Preparing Your Child

FOR ADOLESCENCE

FAITH @Home

Preparing Your Child for Adolescence

"Enjoy 'em now, because they will drive you crazy when they are teenagers!" That is the warning parents of pre-teens often hear. The implication: Teen years will be excruciatingly and unavoidably rough for everyone concerned. Obviously, you and your pre-teen are in for a lot of change, but turmoil is not 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 is 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. Doctors report puberty starting as early as age nine 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 to get 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 nine and twelve.

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. The first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs can be a helpful guide for teens learning to discern between wisdom and folly.

Relationship with 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 have 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
What is 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.

GOING FURTHER—Resources

Preparing for Adolescence (by Dr. James Dobson) is the 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 (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.

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

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