



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of sixth grade students

Growing and Changing

Tweens, preteens, whatever label you use, sixth-grade youth are unique. Approaching the teen years can be happy and harmonious for families, school friends and teachers. But too often, parents fear the brink of a storm – the teen years. Parents of sixth graders can prepare themselves for changes and talk to their children openly. Let your child hear about the positive things you see happening this year.

Curiosity: The Teachable Moment

Many sixth graders are like butterflies. Not only is a physical metamorphosis taking place, but mental and social changes also are occurring. The onset of menstruation, facial hair and other physical changes initiate a normal sexual curiosity in youth.

Sexual curiosity is increased through magazines, movies, television commercials, T-shirt slogans, bumper stickers, greeting cards, video games, music videos and websites. Although most parents believe sex education should begin in the home, few seem to find the time or the commitment to accomplish the task.

Studies show that parents can be a great influence on the preteen's sexual knowledge. But because parents provide limited information, schools, peers, media and literature are the biggest sources of sexual information for preteens. Are these the accurate, complete sources of education you want for your child? Preteens deserve factual information for their healthy development. They need to feel free to talk with an informed, sensitive adult about all the changes in their lives.

Perhaps parents are confused or embarrassed or don't feel like they know what to say. Parents need to be prepared for the preteen questions, such as "Is making out wrong?" "What is it like to have a baby?" "What is abortion?" "How is AIDS spread?" Lots of other questions on dating, kissing, affection and sexual activities are answerable.



Let your child hear about the positive things you see happening this year as he or she grows and matures.



Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Challenge each other to device breaks. Can you go one hour? A whole evening? The weekend? Devise your own rules and find fun alternatives together.

Parents should view preteen curiosity as the teachable moment for facts, morals and values. This is the golden opportunity to teach your child. Some children will not ask questions, but they are likely just as curious and still need the information. If parents don't pass the facts and values on to their child, another source will!

Many local hospitals, schools and faith communities sponsor parent-child workshops on adolescent sexuality. Parents and children can attend together to listen to a professional present the facts. That information can open the door to many more conversations between parent and child.

Keep current materials on adolescent development at home. Children need to refer to them and ask questions. They will re-ask many questions as they try to sort it out. Parents can check in with their preteens to see if there are questions to be further researched and discussed.

If you need help finding current resources, contact your Extension agent for suggestions.

Friendship Groups

Meeting in groups. Togetherness means power, and sixth grade youth enjoy this feeling of importance. At about 11 years of age, peer relationships become more important. Your child will need to find their place in the group.

Once groups are secure, scheduled social activities may increase. Group gatherings for sporting events and movies will be more common. Parties may become popular. These social events bring students together but will prove their differences in maturity. Their discomfort may be handled by goofing around, joking and other immature behavior. These activities are part of the social metamorphosis.

This Thing Called Dating

Parents, peers and society may put pressure on preteen youth to pair off. Adults often tease and ask preteens about boyfriends and girlfriends when asking about group friends is much healthier. Preadolescents often feel pushed into adult roles. Sixth graders are not ready for dating and should not be encouraged to have dates.

Today's 12-year-olds have sexual and societal pressures coming from many directions. Sexual stereotypes and expectations are changing. Gender



roles no longer are so clearly defined as in past generations. Confusion is a common theme for this age group.

David Elkind, professor of child studies at Tufts University, claims parents push children to grow up fast but also want them to remain children. Parents dress their children like adults and give them adult privileges, except for adult options such as smoking and drinking. Parents hope their children will achieve social, academic and athletic success early. These mixed messages create stress for youth.

Perhaps adults need clear reminders that 12-year-olds are still children beginning a metamorphosis or major change. Avoid hurrying your children into adult roles and behaviors.



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