

TWELVE YEARS

PARENT HANDOUT

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DEVELOPMENT

Welcome to the “tween” years! I am sure you are already experiencing the growing pains of adolescence. Your child will begin to change both physically and emotionally in dramatic steps over the next few years. By twelve, some girls may just be beginning with breast development or some may have already started menstruating. Boys’ pubertal development usually begins around 12-13 but can start later. Along with the physical changes come emotional changes. Your new adolescent will begin to push the boundaries of independence— wanting to do things her way with whom she wants. Mastering negotiating skills will become the main focus of your adolescent. Set clear expectations of what is to be allowed, and give some basic explanation as to your decision. He is old enough to understand why you are concerned about certain activities he may want to do, but remember that you are in charge. Think through your “threats”, be consistent and follow through with the consequences of not following the rules. Don’t be afraid to talk with other parents and find out what they are allowing their child to do. Not only will it help ensure parents are all on the same page, it lets the kids know you are a united front on what’s allowed. If you’re not comfortable, it’s ok to say no!

Vaccines

It is recommended that all adolescents receive HPV vaccine. This vaccine protects your child against *Human Papilloma Virus*, a common cause of cancer. If you have any questions, or concerns, let me know!

Nutrition and Exercise

As your child become more independent, he will begin to make more choices about what he eats. It is now more important than ever to provide healthy foods at home. Get her involved in the shopping and cooking. Support him eating lunch at school or ensure he is packing some healthy options in his lunch box. It can often seem overwhelming, but by concentrating on

just one or two strategies, you can help your child’s overall nutrition dramatically. Try one of these: switch from soft drinks to water, choose whole grains, avoid processed foods or avoid junk food. Even a small change can make a huge difference!



It’s recommended that children get 60 minutes of exercise every day. This becomes even more difficult with the pull of electronic devices. Participation in group sports is the most common way. Not his thing? Encourage him to ride his bike after school, take the dog for a walk around the block or throw a ball around. Exerting physical energy after a long school day helps her get in a better frame of mind for homework!



Safety

Accidents are the leading cause of death in children. Keeping your child safe becomes more challenging as she begins to exert her independence, especially in motor vehicles. The CDC recommends that children not ride in the front seat until they are 13 years of age, over 80 pounds **and** are at least 58 inches in height. Air bag deployment can cause fatal injuries in children in the front seat if they are not tall enough. Make sure he wears a helmet when riding any open motorized vehicle and uses appropriate protective equipment for sports and recreation activities. Reinforce personal safety by being a good example for your child! In addition, if she is staying at home alone or with siblings, make sure she is aware of emergency procedures and the do's and don'ts of being at home alone.

Emotional Well-Being

Social interactions and self esteem are the key elements of early adolescent development. Being with same-sex peers and their acceptance becomes an all important activity which can influence self-esteem. Research shows kids who feel connected to their school are motivated to achieve academically, so encourage participation in music, art, clubs or sports. Healthy emotional development is centered around your child's ability to cope with stressful situations. This involves him learning strategies to problem-solve through stress, relying on others for support, and learning how to "bounce back". How to help? The most important thing you can do is stay connected with your pre-teen by spending time together and simply talking about her worries. This has been shown to result in decreased risk-taking behavior, improved school performance and higher self-esteem in young adolescents. If you feel your child is having difficulty dealing with stress or his emotions, let's discuss today.

Internet and Social Media



There is no denying that today's tween is connected to friends and the world through technology more than any previous generation. While they may be comfortable with it, especially social media, their lack of maturity and life experiences can quickly get them into trouble. It is important that as parents we not only monitor who our children are interacting with through social media, but what they are accessing. Here are some recommendations from the AAP:

- *Let your child know you will be monitoring his texts, websites visited and images viewed. Consider formal software to monitor them— these are available in many forms and are easily available and relatively inexpensive.*
- *Create a strategy for monitoring your child's online social media use. Did you know you must legally be 13 to have social media accounts?*
- *Make sure she understands that everything she sends over the internet or with a cell phone can be shared with the entire world, so it is important that she use good judgment when sending messages and pictures.*
- *Set limits for internet and cell phone use. Watch for warning signs of trouble— is he online when he should be sleeping, eating, doing homework or participating in school activities?*

Finally, remember that actions speak louder than words. Reflect on your own use of technology and how your tween sees it. Do you ever text and drive? Do you turn off your phone for family meals or homework time? Showing our kids responsible use of technology is the best way for them to understand what's right and wrong!