



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of sixth grade students

Becoming Independent

“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 often are characterized by somewhat rebellious and contradictory behavior. The rebellion is the child trying to become independent. It is not an act of defiance toward parents.

But how much independence do parents give a preteen? Children at this age often are irresponsible, they may do whatever seems good at the moment, and they are frequently immature. As a result, parents often are uncomfortable letting go of some control too quickly – and rightly so!

So what is too restrictive or too permissive? Family and community values help parents decide what is acceptable. Yet preteens receive pressure from their friends to try all kinds of things.

Being fair in setting limits becomes very important. Parents need to ask themselves why they don't want their preteen doing what 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.

Parents need to examine their behavior closely, too. Telling a preteen not to do something even though the parent does it may demonstrate inconsistency and promote rebellion.

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



Family and community values help parents decide what is acceptable.



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.

Dance party! Nothing gets rid of stress like some vigorous moves to your favorite tunes.

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Parents have no hard and 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!"

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

- Read stories to younger siblings.
- Help clean the house and garage areas.
- Respect others' property.
- Run their own errands.
- Mow the lawn.
- Help adults do the family errands.
- Help clean the bathroom with safe cleaning products.
- Schedule ample time for homework.
- Do a paper route, pet sitting or some other job.
- Provide care and do clean-up for family pets.

Proceeding gradually is wise. Through friendly discussions, an adult and child together can work out what is expected of the preteen and how their behaviors will determine gains in their independence.

The experience of accomplishing tasks and making good decisions also helps preteens build a healthy self-esteem and become responsible, independent people.

Seeking Independence and Maintaining Open Communication

A father 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 got a special card that helped me 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, and so did my son. 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!



Keep listening and talking. Patience is a key to resolving these differences. This is a time when you need to begin to talk to your preteen in a way you 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 as the teen years appear. You will have a sound foundation on which to build a solid, loving relationship with your maturing child.



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