



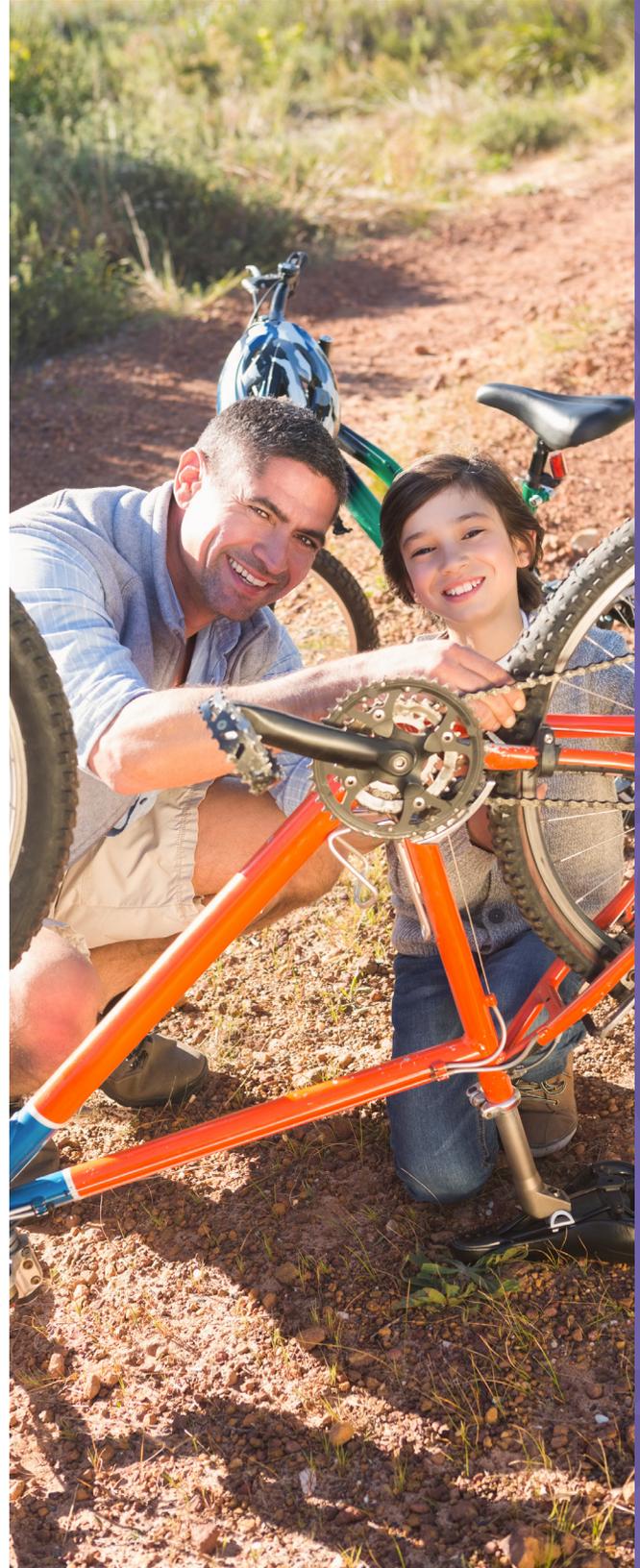
## **MIDDLE SCHOOL PARENT LETTER**

Entering adolescence is a challenging time for both children and parents. As children strive to “grow up” and be independent, which is an important developmental step, they may not yet have the emotional maturity or strategies to handle difficult situations they may encounter. It is important to keep lines of communication open with your child so you can be one of the trusted adults to whom he or she can turn. Abusers often target young adolescents because children in this age group are frequently insecure, are exploring their sexuality and are engaging in more activities that are not directly supervised by their parents.

Some adults can and do take advantage of their authority and use it to exploit and sexually abuse children. In fact, 90% of children who are abused are taken advantage of by someone they – and their parents – know, love, and trust.

The purpose of the **‘Safer, Smarter Families’ Family Safety Toolkit for Middle School Children** is to empower your child to protect themselves in potentially abusive situations by arming them with a few basic protective principles:

- Building self-esteem increases responsible behavior including assisting others
- Safe relationships share a balance of power
- Setting personal boundaries gives children the right to say “no” to anything and anyone that makes them feel uncomfortable
- Children need to have a few trusted adults they trust whom they can go to whenever a situation arises that makes them feel scared or uncomfortable
- There are identifiable warning signs or “red flags,” such as secrets or threats, to help children recognize unsafe situations



Middle school-aged children already are experiencing the often confusing feelings of adolescence with its accompanying physical, emotional, and intellectual changes. They may begin to look more like adults, but their feelings and intellect have not caught up. In addition, their peer group has become increasingly important, as has their desire to fit in, which can make them more at risk to the influence of others.

Involving your child in the activities identified in your family's safety plan is very important. Sharing these strategies will give your child the opportunity to stay

safe. Initiate discussions with your child to help them understand that they have the personal power within themselves to make choices and decisions that keep them safe. And, that they can use that power not only to help themselves by recognizing red flags that alert them to unsafe situations, but to see this in others as well.

Practicing the tips and tools presented in your Family Safety Toolkit is the first step in ensuring your child is prepared to safely navigate these formative years.

For more information, visit [LaurensKids.org](http://LaurensKids.org).

