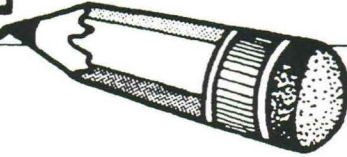


Parenting Pipeline

a newsletter for parents of **sixth grade** children



A Time of Change

Sixth graders live in a confusing time of life. Many changes happen to their bodies and in their social world. Mom, Dad, teachers and others urge them to “grow up.” They try to become less dependent and less emotionally attached to parents. Because of this, they may not want to go to their parents with their concerns.

Sixth graders often talk about their peers and the changes they experience. They discuss a great range of topics. They talk on the phone about their feelings and about the other sex. If you look at your child’s notebooks, you’ll often see doodles and names referring to the opposite sex covering the page. This is a way to explore some of these changes. Sixth graders also talk about their parents, their attitudes, rules and other important things. Sixth graders know that their friends do not know all the answers to their questions, so they may ask an adult for information. Don’t be upset if your child asks other adults for information; sometimes it is easier to talk to someone else.

Choosing friends. We as parents want our children to be in the “right crowd.” Many of the group of friends your children associate with at this age will be their friends throughout high school. If parents are supportive, children are less likely to get involved with problem peers. If your child shows undesirable behavior, he or she needs your guidance and support, not direct orders to change. “Guidance” means allowing youth the opportunity to make some choices. Sixth graders want to be treated with respect. With your support, your child will be able to solve his or her own problems in a way that also will satisfy you.

Making rules. Fair rules are very important at this age. Rules provide structure. Sometimes your child will use your rules as a way to say no to his or her friends. Your child may argue about these rules, but rules do help a child say no. Also, consider negotiating and compromising on some rules, like curfew, clothing and hair styles. One educator states that it’s not wise to “sweat the small stuff.” A major argument over a pair of jeans or style of haircut is pointless when there are far more important issues to deal with! Save your energy and your child’s attention for the important issues.



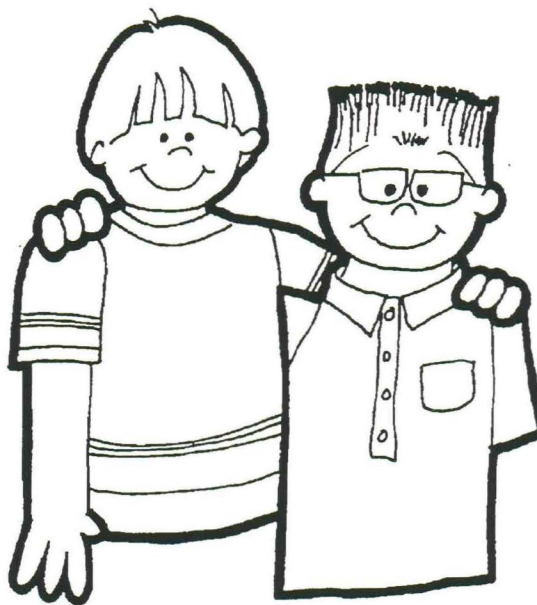
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Facing peer pressure. Parents often are so concerned about negative peer pressure that they forget that friends can be a positive force in a child's life. For example, if your child's peers stress achievement and good grades, your child will probably strive to earn good grades. Friends help your child try new behavior and discover what is appropriate and acceptable. Friends allow peers to feel that they are important and that they belong. When your child's friends visit your home, invite them to share in part of your family's activities, if possible. This is important to your child. But don't monopolize their friends.

Making allies. Parents sometimes think they have lost control of their children when the youngsters are simply learning about people outside their family, people who are important to them and with whom they can get along. People outside the family can be powerful motivators and influences on your child. A peer or adult outside the family with whom your child has a positive relationship can be an important ally. It's not necessarily a rejection of you as a parent. It's more of a reflection of the child's need to expand his or her experiences.

Modeling behavior. Children want your approval, support, reasoning and guidance rather than your control. Believe it or not, parents still have more influence than friends. Providing a healthy role model is a major responsibility of parents. Your actions speak louder than words. For example, if you do not want your child to smoke, it will be more likely to happen if you do not smoke.

Parents often aren't aware of their influence because sixth graders are exploring new behavior and questioning old behavior with their peers. Be patient with them. They'll make some decisions that will be mistakes and some decisions that will make you proud. Encourage and support the positive efforts and successes. Share your feelings and help them understand their mistakes in a respectful manner. Mistakes are an opportunity to learn.



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File: Family life 8

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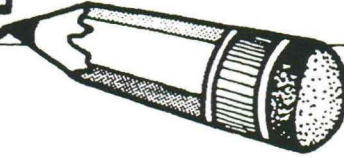
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Boy Meets Girl

Bubblegummers, tweens, preteens — whatever we label them, sixth grade youth are unique. Many of them reach a plateau of comfort during this year. The verge of the teen years can be happy and harmonious for families, school friends and teachers.

