



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of sixth grade students

Almost a Teen

Life is changing. Your sixth grader is moving on to a new and exciting time and may no longer believe everything you say. You'll be amazed by how little you know about what's in, out or acceptable. If you talk to your child's friends, you might inadvertently be an embarrassment to your child and not even know what you did. If you like something, chances are your child will not.

So what are you to do when you sometimes are considered the meanest, most unfair parent on earth?

Remember that 12-year-olds are reaching out, questioning and testing. Children at this age are in the process of sorting out all the information and values to which they are exposed. Don't be alarmed if you seem to have more disagreements. Be patient and allow them to work this out, but stick to your values, beliefs and important rules.

Parents have no magic way to help their child reach adulthood. Parents can listen, negotiate and pass on experiences. The child must decide whether to listen and follow the adult's guidance. Parents can help children make responsible choices by supporting and guiding them while modeling respect and expecting respect in return.

The Invisible Audience

How preteens look is very important to them. If they feel they aren't attractive, they can become very self-critical. Certain things, such as having to wear glasses or braces, or having teeth or a nose that are suddenly out of proportion, are difficult to accept. Additionally, adolescents feel that they are always on stage, in the spotlight with an audience judging them. That is why every misstep is so embarrassing to them.

Parents can help by encouraging good grooming and personal hygiene habits. A fashionable, easy-care hairstyle will do a lot for a preteen. Being aware of the type of clothing other preteens are wearing can help you and your child select an acceptable wardrobe.

Take time to compliment your child and offer assistance. Preteens need love, warmth and support at this time.



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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.

Start a gratitude journal. Or just keep track of all of the awe-some moments in your week.

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 probably will fail or mess up. This usually makes things worse. Children can handle anxious 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 are faced with uncomfortable and upsetting situations. When this happens, leaving the problem behind may be impossible for them. 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.
- Close your eyes and count to 100.
- Talk it out with a good listener.
- Recall past successes.
- Do something positive and physical. Take a walk, run or bike ride; dance; or even play an instrument.
- Calmly make a plan of action, write it out and go forward one step at a time.

Stress is a way our bodies and minds react to life's difficult moments. Preteens need to know that living without some stress is impossible. But that doesn't mean stress has to ruin lives. 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

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 can look and feel their best.

Some tips for skin care:

- Never squeeze pimples or blackheads.
- Keep hair clean, even if that means washing it daily.
- Use fresh washcloths and towels. Wash hands frequently with soap. Avoid using highly fragranced soaps to wash the face.
- Change pillow cases regularly.
- Avoid using heavy makeup and sharing makeup.
- Get a balanced diet (see www.myplate.gov), regular exercise, plenty of water and adequate sleep. (Children this age should get at least nine hours of sleep each night.)

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

Are We Communicating?

How much time do you spend talking and listening to your preteen? Statistics show children at this age generally spend seven hours in school each weekday and up to six hours with television, computers and other digital media, plus, nine hours sleeping. That leaves only two hours each day for eating, chores, grooming, homework and talking to family members.

Preteens need to learn to communicate. Parents have to help bring this about by bringing up topics of interest, asking questions and, most importantly, listening! Discuss how the privilege of having digital devices comes with the responsibility to know when to use them and when to put them away. Talk about your family rules around screen use at the table.

Your example is a powerful model for your child in communication style, stress management, appearance and personal care. Take time to invest in your preteen now during this important stage of development.

Parenting from a Distance

If you are parenting from a distance, keep in touch. Having your preteen hear from you on a regular basis is vital, even if you don't feel as though your child really is engaged in your conversation at that moment. Preteens can be very thought-filled and just need time to sort what you are asking or telling them. Keep notes so you remember to ask next time about the big math test, how the book ended or how they enjoyed the game they attended.

Asking about specific events that are important to your child will remind them that you are thinking about them even when you can't be together.



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