldview, every day. And then second, um, on the Daily Do's, we have reading and they know how to read at this point. You're not teaching them how to read, hopefully. Um, unless there's of course, you know, a dyslexia or another learning disability, which could mean that is the case. And that's just your journey and that's okay. Um, but this is the time we feel where they begin to develop some reading stamina. By this age, they definitely should be able to read and see a movie playing in their head while they're reading. Out loud reading helps with that. So lots of audio books and reading, even still reading to them, Jody, you and I say we should be reading to our kids through high school. And having them to read to us too. My kids always liked when we did, like, once they hit middle school, high school, we would read together, but they would read a page and then I would read a page. And they love when it's their turn to read. But they also need that time of listening. That's really important. Um, we said writing, so that's a Daily Do. And at this stage, there's two things I think that they should be focusing on for writing daily. And one is, um, understanding grammar. And the second is developing some creativity.

Jody:

Okay, we have an awesome grammar curriculum, just saying.

Jenni:

We do, we also have a creative writing course.

Jody:

Yes, we do.

Jenni:

Yep. That's through the MrDmath.com website. Check it out. Um, and then, of course, there's math. So that's the last Daily Do. So our Daily Do's are Bible, worldview, reading, writing, and math. And math, at this stage, you're still doing some drills in middle school where they're still memorizing math facts. Um, but we're also doing some, we're laying a foundation for algebra, so they're doing some pre-algebra. Um, okay. So, uh, the last thing I think that we need to talk about, we did this in our last one and it's really, um, ties into one of our boxes that we check off. And that is conversation, um, is that we intentionally communicate some truths, um, during each stage of development. So, uh, the middle school years are tricky, because they tend to straddle two different sets of truths. Um, in the first, uh, podcast we did on this, when we talked about the elementary school years, we covered the first set of truths that we believe we need to intentionally communicate with our kids from infancy all the way through the start of adolescence. But that marker happens usually in the middle school years. Right? So you start out the middle school years, still communicating these truths. So I want to just review those, but then we cross over into the second set of truths that we intentionally communicate to our kids from adolescence through adulthood. So today, we'll actually camp on those for a few minutes. Okay. So first, just to review, the first set of truths that we

talked about - so if you missed this, you might want to go listen to the last podcast. Um, but there are five of them. And the first one is that you are worthy of love and connection and so is every person you meet. That is the truth we intentionally communicate from the time they're born until the start of adolescence. Um, number two, you are not an extension of us, your parents. You're your own person, uniquely created by God. Number three, you are an important part of every community that counts you as a member. Number four, you have the right to feel safe and protected. So funny. We were just, um, we just did, like, a little field trip with our little kids, our littlest ones this week. And we took them to this wonderful place where we live. That is, um, it's a beautiful, it's a garden. It's a park. It's a, um, it's also a historical site and there's some really cool things. And we were crossing over this long foot-grove. I mean, footbridge through a mangrove forest. And the footbridge went over water, 'cause mangroves are around saltwater, right? And there was, like, an oyster bed underneath. It was really cool. But when we got on the bridge, my little one, who had just turned four that day, um, said, "I'm scared!" And my instant thought was to say, "You are safe." And so, that's such an important message that we communicate. You have the right to feel safe and protected. I mean, you have a God whose hand is upon you, who protects you and looks out for you. And number five, you are inherently strong and capable. You're not weak, right? So when we do everything for them, we are not communicating that message. When we encourage them to try hard things, even when they're little, we are communicating that message. So those are the birth to adolescence truths that we want to communicate. Once they hit adolescence, things change, and they have that foundation. And not that any of those truths are untrue, they're not, but we're hoping that by the time adolescence comes, right? They're ready for the next stage of understanding. The Bible talks about a spiritual dietary transition, right? From milk to meat. That's in 1 Corinthians 3:2 and Galatians 5:12, as people mature, they need different forms of sustenance. And we believe that the adolescent soul needs truths that are going to prepare him, or her, for a powerful and a purposeful adulthood. So starting in middle school, when that adolescent point happens, um, we believe that it's our job to nourish their souls with seven truths that will take them into adulthood.

Jody: So, the first one is you are performing for an audience of One. I love this one. I think in performing for the audience of One, one of the things that I think anchors the soul is that it's not about you. It's not about the man approval. It's about God. Right? The second one is your life is a stewardship.

Jenni: Yeah. And we can break them all down in just a minute. If you want, go through them one by one.

Jody: Um, do we want to break them down or do we want to just...?

Jenni: We'll just rattle them off then we can break them down.

