

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT ADOLESCENCE

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 used in their adult life. With an increase in body-worship culture, it's important to encourage your child that their body is first and foremost a Temple of the Lord. It is difficult for a young person to hang on to this reality when body image becomes everything in middle and high school, but teaching them to value their body outside of its physicality will create a strong foundation.

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. (See "Going Further" suggestions.)

1. Parenting Beyond Your Capacity by Reggie Joiner/Carey Niewhof (good for babies up to high school aged kids)
2. Five Love Languages by Gary Chapman
3. Shepherding a Child's Heart by Tedd Tripp
4. Just Keep it in your Pants? by Eric Poulin

Every Sunday evening from 6-8PM, the FREEDYTH ministry meets. This is a great place for you student to connect with other kids their age pursuing Christ. You can find them on social media @freedyth or email freed@freedomfamily.us for more information!

