

FACTS *for* FAMILIES

No. 56 (06/01)

PARENTING: PREPARING FOR ADOLESCENCE

Parenting can be the most rewarding work of adult life. Nothing brings more joy and pride than a happy, productive, and loving child. Each age and stage of a child's development has specific goals and tasks. For infants, it is to eat, sleep, and explore their world. For adolescents, it is to become their own person with their own group of friends. Adolescents need many skills in order to successfully achieve their goal of increased independence. Some adolescents do not make this transition smoothly. Their movement toward independence can cause stress and grief for parents. Some aspects of this rough transition are normal and, while stressful, should not alarm parents.

Starting early is the best way for parents to prepare for their child's adolescence.

The following are ways that parents can prepare themselves and their child for a smoother transition and greater success in achieving the tasks of adolescent development:

- Providing a safe and loving home environment
- Creating an atmosphere of honesty, mutual trust, and respect
- Allowing age appropriate independence and assertiveness
- Developing a relationship that encourages your child to talk to you
- Teaching responsibility for their belongings and yours
- Teaching basic responsibility for household chores
- Teaching the importance of accepting limits
- Teaching the importance of thinking before acting

These are complex processes which occur gradually and start during infancy. A teenager's adolescent years will be less stressful when parents and child have worked together on these tasks throughout the child's earlier development.

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The ability to talk openly about problems is one of the most important aspects of the parent and child relationship. Developing this relationship and open communication takes time, persistence, and understanding. The relationship develops gradually by spending time with the child. Meal times, story telling, reading, playing games, outings, vacations, and celebrations are important opportunities for parents to spend time with their child. Parents should also try to spend some individual time with each child, particularly when talking about difficult or upsetting things. This relationship creates the foundation for talking with the child when struggles and conflicts emerge during adolescence.

A parent-child relationship which is very stressful or troubled during the preadolescent years can be a strong signal that professional help may be needed. Parents' investment of time and energy in the child's early years can prevent small problems of childhood from becoming larger problems of adolescence.

For additional information see *Facts for Families*: #24 Know When To Seek Help, #43 Discipline, #57 and #58 Normal Adolescence. **See also: *Your Child* (1998 Harper Collins)/*Your Adolescent* (1999 Harper Collins).**

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