Curiosity: The Teachable Moment

Many sixth grade youth are a bit like butterflies. Not only are great physical changes taking place, but also mental and social changes are occurring. The onset of menstruation in girls and signs of puberty in boys emphasize the difference between men and women. Physical changes initiate a normal sexual curiosity.

Sexual curiosity is increased through contacts with magazines, movies, television commercials, T-shirt slogans, bumper stickers, greeting cards and music videos. Curiosity is natural.

Although most parents believe sex education should begin in the home, few seem to find the time or the courage to accomplish this task. Studies show that

parents can be a great influence on the preteen's sexual knowledge. But many parents provide limited sex information.

Schools, peers and literature are the main sources of sexual information for preteens. Preteens deserve sound factual information for their own healthy development. They need to feel free to talk with an informed sensitive adult about all the changes in their lives. They need to have resources and books available to them for personal reading.

Perhaps parents are confused, embarrassed and under-educated themselves. Parents need to be prepared for the preteen questions. "Is necking or making out wrong?" "What is it like to have a baby?" "What is abortion?" "How is AIDS spread?" There may be lots of other questions on dating, kissing, petting and intercourse.

Parents should view preteen curiosity as the teachable moment for giving facts, morals and values. This is the golden opportunity to teach your child. Some children will not ask questions, but they have the curiosity and the need for information. If you do not pass the facts and values on to your child, another source will. And you may later wonder where they ever got their ideas from!

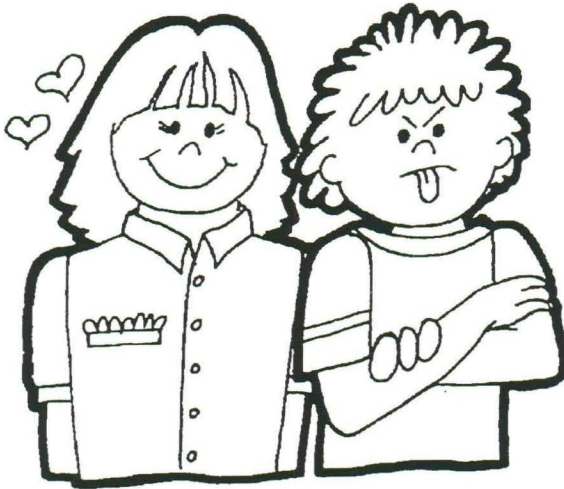
Many local hospitals, clinics and churches sponsor parent-child workshops on adolescent sexuality. A parent and child can attend together, listen to a professional present the facts and begin to open the communication on this topic.

Keep current books with the facts on your bookshelf at home. Many children will want to read and ask questions. They will "re-ask" many questions as they try to sort it out. Be honest, express your values and the facts. Let them know you are approachable.

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Girl Likes Boy

Girls usually show interest in boys first. Boys may be mildly receptive to this interest, or may still be “anti-girl” during these preteen years. During sixth grade, boys and girls usually come together first in groups. Togetherness means power and sixth grade youth enjoy this feeling of importance. At 11-12 years, peer relationships become more important to the preteen. He or she may need to experiment with many behaviors to find his or her place in the group. Once groups are secure, scheduled social activities may increase.



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Group gatherings for ball games and movies may begin. Parties may become popular. These social events bring boys and girls together physically, but may prove their difference in maturity. Girls may gel their hair, put on designer jeans and imagine an exciting evening. Boys will approach a party awkwardly, hoping the food is good. Their discomfort with this new scene may be handled by fooling around, joking and other immature behavior. Even though both boys and girls may feel awkward, these times can be important in growing up.

This Thing Called Dating

In many communities a form of dating may begin at this age. Parents, society and peers may put pressure on preteen youth to pair off. Adults often tease and ask preteens about boyfriends and girlfriends when it is much healthier to ask about group friends. Preadolescents often feel pushed into adult roles.

David Elkind, professor of child study at Tufts University, claims parents push children to grow up fast but also want them to remain children. They dress them like adults and give them some adult privileges. These mixed messages create stress for youth. Parents hope their children will achieve social, academic and athletic success early. Perhaps adults need reminding: 12-year-olds are still children beginning a big change. Parents should avoid hurrying their children into adult roles and behaviors.

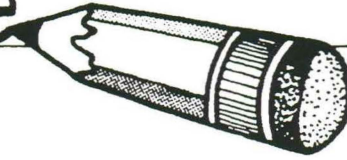
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Becoming Independent, or Everyone Else Is Doing It!

Preteen years are a time of contradictions. One moment the preteen is perfectly “reasonable” and the next moment you wonder “who turned the world upside down?” This is normal. Preteens are often characterized by rebellious and contradictory behavior. The rebellion is the child trying to become independent. It is not necessarily an act of defiance directed toward parents.

But how much independence do parents give a preteen? Because children at this age are often irresponsible, because they do whatever seems good at the moment, and because they are immature, parents are uncomfortable in letting go.

Helping Your Sixth Grader Become More Responsible

Family and community values help parents to decide what is acceptable. Preteens receive pressure from their friends to try all kinds of things. Your role as a parent is to set fair limits.