Jody: You are responsible for the maintenance and betterment of every community that counts you as a member. We've talked about that a

little bit before. The fourth one is society owes you no debts. Boy, is that true...

Jenni & Jody: Some people might need to hear that, today.

Jody: The fifth one is you cannot control other people. So yeah, there's that. Um, the sixth is you are responsible for both your successes and guess what, your mistakes. Number seven is your time in this life is finite.

Jenni: Yup. So the whole "yolo!" and...

Jody: That's a lie.

Jenni: Well, it is in the sense that they interpret it, the truth is you do only live once and that time is finite. And so what you do every day matters.

Jody: But their interpretation of it is so - It's the wild child like, "You only live once, go do this horrible thing!"

Jenni: Yeah, actually, sadly, my son just recently had a breakup partially over this, because the person that he was, um, dating, he is an older high schooler. And, um, she felt like high school was the best years of your life. And she felt like her parents were oppressive, because they wouldn't let her just do whatever she wanted. And once he figured out that that's what was going on, he said to her, like, "If this is the best years of your life, like, what is it all downhill from here? You've got like decades beyond this. What does that going to look like? This is the sowing of the seed season. We're only beginning. Like we haven't even begun to sprout yet. And we have so much time, but how we sow seed is so important." So, um, going back to the first one, you were performing for an audience of One. This is a very hard message to communicate to teens in today's social media culture, because they live in a fishbowl and the people outside the fishbowl are their peers. They've got Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, although a lot of them don't use Facebook, but, uh, now Tik Tok. Um, and there are things - who knows? There are other ones we probably didn't even know about. Um, Jody, we read an article, a while back, that said millennials and those younger even choose jobs based on what they think will have the most social media photo ops. "#LoveMyJob"

Jody: No, you see it all the time. They're out taking pictures. Like, "This is where this is right here. I got to get this one. I gotta get this snap."

Jenni: Yeah. And so, um, this is a tough one, because they are really feeling like they're not living for an audience of One. They feel like they're living for an audience of 1 million. They feel like they have to publish and put a filter on every aspect of their life. And so, um, the sad thing is of course, we know that if we seek human praise, then once the praise is over, so is our reward. But when we seek God's approval, the reward is great and it's never ending. And, um, in the middle school years, we can work very intentionally to really present, um, of course, figures in God's word. I think that's partly why God gave us all those stories of the different people that he'd walked with to show us how he interacts with his creation. But also this is a great time, specifically in

homeschool, to study, um, some of the heroes of the faith, right? So like, uh, Gladys -- am I saying this right? -- Aylward, um, and George Mueller and, just some of the different people who've gone before us, who've done some really powerful things for God and suffered persecution and didn't care as much about how they were received and were willing to endure all kinds of suffering in order to, um, do what God has asked them to do.

Jody: To further the Kingdom. Yeah.

Jenni: Um, and as they take this message into adulthood, hopefully it will help them to become faithful spouses, honest employees, trustworthy neighbors, responsible consumers, because the One that they answer to sees it all and knows it all. There's no filter or app that makes us look better before God, right?

Jody: Oh, there might be one out there.

Jenni: I don't know. Maybe it's called the 10 Commandments and faith. That's the filter. The filter of faith makes us maybe. Um, anyway, number two, uh, your life as a stewardship. So Jody, you and I have said over and over again that we don't own our children. That they're not an extension of us. We're just stewards of them and their young lives for a short season. But as our kids begin to inch toward, um, adolescence, this message begins to grow. Um, and we begin to pass the torch of stewardship from us, us stewarding them to the child. This is a process and it's a season and it's awkward and it's uncomfortable. But, um, I was just talking to a mom about it recently. And she was saying like, "it's around that time of adolescence that we begin to step back, even as their authority." I mean, we are still their authority to a degree, but we begin to give them more of that responsibility over their lives. Right?

Jody: Well, here's the thing. If we don't begin to do that at this age, when they do magically become an adult, which doesn't happen, not magical in any way, they don't - it's like they' flounder. They don't know where to go. They don't know where to turn. They've never had to make a decision before. They don't know what that looks like or how do I suddenly become responsible? How do I suddenly, you know, become a man or a woman or take care of a household or even take care of my car. I've never made a phone call to have to do that. So we have to, in a sense, guide them, mentor them, coach them all along the way. And it means letting go.

