

“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 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.

Intentionally navigate your son or daughter through that change in a proactive and positive way.

The Coaching Period (early teen to young adult)

Our job changes when the kids enter the coaching period. We can motivate, encourage, challenge, and advise. We can't force feed. We can help them clearly articulate what they believe, challenge their thinking, and remind them of the "basics" learned during the "practices" of the imprint and impression years. We can provide a safe environment to wrestle with, even question, the values they've learned. Maintaining strong relationship and frequent dialogue are the key to your influence now. In light of these realities, parents can become intentional about creating and capturing opportunities to nurture the roots of faith in their children.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The 5 Love Languages of Teenagers (by Gary Chapman) lays out the tools parents need to communicate with their teenager.

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.

Planet Middle School (by Dr. Kevin Leman) Time-tested principles will aid parents in helping their middle schooler not only survive but thrive during these turbulent years on Planet Middle School.

What He Must Be: If He Wants To Marry My Daughter (by Voddie Baucham) Parents who want their daughter to marry a godly man-as well as those who want their sons to become godly men-will be well equipped to help their children look for and develop these God-honoring qualities.

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Preparing for Adolescence

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