Ask yourself what you don’t want your preteen doing that his or her friends are doing. Often parents fear they will lose control over their child. Parenting, however, involves guiding the preteen to develop responsible behavior. Control seldom accomplishes this and further sets the stage for teenage rebellion. (Control refers to giving a direct order without providing the child with a reason or allowing opportunities to negotiate.) Controlling parents contribute to more rebellious behavior, not less.

Closely examine your own behavior, too. Telling a preteen not to do something, even though the parent does it, demonstrates inconsistency and may promote rebellion.

Preteen years are an important time for kids to begin developing responsible behavior. Parenting is a little like growing a garden — it takes time, patience and hard work to reap the benefits. Parents are still powerful forces for preteens even though the preteens appear not to listen or care.

There are no hard or fast rules about developing a responsible, independent preteen. Unfortunately, parents can’t just suddenly take a preteen and say, “OK, you’re old enough now — be responsible!”

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Preteen Responsibilities

Here are some examples of appropriate ways to involve preteens in the responsibilities of family life. Of course, no one preteen would be expected to assume all of these duties.

- Help dress younger siblings.
- Help clean house and garage areas.
- Help clean up kitchen after dinner.
- Run own errands.
- Mow lawn.
- Help adults build things.
- Help get younger siblings ready for bed.
- Schedule ample time for studies.
- Do paper route, baby-sitting or some other job.
- Do the family errands.

Proceed gradually. Through friendly discussions, an adult and a preteen together can determine responsibilities and accept independence.

The satisfaction preteens experience as a result of accomplishing tasks or making decisions helps to build their self-esteem and to make them responsible, independent people.

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Maintaining Open Communication

A 4-H leader with a preteen son tells this story.

One day my son told my wife, "Dad doesn't love me anymore." That was a real shock to me and made me stop to think. I realized that I had been on my son's case. I came down hard on him for his poor grades, his lack of motivation to do anything but watch TV and play ball, his negative attitude around the house, and his manners.

I pulled back on the criticism and looked for positive things. Thank goodness, during this time that we had emotionally shut each other out, he was still communicating with his mother! His birthday came and I bought a special card that helped this macho dummy father express the fact that I loved him and was proud of him. In retrospect, I was lucky he didn't completely shut me out. I needed to make changes, as well as my son. And it's amazing how my taking the lead resulted in progress for my son and for the growth of our relationship. I knew I didn't want to lose him, and I worked at it!

Seeking independence can result in communication problems. Patience is a key to resolving these differences. This is a time when we need to talk to our preteens in a way we would talk to other adults and friends. Sit down face-to-face and give them your full attention. It's hard work! Listen to the meaning behind the words, hear the message and guide them toward appropriate behavior.

Making a significant effort now will pay off later. You will have a sound foundation to build on.

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File: Family life 8

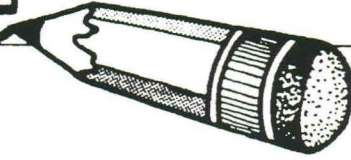
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Almost a Teen

Life is changing. Your sixth grader is moving on to a new and exciting time, and may not believe everything you say. It's amazing how little you know about what's in, out or cool. If you talk to your child's friends, it's possible you will be an embarrassment to your child.

If you like something, there's a good chance he or she will hate it. So what are you to do when you are sometimes considered the dumbest, meanest, most unfair parent on earth?

Your 12-year-old is reaching out, questioning and testing. Children at this age are in the process of sorting out all the information and values they are exposed to. Don't be alarmed if you seem to have more disagreements. Be patient and allow your child to work this out.

There is no magic way for parents to help their child reach adulthood. Most preteens will have ups and downs even if parents try their very best.

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How Does Your Preteen Look?

How preteens look is very important to them. If they feel they aren't attractive, they can become very self critical and find all kinds of things wrong with themselves. Physical growth patterns at this age may result in features the preteen considers unattractive (wearing glasses or braces, or having teeth and a nose that are too large compared to the rest of the face).

Have your child look at his or her positive features. Parents also can help by encouraging good grooming and personal hygiene habits. Helping your child get a hair style he or she likes probably will make a difference. Being aware of the type of clothing worn by other preteens can help you and your child select an adequate wardrobe.

Personal appearance becomes a priority because of the major physical changes taking place. Take time to compliment your child and offer assistance. Preteens need love, warmth and support at this time.

Stress and the Sixth Grade

Children often lose confidence in themselves when they are stressed. They tell themselves that they are not any good or that they expect to make mistakes. This usually makes things worse. Children can handle tense moments by believing in themselves. Preteens need to learn to be their own best friend — a friend who can be counted on in tense times.

Sometimes preteens face uncomfortable and upsetting situations. When this happens, it may be impossible for them to leave the problem behind. However, they don't have to end up feeling miserable because of it. Parents can help by suggesting some stress relieving activities.

