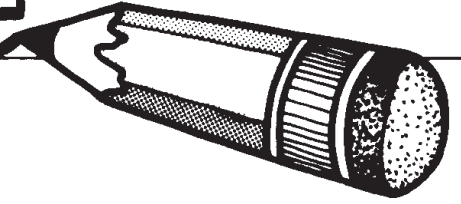


Parenting Pipeline

*A newsletter for parents of sixth-grade children
from the North Dakota State University Extension Service*



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 inadvertently be an embarrassment to your child. If you like something, there's a good chance your child will hate it.

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

Realize 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 they are exposed to. Don't be alarmed if you seem to have more disagreements. Be patient and allow them to work this out.

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There is no magic way for parents to help their child reach adulthood. Parents can have a steadfast commitment to listen, negotiate and pass on experiences. It's up to the child to decide whether or not to listen. Parents can help children make responsible choices by supporting and guiding them.

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. Certain things often come up at this age which seem unattractive to the preteen – such as having to wear glasses or braces, or having teeth and a nose that are too large compared to the rest of the face.

It's important that parents have their child look at her positive features. Parents can also help by encouraging good grooming and personal hygiene habits. A nice-looking hair style will do a lot for a preteen. Being aware of the type of clothing worn by other preteens can help you and your preteen select a 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 will probably fail or blow it. 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 are faced with 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.
- Calmly make a plan of action 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 it's impossible to live without some stress. 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 will feel their looks are acceptable, even pleasing.

Some tips for skin care:

- Never squeeze pimples or blackheads.
- Keep hair clean even if it means daily washing.

- Always use fresh washcloths and towels. Wash hands frequently with soap. Avoid using highly fragranced soaps to wash the face.
- Avoid heavy make-up. Be careful of sharing make-up.
- Get a balanced diet, regular exercise, plenty of water and adequate sleep.

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.

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? Statistics show children generally spend seven hours in school, up to six hours watching television and nine hours sleeping. That leaves only two hours. Preteens need to learn to communicate. Parents have to help bring this about by bringing up topics, asking questions and listening.

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.

This newsletter is published for North Dakota families with sixth-graders by the NDSU Extension Service and distributed through your county extension office. See your extension agent for more parenting information and other nutrition, youth and family programs.

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