



Preparing Your Child for Adolescence

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Adapted by Greenville Oaks Church of Christ*

Adolescence is a time of intense change that can bring anxiety for parents and children alike. Their bodies will change in appearance, hormones begin to kick in, peer relationships become more complicated, and they find themselves facing conflicting messages about life from a variety of sources.

Pre-teens and tweens often push their parents away by their behavior, but the truth is that they need you more than ever before. Nothing can replace your guidance and love. As your child approaches adolescence, you have the unique opportunity to intentionally navigate them through the difficult changes of adolescence in a proactive and positive way.

Here's a quick guide to the when, what, and how of that time together:

When

If your children don't hear about adolescence and sex from you, they will undoubtedly find out from someone else, and what they learn might not be in line with your worldview. Some girls begin the hormonal changes of puberty as early as seven or eight years old. And with ease of access on the Internet, boys and girls are often exposed to pornographic and overtly sexual images in early childhood.

That's why most experts recommend starting age-appropriate discussions with your children about sex when they are between three and four years old. Then when they are bombarded with confusing messages in adolescence, they've already received sound guidance at home and feel comfortable going to you with their questions.

Many parents are conflicted about introducing this subject. No parent wants to take away a child's innocence before they are ready. The key? Know your children. When they begin showing curiosity, don't let your embarrassment keep you from teaching them about their bodies and sexual health. Again, they *will* get answers from somewhere. Our culture has no shortage of opportunities to learn about sex.

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.

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 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 foolishness.

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 adolescence and sex with your child? Instead of one "big talk," it should be ongoing, age-appropriate discussions based on trust and love. Ideally, your kids should feel comfortable asking you questions about any topic, without feeling ashamed. This kind of trust grows over time, in lots of small, even casual, talks through their development.

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Books:

Available for checkout at the Faith@Home Center or for purchase online.

Preparing for Adolescence: How to Survive the Coming Years of Change (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.

Talking to Your Kids About Sex (by Mark Laaser, PhD) coaches parents through specific, age-appropriate discussions.

The Focus on the Family Guide to Talking to Your Kids About Sex (by J. Fitch and David Davis) shows parents how to talk with confidence to their kids about sex and sexuality.

How God Makes Babies (by Jim Burns) is an introduction to basic sexuality for ages six to nine.

God Made Your Body (by Jim Burns) provides the basic foundation that God created our bodies and wants us to honor Him with our bodies — for children ages three to five.

Recommended DVD & Kit:

The Ultimate Sexual Experience: God's Vision for Sexuality (by Steve Holladay) reveals God's plan for sexuality in a down-to-earth, respectful and entertaining way.

Passport 2 Purity Getaway Kit (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/passport2purity

Ultimateescape.org/parents

GOING FURTHER – Church Support

Pastoral Care

Greenville Oaks Shepherds and Ministers are here for you. Email info@greenvilleoaks.org and ask to be contacted by a Shepherd or Minister.