- ✓ Take several deep calming breaths
- ✓ Talk it out with a good listener
- ✓ Recall past successes
- ✓ Take a walk around the room or the block, or take a bike ride
- ✓ Make a plan of action; follow it one step at a time

Stress is a way our bodies and minds react to life's difficult moments. Preteens need to know that stress is normal. They need to identify where it comes from and how they react to it. This way they can control stress rather than letting it control them.

Personal Care

How do you help your preteen learn about personal hygiene? This can be a tough task.

Preteens experience many physical changes. The endocrine glands release hormones that cause sudden growth spurts, facial hair and other body changes, including voice changes in boys. Now is the time to concentrate on good health habits so preteens will feel good about themselves.

A daily shower is a basic cleanliness habit, and an underarm deodorant helps your preteen keep fresh and eliminates odor. Looking good builds self-confidence and good feelings about oneself.



Some tips for skin care:

- ✓ Never squeeze pimples or blackheads.
- ✓ Keep the hair clean even if it means daily washing. Avoid using highly fragranced soaps to wash your face.
- ✓ Always use fresh washcloths and towels. Wash hands frequently with soap.
- ✓ Avoid heavy make-up. Be careful of sharing make-up.
- ✓ Get a balanced diet, regular exercise, plenty of water and adequate sleep.

Are We Communicating?

Adults usually have little trouble relating to each other. This isn't true for preteens. They need to work at communicating with friends, parents and other adults. How much time do you spend talking and listening to your preteen? Preteens need to learn to communicate. Parents can help bring this about by asking questions and listening. But don't try to make them talk.

Your example is a powerful model for your child in communication style, stress handling, appearance and personal care. Take time to invest in your preteen now during this important stage of development. Find natural times when they are likely to open up, such as when you're driving them somewhere or doing a chore together.

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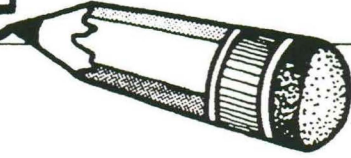
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Preteens and Money

Children as consumers? Yes, children today are heavily targeted by business and industry. It is estimated (1987) that U.S. children ages four to 12 spend \$4.2 billion a year and save half a billion. This means that a child's income averages \$3.00 per week, expenditures average \$2.70 per week and savings average \$.30 per week. Where does this money come from? Most of it comes as special spending money from parents (65 percent), as a birthday gift (61 percent) or as an allowance (58 percent).

How Do Preteens Handle the Money They Spend?

The spending patterns of preteens reflect the raging advertisement battle now taking place within the snack and toy industries. Most children use their money to purchase candy (59 percent) and toys (30 percent). But more than one-fifth buy soft drinks, snacks, holiday gifts, books and magazines with their money.

Preteens also influence their parents' spending patterns, with 66 percent of all children having a say in the purchase of their clothing — especially when it comes to what sneakers they wear (72 percent).

Preteens are not born with "money sense." Instead they learn by example and experience. Parents often assume children learn to manage money on their own. Preteens need to learn by trial and error and need your guidance.

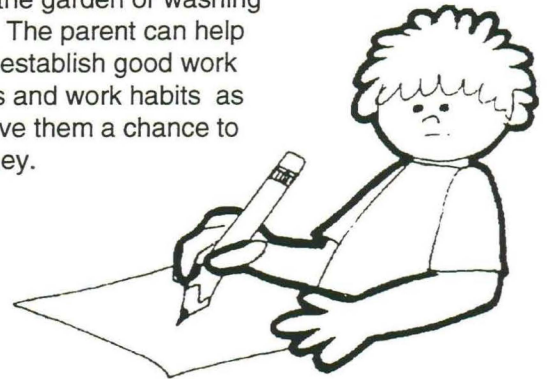
Allowances

An allowance is one way to help your preteen gain experience in handling money by making decisions about how money should be spent. Some parents may think they cannot afford to provide an allowance. They may be able to, however, by using one of the following methods.

- Keep a record of the money given to your child each week for lunches, other school expenses and entertainment. This amount can then be given as an allowance.
- Sit down with your preteen and draw up an expense account, including fixed, flexible and "fun" expenses. It's important that the allowance include some money your child can make decisions about. Planning a budget may be scornfully regarded as "baby stuff" and parents may have to work hard to retain their self confidence and their cool.

Periodic review of spending habits and the allowance is a good idea, since the economy affects preteens' expenses as well as adults.

While it's not considered a good idea to pay for all household chores, parents may want to pay for "extra" jobs such as washing the car, weeding the garden or washing windows. The parent can help preteens establish good work standards and work habits as well as give them a chance to earn money.



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Preteens will make mistakes in their spending, but adults can help them learn from these mistakes. A product that didn't perform as expected can be a learning experience. First, adults can help preteens prevent (or at least minimize) future disappointments by comparison shopping, doing some "product research," reading ads, comparing prices, and asking questions. Secondly, adults can help their preteen exercise their consumer rights in the case of a faulty purchase. Arrange to talk to the store manager where the item was purchased or help them write a letter to the manufacturer.

