

Preparing Your Child for Adolescence

From the staff at Greenville Free Methodist Church
With Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Marriages

“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 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 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. 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.

How

So what’s the best way to talk about this with your child? Fortunately there are several great tools available for parents looking for recommendations on how to be intentional and effective in their efforts. (See “Going Further” suggestions.)

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Books and Kits:

*(Available for checkout at the HomeGrowth Center)
Please check out the library resource list for more choices.

Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Daughter; Five Conversations You Must Have with Your Son (by Vicky Courtney) From the cradle to college, tell your kids the truth about life before they believe the culture's lies.

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

Got Teens? (by Jill Savage & Pam Farrel) Time tested Answers for Moms of Teens and Tweens

Six Ways to Keep the "Little" in Your Girl: Guiding Your Daughter from Her Tweens to Her Teens; Six Ways to Keep the "Good" in Your Boy: Guiding Your Son from His Tweens to His Teens (by Dannah Gresh) Tips for raising emotionally healthy 8-12 year olds.

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

Recommended 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 provides suggestions for parents to help their children win at purity. (Type 'sex education' in search field).

FamilyLife.com/passport2purity provides suggestions for creating a getaway event with your child.

"Preparing for Adolescence" at *TroubledWith.com* also offers helpful articles and resources.

www.secretkeeper girl.com Check it out with your girl!

GOING FURTHER – GFMC Support

The tween and teen years are a time when neither kids or their parents should feel isolated! Check out homegrowth.org or talk to a staff member about current Growth Groups or special courses.

Preparing Your Child For Adolescence

