

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. Obviously, you and your pre-teen are in for a lot of change, but turmoil isn’t inevitable. You have the opportunity – before the 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 by spending time together dedicated to giving your preadolescent the framework for what’s coming. The hope is that you - the parent - will 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

Don’t wait for your son or daughter to come to you with questions. Your child may be too embarrassed to ask questions or not know what to ask. Doctors report puberty starting as early as age 9 among 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, but generally, your prime opportunity will fall somewhere between the ages of 9 and 12.

The information and support that your adolescent needs is not a one-time “sex talk,” but rather an ongoing conversation. When opportunities present themselves, discuss the ways in which today’s culture presents an unhealthy view of sexuality. Remember that your teen will likely encounter many messages about sexuality from, TV, movies, music, social media, and his or her peers. If you do not talk with your teen about these issues, your teenager will be more influenced by the surrounding culture more than by you and your Christian values and ideals.

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 is 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 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. Allow choices whenever possible, teens learn to make good choices ... by making choices. It is also important to reassure your child of your love and support when they make choices that are different from your own. Proverbs chapters 1-9 can be a helpful guide for learning to discern between wisdom and folly.
- **Relationship to You:** The desire for increased independence can result in adolescent rebellion – it is a common developmental norm. Most, if not all, teenagers will test the limits at some time and to some degree. (The opposite of this normal pattern would be the desire to stay at home, refuse to take responsibility, and fear making decisions.)

Increased independence is a natural desire; teenagers need to question the world around them and take ownership of their personal beliefs and actions. However, because they are inexperienced, they will inevitably make mistakes. Be encouraged – failure plays a critical role in the learning process.

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. Your role will be progressively changing to that of a coach who is there to guide them in their transition into independent development. But keep in mind, your role is to be more than a "friend" – they still need your leadership.

How

What is the best way to talk about adolescence and sex with your child? It should be an ongoing, age-appropriate discussion based on trust and love. Ideally, your child should feel comfortable asking you questions about any topic, without feeling ashamed. This kind of trust grows over time, through a lot of small, causal talks in their developing years.

Providing your teen with a healthy peer culture – church, church youth programs, small groups, ministry and missions opportunities – can help. Developing a strong identity in Christ will help your child resist the influences in a culture which promotes unhealthy sexuality, and choose to follow God's plan for healthy sexuality.

© 2008 Inklings Innovations; Revised: 31-Mar-2019

GOING FURTHER

RESOURCES

Preparing for Adolescence

by Dr. James Dobson

A classic Christian resource for this transition.

Raising a Modern Day Knight

by Robert Lewis

Focuses on fathers preparing their sons for manhood.

Passport to Purity Kit

by Dennis & 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.

FamilyLife.com

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