As adults help preteens learn about money, they should:

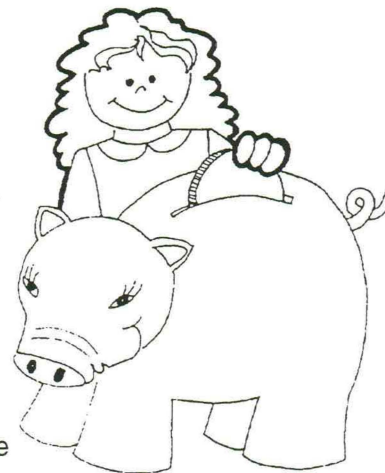
- guide and advise rather than direct and dictate.
- encourage rather than criticize or rebuke.
- allow them to learn from mistakes as well as successes.
- show how to make spending plans and keep account of how money is spent.
- be consistent, but flexible.
- be objective about the purpose of money, rather than use it for rewards or punishment.
- communicate to family members, to help the family work toward long and short term goals.
- include all family members in decision making and family money management activities.

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Parents may not feel comfortable teaching preteens to manage money, because they feel they're not "super managers" themselves. But it is not necessary to be an expert to provide appropriate experiences for children.



As with many things a child learns, some of the most powerful teaching about money will come from the parents' own example. If money is a touchy subject, if parents always argue about money decisions, the child will certainly pick this up.

If parents frequently speak longingly of someone else's house or car or that big TV at the store, the child will learn that material things are the most important goals to hope for. If parents practice living on credit, the child will assume this is the way money should be handled.

Teaching your child about money through experiences with managing money and your own good example of money management will give excellent preparation for his or her own successful family life.

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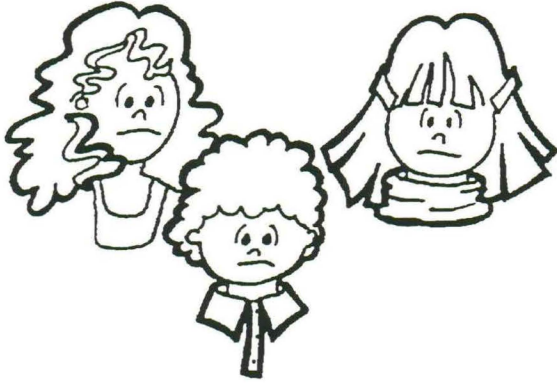
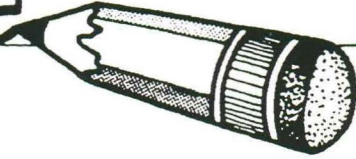
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Welcome to *Parenting Pipeline*

Parenting is a challenge. This monthly newsletter is designed to help you better understand your sixth grader so you can help your child build self esteem, develop creativity, and reach his or her physical, social, emotional and intellectual potential.

Growing Up So Quickly

You may well be enjoying your role as the parent of a preteen. Many say that the 9- to 12-year-old years are the happiest years for parents. The busy caregiving times of earlier childhood are over, and the teen years are yet to come.

You may be feeling quite comfortable in your parenting role, but your preteen is going through some big life changes. The 10- to 12-year-old years are sometimes called the "most horrible" time in a person's life. Your child must deal with feeling like a child and a teen at the same time.

One way parents can help is to take time to talk. You can help your child understand and adjust to physical and emotional growth and development.

Most preteens have very limited factual information about the physical changes in their bodies. Much of their information comes from their peers and is often inaccurate or incomplete. Preteens are very concerned about all the changes they are experiencing and you are their best support.

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Physical Growth

The transition is gradual enough that it is easy for parents to overlook the difficulties their child may be experiencing. During rapid physical growth the changes are so great that most children feel some sort of discomfort and distress.

Girls usually grow the least during their ninth year. Their growth spurt often starts at age 10 and peaks at about age 12. Girls are apt to be taller and heavier than boys at this stage of development. This may make girls feel large, clumsy and unattractive.

The slowest growth rate for boys is usually from age 10 to 11. Boys commonly begin their major growth spurt at about age 14. Up to this time they may feel that they are never going to grow.

Peer comparisons can cause great anxiety for preteens. Children's feelings about their body size and shape are often influenced by their friends — especially if they see themselves as "different." You can assure your child that it's common for growth rates to vary. You might explain what kinds of body changes and growth can be expected. A child who knows what changes to expect usually will find it much easier to deal with the changes as they occur.