Jenni: And it means allowing them to be stewards of their life. So that means stewards over their bodies. So they have to make good choices for their bodies. We're talking health, but we're also talking sexual purity. We can't police them 24/7. If they have it in their mind to become rebellious or impure in some way or to indulge in intoxicants and things that the world is going to tell them are part of that "YOLO!" you know, um, we're not going to be able to exert an external pressure enough to make them make the right choices, the healthy choices, when we're not there, they have to begin to take ownership of that. And they have to believe that that's truth. So if we begin to communicate to them that are stewards over their life, that they have a responsibility to take care

of the body that God's given them, that they have a responsibility to live before the Lord and to steward their identity and to steward their gifts and their talents. They're going to have a different set of, it's not just about, "Oh, my parents won't let me." It's about, "I'm responsible now. What are the choices that I want for the future of my life and my body?"

- Jody: I had a conversation with one of my kids at one point, and this child said, you know, "I'm so sorry that I made this choice." And I looked at that child and I said, "I appreciate that thought process, but I have to tell you, I'm not responsible for your choice."
- Jenni: That's right.
- Jody: "And it's really not me - I understand you want to talk to me about it. That's great. But I'm not the one you owe an apology to..."
- Jenni: It's God and yourself.
- Jody: "You need to go to God and you need to go to you and you need to then forgive yourself once God forgives you. Because here's the deal, when you're married one day, I'm not going to be standing there going, 'don't you have that affair.'"
- Jenni: "Don't you have the impure thought about that other person."
- Jody: So, if we don't teach them, at a young age, how to be a good steward of their relationships and their own body and their relationship with God and their thoughts, you can't be that for them when they are older.
- Jenni: And Jody, you hit the nail on the head before. It's a process. So it's not like they're just going to magically become 18 and like, "Okay, now all of a sudden they're responsible for themselves."
- Jody: Right.
- Jenni: Like it's years of transitioning and it's a slow process. We transition them off of our stewardship onto their own. We don't suddenly hand the keys over and be like, "Okay, you're on your own - Bye."
- Jody: Right. And it's years of stewardship of training them the mindset that, "you are responsible for yourself, I'm not going to be the one put to blame. I'm not going to be the one to correct this. That's your job."
- Jenni: Yeah. The third one, here, is you're responsible for the maintenance and betterment of every community that counts you as a member. And Jo, we've talked about this extensively in all different ways, but, um, as we said, our family is our first community. So if you're not contributing to the needs of the family, like we ha - you have a three-year-old, who's almost four. And I have a four-year-old. And those little ones, they contribute to the needs of the family, right? They're not really meeting the needs of the family, but our teenagers and our young adults and our adolescents, that's why we make this transition around adolescence, they can contribute to the needs of the family in a wide variety of ways, with food, with the cleaning of the house, with the, um, and we say

that the maintenance and the betterment of the community, right? Like socially, we expect our kids to be socially present with us and make our environment better. We all want to connect in a really powerful way.

Jody: I expect them to make me laugh. I am not going to lie. I expect some humor. I expect some joy and some fun.

Jenni: Yeah.

Jody: They are for my entertainment pleasure.

Jenni: Sometimes they really are. And I think, and they're also, um, if they can drive, that's a need that they can meet.

Jody: Errand children all the way. Errands, errands, errands.

Jenni: That, kind of, really helps, I think, to communicate the fourth truth, which is society owes you no debts. When they're groomed with that mindset, we've had our kids and I have a really big family. So I've especially had my kids, um, be told by their peers, by other adults that they shouldn't be responsible for helping to take care of the house, that that's their parent's job. They've been told that they shouldn't be responsible for helping to take care of their siblings. Um, they didn't choose to have them, so they shouldn't be responsible for them. Well, you know what? I didn't choose homelessness to happen in my community. It doesn't mean that I'm not responsible for helping if I'm capable.

Jody: I think they're forgetting where God put them.

Jenni: God chose them to be a part of this family. And part of being, um, if I'm in the workplace and I see a wrapper on the floor, I didn't put it there, but it doesn't mean that I'm not responsible for picking it up, because I'm a part of that workplace. And I'm a part of its maintenance and its betterment. I'm responsible for its maintenance and its betterment.

Jody: That's kind of like saying, "well, the baby pooped his pants and guess what? I didn't poop my pants. So I'm not changing that diaper."

Jenni: It's craziness.

Jody: It's a foolish mindset.

Jenni: Right. It is. Well, and it's a selfish mindset and it breeds entitlement. Um, instead we have kids who feel like, "No, my family affords me tremendous privileges. My family loves me. They support me. They encourage my interests and my, they helped me to develop passion. And as a part of that privileged community, I have to give back, too."

Jody: How about just the privilege of having a family? That's a privilege.

