

# Month of the Young Adolescent



October 2002



National Middle School Association

## The Op-Ed Article

An op-ed or opinion article is an opinion piece published in a newspaper but written by someone who is not on that newspaper's staff. Numerous large dailies, smaller dailies, and weekly newspapers use op-eds somewhere in their editorial section. In many large newspapers, that paper's editorials, the editorial cartoon, and columns by staff writers will appear on the editorial page. Opposite that page, the op-ed articles will appear, and that's where the term "op-ed" comes from — opposite the editorial page.

The important point is that these articles provide anyone with the chance to publish his or her opinion. You don't have to convince a reporter to come and cover your event; you can express your opinion. You may see that the presidents of the chamber of commerce or taxpayers' association are published in the op-ed columns. This opportunity is available to you, too.

Consider these steps. First, determine whether newspapers in your area use op-ed articles. You can do this simply by reading the editorial pages. See if national columnists or local officials are published. Read these articles. Become familiar with style, length, format, messages, and anything else that makes them stand out.

Then, determine the newspaper where you would like to submit your op-ed article, and find out who makes decisions about those articles at that paper. It's typical to select a large newspaper and offer the article to that paper on an "exclusive basis," meaning you will not submit it elsewhere until that newspaper decides whether it will use the piece. If that paper publishes the article, you cannot later give it to another paper. If the first newspaper does not use your article, you are free to send it elsewhere once the decision to reject it has been made.

To find out the name of the person in charge of op-ed articles, simply phone the newspaper and ask. For large papers, there will probably be one editor of the op-ed page. For smaller papers, the editorial page editor will make the decision; on weeklies it will probably be the editor or publisher. Give that individual a call and let him or her know your interest in writing an op-ed article and the topic. Focus on why your article is important to the

community. Let the editor know you'll offer this exclusively. The editor often will express an interest in looking at your article. Do not expect to be told that your article will be printed. If the editor is interested, ask about length, deadlines, and any other details.

Once the editor has said he or she will consider your article, it's time to write. Write in a crisp, clear style. It's essential to forget educational jargon. Be sure to include personal experiences and local examples.

After writing and editing the article, send or deliver it to the op-ed editor. The sooner you can get this done after your phone conversation the better because your proposal will be fresh in the editor's mind. If you mail your article, it's okay to phone the editor a few days later to confirm that the article has been received and inquire when a decision might be made. Frequent phone calls, however, will bug the editor and hurt your chances of publication.

Finally, it's wise to include a few sentences about yourself since some newspapers identify the writer of op-ed articles. This should not be your resume, but one or two sentences.

If your article is used, it would be appropriate to write a thank you note to the person who made the decision. You should develop a relationship with this individual for the future.

If there are key people in your community who should see the message in your op-ed article, send copies of it to them after it has been printed. Having your message published adds credibility to it — make use of that. Appropriate people to see your message might be state legislators, locally-elected officials, business leaders, parent group leaders, etc.

And three final suggestions:

- Do not ask for a guarantee that your article will be used — only for the chance to submit it and have it reviewed.
- Submit your article typed and double-spaced.
- Include a cover letter on your letterhead, thanking the editor for this opportunity.

## By Your Name

The young adolescent years — those between 10 and 15 — have been called the second most important time in a person’s development. That’s why October has been declared Month of the Young Adolescent, and why everyone in this community should ask, “How can I help a young adolescent reach his or her potential?”

National Middle School Association initiated Month of the Young Adolescent in 1997, and today 41 organizations throughout the United States are involved in supporting its concepts. These groups represent a broad range of people — educators, parents, business leaders, youth service personnel, and others. There’s a reason why so many are involved — when young adolescents succeed, communities prosper.

The young adolescent years are a time when youngsters leave childhood and move toward full adolescence. It’s a time when they begin to make decisions that will have an impact on their lives for years to come — decisions about values, attitudes, friends, and lifestyles.

It’s also a time of rapid change, both physically and emotionally. Young adolescents are reaching out to “become their own persons,” to achieve independence, to set their own direction. Yet, it’s also a time when they need support from adults who care for them, including parents, family members, educators, bosses, mentors, and anyone who comes in contact with them.

All of us in this community can support a young adolescent. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Become a mentor to a young adolescent. You might find a 10- to 15-year-old in your neighborhood, your religious affiliation, on a team, or in another group. Be a friend to that youngster—a friend who is always ready to offer sound advice.
- Celebrate successes of young adolescents. It’s easy to find fault when any person is struggling to test new ideas, and it’s easy to point out where he or she is going wrong. But young adolescents are also achieving significant accomplishments in their school and personal lives. Many are involved in outstanding service projects. Find ways to recognize those accomplishments and congratulate them. It’s wise to reinforce behaviors that we would like to see repeated.
- Talk to a young adolescent about the tough times you had when you were his or her age. Many believe they are the first to experience difficulties during this period. Share the challenges you faced and how you overcame them.
- Encourage healthy lifestyles. A healthy mind and a healthy body go hand in hand. Model good eating habits and exercise. Encourage young adolescents to join you in healthy activities. Encourage community leaders to assure that young adolescents have the opportunity to participate in recreational leagues, hiking, biking, and other healthy activities.

Above all, remember how important these years are. Young adolescents need support from all of us, and that support will help them as individuals and our community as a whole.