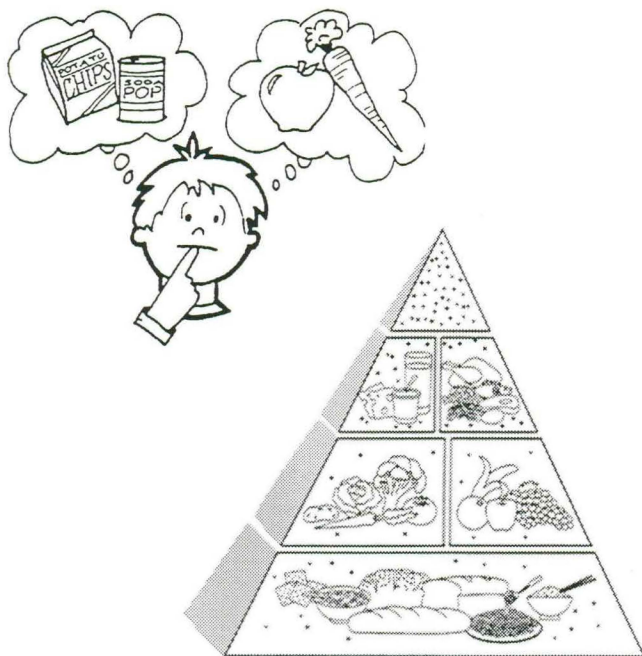
Many excellent resources are available to help parents explain human physical development to their children. Your doctor, school nurse, teachers or librarian may be able to suggest resources you can use. Check with your county extension office, book store or library.

Wellness

Once the days of childhood illness are past it's easy to take your child's health for granted. Also, the busy lifestyle of today's family makes it easy to overlook setting guidelines that encourage healthy habits. But children still need nutritious foods, adequate rest and regular exercise to achieve normal physical development and general wellness.

Nutritious foods. Talk with your preteen about how to choose a well-balanced diet. The preteen needs calories and a good supply of nutrients to meet the body's growth needs. Nutrients are best supplied by a variety of healthful foods. Children at this age need to develop good eating patterns to carry into the teen years.

Snacks. Healthy snacks are part of a good diet. Stock your kitchen with nutritious, ready-to-eat choices such as fresh, frozen and canned fruit and fruit juices, yogurt, wholegrain breads and crackers.



You may want to post a snack list or designate a snack shelf in the refrigerator or cupboard. When you have extra time to spend at the grocery store, take your preteen along and together compare food product labels. Pay special attention to the serving size and the amount of fat. Look for snack foods that fit your budget and fit into the food pyramid.

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Adequate rest. Most children need at least eight hours of sleep each night. They may need more during times of rapid growth. Good sleep habits and regular sleeping hours help normal physical development. Encourage your child to go to bed and get up about the same time each day.

Regular exercise. Daily exercise is another good habit you can encourage your preteen to develop. Children have different interests and physical abilities that influence their exercise choices. Exercise doesn't have to be competitive or team-oriented, although preteens often enjoy the socializing that goes along with being on a team. You may want to suggest walking or biking together because joint activities can provide opportunities for one-on-one "talking" time.

Now's the Time

Parents often have to juggle many pressures from community, work and family responsibilities. It can be hard to find "talking and listening" time to share with your child. Preteens may feel too grown up to ask for your time like they did when they were younger. But they still need the support, love and concern that parents provide. Your guidance is especially important as they learn how to accept their physical growth and development.

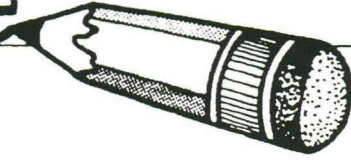
This Issue

This newsletter is published for Iowa families with sixth grade children by Iowa State University Extension and distributed through your local county extension office.

For more information, contact:

Parenting Pipeline

a newsletter for parents of **sixth grade** children



Listening + Responding = Communication

Can you carry on a conversation easily with your child and your child's friends?

Talking with sixth graders can be a challenge. Personal questions often put them on the spot and cause them to clam up.

We often tell preteens, "My, how you are growing! I wouldn't have recognized you." (Of course, we don't hear their under-the-breath reply, "No, I've shrunk" ... out of embarrassment.) We would not make potentially embarrassing physical comments to other adults ("My, how you've grown.") This same courtesy should apply to preteens.

Also, adults are comfortable with questions like "How are you?" "How's the family?" But, youth have not had a lot of practice dealing with personal communication and such questions can make them feel awkward and uncomfortable. Try to focus on something other than the child. Visit about a person, event or an object that might interest a preteen: "What did

your sister do on her trip to California?" "What special plans do you have for this summer?" "If you could go any place you wanted for two weeks, where would you go?" "Why would you go there?" Personal communication will happen as conversation becomes easier and trust develops.

Parents - Listen to Your Child

"My friends listen to what I say, but my parents only hear me talk." That's how some kids feel.

Parents also feel frustrated when their children do not seem to listen to them. Learning to listen is the key to good communication and conversation. To teach children how to listen, we must first listen to them.

We can improve communication if we listen and respond positively to the unpleasant as well as to the pleasant. Guaranteed conversation "enders" are such statements as "You don't really mean that!" or "You shouldn't feel that way!" or "Don't argue with me!" or "Don't talk back to me!" or "Nonsense, there is no reason to feel that way!" Really listening means listening without criticizing or judging people for what they say. Otherwise we shut off sharing and only teach children to tell us what is safe. When you listen with total attention you are saying that the child's concerns and interests are important to you.

