

# Did You Know...Cornerstone Accepts 5th Grade Students?



Research findings from the fields of psychology and education have long underscored the importance of early intervention with students experiencing developmental, learning, and/or mental health differences. In our experience, while some students who enroll at Cornerstone Day School (CDS) did not begin to show mental health symptoms until middle school or later, there are also many whose problems were identified much earlier by health and/or school professionals.

Cornerstone staff routinely hear from parents, "I wish I knew of CDS when my child was younger," feeling that Cornerstone is THE right place for their children. With this in mind, we want to remind you that we have accepted students as young as 10 years old (5th grade) for well over ten years. CDS offers children and families with significant challenges the necessary support and resources much earlier in their journeys. Since moving in 2019 to our current spacious location in Cranford, NJ, the layout of our middle school program to be distinctly separate from our high school to provide our unique services to younger children physically and programmatically.

The middle school program is designed to meet the developmental needs of pre-adolescents who are growing socially, emotionally, and academically. Although all CDS education and clinical interventions are highly individualized, the ability to be adaptive and flexible is especially critical with younger students where there is great variability in maturity levels, including knowledge, self-regulation skills, attention spans, and self-awareness. Services for middle school students, including our 5th graders, are characterized by:

- Small class sizes and individualized instruction as necessary.
- Specific support to help students acclimate to CDS and to overcome school avoidance.
- An emphasis on the development of social awareness and skills, with a focus on building effective school-based relationships with peers and teachers, and on improving home-based relationships with parents, siblings, and extended families.
- An emphasis on the various components of executive functioning that are needed to support academic rigor, school and home routines, and the acceptance of personal responsibility.
- A vibrant enrichment program that includes field trips, after-school socials, a multi-faceted art program, and activities that engage interest and enhance school-connection such as gaming, sports, and chess.
- A multi-pronged therapeutic approach that includes weekly individual therapy sessions and as-needed clinical support during the school day, daily process and psychoeducation groups, weekly family therapy, and access to a 24/7 crisis line.
- Intensive parental support that includes the above-mentioned family therapy and crisis

line as well as regularly scheduled support and psychoeducation groups. In addition, all parents of newly enrolled students are encouraged to attend CDS's recurring two-day parent retreat.

Most importantly our MS program allows for intervention when students are young and developing. Younger students that are identified early by a health or school professional are likely to have better outcomes when coping with mental health challenges and later diagnoses. At CDS, we view the whole child and support the manifestations of mental health that begin to emerge early. The intervention through the middle school program contributes to the student managing a mental health diagnosis or challenge more effectively. Our goal is always to return a student to their district and the earlier they receive support at CDS, the more likely they can receive services in their home district with their community peers.

We invite you to call for more information or to schedule a visit to learn more about our services for 5th graders and our growing middle school program.

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