



Preparing Your Child for Adolescence

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“Enjoy them now before they become teenagers!” This is a common warning that parents of pre-teens often hear. The implication: the teen years are excruciatingly rough for everyone involved. Yes, the adolescent years can be tough for both the teenager and their parents but turmoil isn’t inevitable. You have the opportunity to prepare them, and yourself, for the transition from childhood to adulthood. Help them navigate this journey in an intentional and positive way.

PLANNING AHEAD

I have often told parents with newborns, “Starting now, you are preparing for the teenage years!” With each of my children I have added 10 years to their current age. I am still doing this today. This helps my wife and I plan ahead for how we want them to act and live when they reach that age. When they were two years old I asked myself, “Do I want them to act this way when they are 12?” When they were six I said, “Do I want them acting this way at 16?” This helped us to stay in tune with how they were allowed to act, talk, and respond to authority. This also helped us focus on what skills, lessons, and character traits we as parents needed to instill in them.

SET THE STAGE

As parents, you know what’s coming in regards to adolescence. They don’t. Plan on preparing them for what is to come: hormonal changes, body changes, acne, negative peer pressure, voice change for boys, and monthly cycle for girls, etc. Helping them to know what’s around the corner will help them navigate these rapids when they arrive. As the adult, refresh your memory by studying up on these changes before they happen to your child.

WHEN?

Sometimes parents are concerned that they will overwhelm their pre-teen or encourage curiosity if they jump the gun in preparing them for adolescence. A greater concern is the likelihood that someone else will beat you to it, namely their peers. Parents who wait to respond to changes after the fact are operating from a deficit instead of being proactive with their child. Doctors report that puberty starts as early as age 9 among some girls. Boys are generally two years behind in physical development. Of course, not all children are the same. That’s why it is important for you to be in tune with them and how they are developing. You also need to be in prayer for when to begin having conversations about certain sensitive subjects. Generally, your prime opportunity will fall somewhere between the ages of 9 and 12.

WHAT?

You should plan on addressing four main areas of change your son or daughter will encounter during their transition to adulthood:

Their Body: They need to understand that God designed their body to respond and react in a certain way for when they get married. Not only do you need to address sexual abstinence until marriage but also God’s view of sexuality within the confines of marriage. They need to understand that God is preparing them for the joys of marriage and the miracle of creating new life.

Decision-making: Increasingly, your child needs to have the skills and opportunities to make their own decisions. Begin teaching them that there are consequences or blessings to their choices. Example: when you give them some money, teach them the value of money and the habit of honoring God with it by tithes and offerings. After they give back to God, allow them to spend the rest of the money as they wish. If they blow it all on candy and don’t have enough for other important things, don’t pick up the tab. Let them suffer the consequences of going without. Also, discuss what peer pressure is and the dangers of following the crowd. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs are a helpful guide for learning to discern between wisdom and folly.

Responsibility: Giving children responsibility and holding them accountable gives them a sense of accomplishment. Doing too much for them (cleaning their room, taking out the trash, cleaning the bathroom, kitchen, etc) teaches them that someone else will handle those tasks for them. This is not real life. When they fail to do their responsibilities they must face some sort of consequence. Letting them off the hook will teach them that your words don’t mean anything. They will need this skill to survive and thrive during the teenage years!

Relationship with You: Your role with them must change as they change. You must move from a teacher who gives them the right answer, to a coach who shows them the right way. During their teenage years you become their coach and cheerleader. After adolescence you must become their counselor/advisor. Failure to adjust your role along the way will cause you to lose credibility in their lives.

HOW?

So what's the best way to talk about this with your child? First, seek the advice of parents who are further along the path than you are. Look for parents who have a good relationship with their teenagers; one where respect is flowing in both directions. Also, invest in these great tools that will assist you to in being intentional and effective as parents.

Going Further – Resources

Recommended Books:

- *Preparing for Adolescence* by Dr. James Dobson
- *Raising a Modern Day Knight* by Robert Lewis

Recommended Resource for Discussion about puberty, sex and relevant issues:

- *Passport to Purity* by Dennis and Barbara Rainey

Recommended Websites:

- www.familylife.com/passporttopurity
- www.rmdk.com – for preteen boys
- “Preparing for Adolescence” at www.troubledwith.com