When strong emotions are involved, we need to actively listen. This means observing the preteen's face, body movements and unspoken gestures in order to understand both what is spoken and what is meant. Your response should show that you understood what was said and should leave the door open for further discussion. For example, when a preteen says, "Leave me alone. You don't care what happens to me," you might say "Don't be silly, of course I do." Or, "It sounds to me like you're feeling very hurt and angry." The first response ends the conversation. The second shows active listening and responding with understanding.

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Parents - Listen to Yourself

It's easier to listen to others than it is to listen to ourselves. If you are constantly being misunderstood, look at the way you've sent your messages. Listen to how you respond to differences of opinion. Do you really accept the fact of individual differences? Do you share your true feelings or do you withhold them? Listen to your tone of voice when you talk to your spouse, children or friends. Does it change? The tone of voice communicates to the listener something over and above the verbal messages.

Communication is not done with just words, but with your interest, tone of voice and body language.

Suggested Resources

"*How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*" is an excellent book for parents to use. The authors, Faber and Mazlish, have developed a series of cartoon examples that help get basic communication skills on track in a very quick and easy way.

If you have often thought that your family needs to work on how members communicate, this book is an excellent start for you.

Check for workshops being held in your county to assist you in setting up a positive relationship with your child. The time to establish this skill is NOW — not during a rebellious teenage phase.

Call your county extension office for more information about resources available through Iowa State University Extension.



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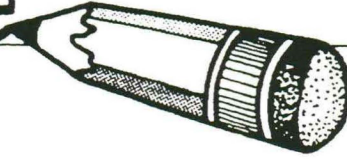
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Choices

Your child has roughly 80 hours a week to do things. Subtract 50 hours for school, homework and chores. This leaves your child only 30 hours a week for everything else.

As parents we need to guide our children to participate in a variety of activities. Listen to your child's expression of interest and watch your child participate in activities. This can help you determine the activities to emphasize and those to discontinue.

Sometimes we push achievement in scholarship, athletics or music so much that we spoil the fun. Help children enjoy their activities.

Here are some questions for you and your child to discuss when choosing activities.

- ✓ What does your child like to do?
- ✓ Will this activity develop one of your child's interests?
- ✓ Will participating in this activity allow development of some special leadership skills? These skills include communication and working as a team member.
- ✓ Can this activity foster a healthy self-esteem? Sometimes activities can foster healthy self-esteem but leaders, coaches or other participants can change the experience into a negative one.

- ✓ What equipment is required and what are the financial costs? If your child wants piano lessons but you don't own a piano, can you rent or borrow? Your child is exploring interests now and may not want to continue in the future.
- ✓ What is a realistic goal for your child if he or she participates in the activity?
- ✓ How can your child achieve this goal?

When you show an interest in your child's activities, you help the child maintain an interest. Also, emphasize the value of participation and learning more than the competition. Some parents spoil the fun when they become more emotionally involved in the activity than their children.

Sometimes your child may not be selected for the team, the play, or another activity. You can help your child handle such disappointments. First, acknowledge the child's feelings. The disappointment is very real to your child, even though you may not view it as serious. Express positive feelings. For instance, you might tell your child that it took courage to try out and that you feel proud of his or her effort. You might discuss other interests to pursue and help the child set realistic goals. If you are positive about your child's disappointment, your child's self-esteem and confidence will become stronger.

On the other hand, some children become the "hero" of the class. This creates stress on the child. We, as parents, enjoy seeing our children respected by their peers but we don't want them to be on a pedestal. You might stress the importance of teamwork, or of helping others learn a skill. Here's an experience one mother related about her son and his wrestling team. Her son had done well and decided to help another wrestler. He taught him several moves and the boy won his match. The mother viewed her son's helping another as more important than his winning record.

Be careful not to overdo it when encouraging your child to participate in activities. Help your child decide how to spend time, but do not plan every minute of a child's life. They need free time too. Try to balance activities, schoolwork, chores and free time.

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Children and Stress

Even though adults often reflect on the “good old days” when worries were few, they no doubt can recall several stressful periods in their childhood.

Children experience stress in many situations. When adults pass off the concerns of their child as unimportant, they send a message that their child’s needs are not important. Recognize and affirm your child’s concerns. A few minutes of listening and responding is often all that is needed.

Children often are unaware of what to do with all their concerns. They need help to manage the overload. Each child, however, will respond to stress in his or her own way. Avoid comparing children.

