

Preparing Your Child For Adolescence

“Enjoy ‘em now, because they’ll drive you crazy when they’re teenagers!” That’s the warning parents of pre-teens often hear. The implication: the teen years will be excruciatingly, unavoidably rough for everyone concerned. Obviously you and your pre-teen are in for a lot of change, but turmoil isn’t inevitable. You have the opportunity—before the cataclysmic transition from childhood to adulthood begins—to intentionally navigate your son or daughter through that change in a proactive and positive way.

The best way to prepare your child for adolescence is for you to set the stage — for a mom and her daughter or a father and his son or a single parent and either sex to spend time together dedicated to giving their pre-adolescent the framework for what’s coming. The best hope for a good outcome is when you—the parent—are the one to explain what it means and how to make the most of this vital time in life. Here’s a quick guide to the when, what, and how of that time together:

When

Often parents are concerned that they will overwhelm their pre-teen or encourage premature curiosity if they jump the gun in preparing them for adolescence. A greater concern, however, is the likelihood that someone else will beat you to it. Children are typically ready before their parents are. Doctors report puberty starting as early as age 9 among some girls, and the average age for first exposure to pornography among boys is around the same age. Of course, not all children are the same. That’s why it’s important to spend time with your pre-teen getting a sense of where they are developmentally and to make the timing of your conversations a matter of prayer. Generally, your prime opportunity will fall somewhere between the ages of 9 and 12.

What

In your conversation about the years ahead, you should plan to address the many areas of change your son or daughter will encounter during their transition to adulthood - in their body, their decision-making, and their relationship with you.

Body: It’s important to frame the physical changes ahead as much more than a plea for sexual abstinence. Your son or daughter needs a vision for how the internal and external changes ahead are preparing them for a deeper relationship with Christ, the joys of marriage and the miracle of creating new life.

Decision-making: Increasingly, your child will have to make and assume the responsibilities for his or her decisions. As you maintain your overall family values in media choices, individual responsibilities (chores, homework, etc.), and alcohol/drug use, you also need to direct your son or daughter in how to make good decisions for themselves. It is in this time of their lives that they will be pressured into making decisions that are not best for them. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs can be a helpful guide for teens learning to discern between wisdom and folly.

Relationship to you: Helping your son or daughter understand and embrace the changes in his or her body while challenging them to bear the responsibility of decision making will be different from the role you’ve played before. Instead of communicating like a teacher who

teaches the right answer, you should explain to your pre-teen that over the next decade your role will be progressively changing to that of a coach who is there to guide them in their transition into independent development. Fight the urge to be a “helicopter” parent

How

So what’s the best way to talk about adolescence and sex with your child? Instead of one “big talk,” it should be an ongoing, age-appropriate discussion based on trust and love. Ideally, your kids should feel comfortable asking you questions about any topic, without feeling ashamed. This kind of trust grows over time, in lots of small, even casual, talks through their development.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Books and Kits:

Some books are available for checkout at the Faith@Home Center or purchase online.

Preparing for Adolescence (by Dr. James Dobson) is the classic Christian resource for this transition.

The Myth of Adolescence: Raising Responsible Children in an Irresponsible Society (by David Allen Black)

Raising a Modern Day Knight (by Robert Lewis) focuses on fathers preparing their sons for manhood.

Talking to Your Kids About Sex (by Mark Laaser, PhD) coaches parents through specific, age appropriate discussions.

The Focus on the Family Guide to Talking to Your Kids About Sex (by J. Fitch and David Davis) shows parents how to talk with confidence to their kids about sex and sexuality.

Recommended DVD and Kit:

Passport to Purity (by Dennis and Barbara Rainey) provides tools for a meaningful getaway in which parents discuss puberty, sex and other “preparing for adolescence” issues with a son or daughter.

Recommended Websites:

FamilyLife.com/passport2purity provides suggestions for parents to help their children win at purity. (Type ‘sex education’ in search field).

“Preparing for Adolescence” at **TroubledWith.com**

GOING FURTHER - Church Support

The Student ministry is here to help! Call the church office at 757-489-3134 or email Chris Langley, Youth Minister (clangley32@me.com) if you have any questions about preparing your child for adolescence.