A new school year is just beginning for most families throughout Robeson County. For many, this means getting back into a routine, and this can be a challenge. Although there are many back-to-school tips that will help us get organized for the new school year, I want to spend some time highlighting some other areas that are typically concerns for parents of middle school aged children.

You may find yourself feeling less ready to face the challenges this age may bring than you were when your children were younger. Common areas of concern may include worrying about the new situations they may face as they transition to a new school. Elementary schools tend to be smaller, and it’s easier to know everyone and their parents. Middle school is not always that intimate. It is also a time when your young person may be trying to spread their wings and try new things. This can be scary for parents, because we can’t always control everything that our children are exposed to as they get older. Parents may also be concerned about bullying and will their child be a victim.

At the same time, your children may also be experiencing some new feelings of their own. They may have noticed a sudden change in growth or appearance or maybe they are not quite sure if they will still “fit in” with their peers. They are also concerned about pleasing their parents even if they do not express that concern. Often being referred to as “tweens,” meaning between stages of childhood and teen years, illustrates these challenges. Many of us probably remember a time when we felt like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. It did not work then and it still does not work.

Parenting is complex. Many factors affect outcomes in children. Personal resources; the characteristics of the child; and the stress or support parents get from school, family, and the community all play a part in the results. Remember to meet this stage of growth and development with warmth, fairness, and even a sense of humor.
A new catch phrase in Cooperative Extension is “The Power of Extension!” This phrase is meant to remind community members of the resources and opportunities your local Extension Center has to offer. One such opportunity for parents will happen this fall with a parenting series offered just for parents or grandparents of children who are ages 10 - 14. The series, called Strengthening Families, is an evidence-based parenting series specifically designed to address the developmental issues faced by families with children in this age group. What makes this opportunity so unique is that it engages the parent and the young person to approach the challenges together. Each session builds on the next and each week adds to the strategies learned the week before. The series is 6 weeks long with a 7th follow-up session held several weeks later to support what was learned and help with implementing any strategies that families may have found challenging.

The best part is that it is absolutely FREE. That’s right, FREE! The only requirements are a commitment from you and your child to complete the entire series and that you reserve your spot by calling our office. The weekly series will begin Thursday, October 13, and meet each Thursday evening for 6 weeks. The classes will be held at the O. P. Owens Agriculture Center. A light supper will be provided promptly at 6:00 p.m., and the class will start at 6:30 and wrap up at 8:30 each night.

If you have questions or would like to register, please call our office. For more information, please contact Christy Strickland, Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, by E-mail at Christy_Strickland@ncsu.edu, or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu/.