Jenni: It is. It is. And a family that has chosen to homeschool you, because they want to give you the best opportunities that they're capable of giving you. Um, so this leads them to believe, over time, that society

owes them no debts, right? Um, they - money doesn't come from an allowance, because there are no entitlements. Money is always created from work. That's where money comes from. The Bible says, if you don't work, you don't eat. So we want to teach them if they want extra money, then they can, they have the ability - the agency, remember, that's one of the big key words for this season. They have agency. They can create an income for themselves in a variety of ways. And again, go listen to that, um, Facebook live, cause we talk all about them. All about that. Number five, Jo, we love this one. You can't control other people. Um, we need to tell our kids all the way through. We can't determine the outcomes of situations. I'll ask my kids - if they're upset with someone, I'll say, "Have you talked to them about this?" And, occasionally, I get this back, "No, because they're just going to blow up." "Okay. Well, you're not responsible for how they respond. You're responsible for communicating your feelings. How they choose to respond to that is there is on them. It's not on you. You can't control the outcome of situations. You can only control your choices in the situation, right? We can only control ourselves. We can control ourselves. We control our reactions. We control how we pray about a particular situation."

Jody: How we view it, our perception of it.

Jenni: How we choose to discuss it or not discuss it. But at the end of the day, um, we're not, we can't control other people.

Jody: Nope.

Jenni: Um, number six, you are responsible for both your successes and your mistakes, which means mom and dad. We can't take ownership of our children's successes and feel prideful about their successes. But on the same line of thinking, we can't feel shame over their mistakes. Like you said, just before Jody, like, your kid doesn't need to apologize to you, because you don't own that choice. That's their choice.

Jody: I am not going to. Let me tell you.

Jenni: No. And I hear parents say like, you know, "you're going to allow that?" Or, you know, "how are you going to respond to that?" I mean...

Jody: And you're going to control it?

Jenni: You can't control it.

Jody: Good luck, sistah!

Jenni: You can't control it. We can have discussions with our kids. We can definitely in the adolescent stage say, "Hey, can we sit down and talk? Cause I have some concerns." And share with them what our concerns are, but ultimately we can't control it. And if we think we can, we are treading into some dangerous water. Because the moment we begin to think that we can control their behavior, we are setting a breeding ground for rebellion.

Jody: Yeah. Number one, how about you just pray and let God have His way in that situation?

Jenni: And he'll tell us what to say. There are times where I know you and I have both sat our kids down and we've said like, "Okay, we need to talk about something. Cause we're really concerned. Here's what we see. Our life experience tells us or I've been praying. And I really feel a check about this, or let me tell you what I see happening." Um, and in the end, here's what we need. When our kids make a mistake, we need to be able to say to them, "Baby, you're going to make mistakes. That's going to happen. And we're going to learn from them. So let's talk about..." Here's the key I think in this, Jo, is to sit them down and say, "okay, so what do you think..." -- And this can take some lots of introspection and talking and thinking and... -- "what do you think was the need that you were trying to meet when you made that choice?" And get them to really - you were talking about the creative, I mean the inner genius. This will bring the inner genius to the table where they really have to think, "Okay, what need was I trying to meet at that moment?"

Jody: Right.

Jenni: "Okay. I get that. We all have that need. That need is not wrong."

Jody: "What's a healthy way we can meet it now?"

Jenni: "Now let's brainstorm how you could do that next time in a better way." Because once they have that skill, they can take that skill into adulthood. They're not going to walk around feeling shame. They're going to feel like they can own their mistakes, because their mistakes are going to pave the ground for future successes.

Jody: Well, it's growth.

Jenni: Right. They're going to grow. That's right. That's the key. Right? And last of all, your time in this life is finite. Um, we want them to understand that time is just like money. They can either invest it or they can spend it. And, Jo, we think that one of the most powerful ways that kids can invest their time, especially as homeschoolers, is to find their own lane, to discover where God is calling them. And then once they find it to run the race that God has set before them and to live with the end result in mind. Paul said "to press on toward the prize," right? Because everything that they do is going to contribute to the legacy that they're leaving for future generations. Everything that they do is going to impact the people around them, their generation in one way or another.

Jody: We forget, God thinks generationally. Everything we do right now, isn't even really about us. It's about what's coming.

Jenni: So true. So those are our thoughts for the middle school years. And if you're tuned in and listening, um, hop onto Facebook, share with us your thoughts, questions, ideas. You disagree with us, tell us your stories. You can also find us through the website [fromcradletocalling.com](http://fromcradletocalling.com). We really want to hear from you.