Symptoms of stress can be seen in extreme behavior changes. For example, your child may become restless, irritable and unable to concentrate, or may become very withdrawn from routine activities and display a loss of interest in activities. Other symptoms might include:

- ✓ Excessive sleeping or insomnia
- ✓ Increase or decrease in appetite
- ✓ Sudden weight gain or loss
- ✓ Hyperactivity or apathy and withdrawal
- ✓ Self-destructive behavior, defiance, destructiveness of property
- ✓ Nervous behavior such as nail-biting, teeth grinding

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- ✓ Escape behavior such as immersion in TV, studies, chemicals or running away
- ✓ Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, other complaints
- ✓ Prolonged and persistent temper tantrums
- ✓ Explosive crying
- ✓ Loss of sense of joy
- ✓ Frequent nightmares

Helping Your Child

Handle your own stress. Your coping strategies are often mirrored by your children. Find the strategies that best suit you. Begin working on your own methods of coping. For more on ways to manage stress, ask for Pm-1404 (a-f), *Balancing Work and Family*, and Pm-1025, *Helping Families Cope With the Stress of Change*, at your county extension office.

Listen. Children need to unload all the feelings inside them. They do not always want advice. They want a listening ear. Simply reflecting what you hear is a first step. Try, “I can see that is really bothering you ... It hurts when a friend says bad things about you, doesn’t it ... I bet you felt embarrassed when that happened ...” These statements do not solve problems. They do help your child sort out feelings and come up with solutions. This method shows children that they are capable of solving their own problems. It also teaches children that you are there to support them instead of pass judgment on them.

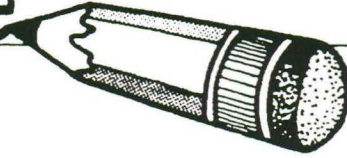
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Anger and Rebellion

Around age 11, youngsters begin to express an urge for independence. The preteen continues to be emotionally dependent, but blind faith in and total acceptance of parents is not as likely as it was in earlier childhood.

Preteens are undergoing social conflicts because they are trying to please parents, friends and teachers all at the same time. Some of this turmoil may be expressed through increased anger and rebellion directed toward parents and other adults.

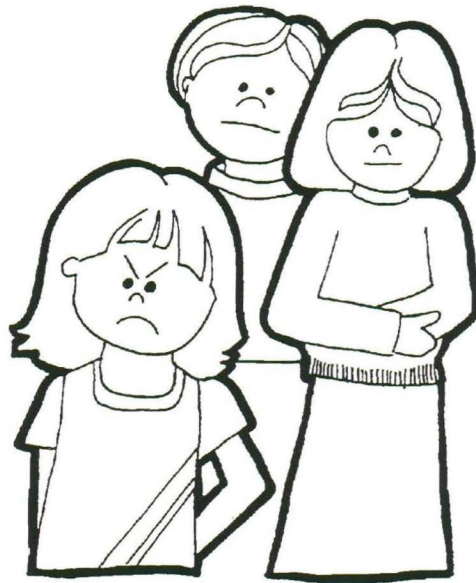
Preteen anger usually occurs when youngsters meet some situation that they cannot control or that does not come out as they expected. They are angered and frustrated by things that upset their routine or their plan. Their anger is self centered. This may provide you with images of your child at age two — another phase in the development of independence.

Adults are a common cause of anger as they seek to set and enforce limits. Parents need to ask themselves, "Why do I object to my child doing something?" Is it because it is potentially unhealthy for the

child or because we just don't want to give permission? Are we sometimes afraid that the more independent children become, the more we will lose control? Total control usually leads to open rebellion. "Because I said so" doesn't often work well with a preteen.

This age group is more likely to express anger verbally with sarcastic remarks and sulkiness. They also may fight, kick, hit and slam doors. Preteens need to be shown socially acceptable ways to express and vent their anger. Even though parents would like angry children to think and speak rationally, in lowered tones, with controlled feelings, they do not always display such control themselves.

It is unrealistic to think a person should never get angry, whether that person is 11 or 42. The goal should be to teach preteens to express anger in appropriate ways, not to eliminate it. You might say, "It's OK to be angry, but it's not OK to slam doors."



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After a cooling down period, listen to your child tell you what happened and why it happened. Acknowledge his or her feelings. Then talk about what your child could do next time to handle it more effectively.

Activities that can help vent frustration or anger include physical exercise, biking, walking, room cleaning, painting and piano playing. The mental exercise of writing poison pen letters also can work (destroy them prior to delivery, of course).

The home is the greatest single source of rebellion for preteens. They do not want to overthrow their parents; they simply want to believe they are competent to do many things without our assistance. Avoid taking this rebellion personally. Your child may be as confused and frustrated over his or her strong emotions and moodiness as you are.

Preteens need guidance and support. Allow the child to make independent choices whenever possible. When a free choice is not possible, consider possible alternatives and their consequences. With independence or individuality comes self responsibility. Preteens must associate the right to do something with responsible behavior on their part.

Preteens need more love than harshness; more positive than negative feelings; more encouragement to do things on their own than parental control; more guidance than indulgence, and more hugs than "I told you so" statements.

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Some parents withdraw the hugs, kisses and strokes as their child grows. Some preteens become more uncomfortable with these public displays. Preteens need to be shown your love and affection. Appropriate hugs and kisses are rarely rejected. If you have established this pattern from infancy on, it will continue throughout the preteen and adolescent years. If you have not established this pattern, it may be more difficult at this time, but it's never too late to begin.



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