



PREP FOR ADOLESCENCE

It's time. You knew it was coming, but you had no idea how fast it would actually get here. We are talking about the day when your sweet baby actually grew up and is now beginning the process of changing into a young adult. Because this is a season of so much change, it seems as if our kids can become unsure of themselves almost overnight. As parents we can't let them stumble their way through. We have the great privilege of sharing with them who they are at this moment and what they can become in the future. If our students can't trust us to give them straight answers, who can they trust? It's time to speak to our 6th graders, but mostly it's time to listen.

This Milestone Experience is full of potential for creating lasting memories and healthy dialogue with your 6th grader. You will have an opportunity to **ENGAGE** with your student through three conversations about the physical, emotional, and spiritual changes he or she is experiencing. You will also be given a chance to **AFFIRM** your student by presenting him or her with a special mirror decal specifically designed to remind your 6th grader to take his or her cue from the One who made them, loves them and redeemed them.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that there is a time for everything. And now is your time to gently but truthfully prep your student for adolescence.

STEP 1: PREPARE

Talk with your 6th grader and share that you would like to schedule three different days to have a 10-20 minute, uninterrupted discussion with him or her regarding the physical, emotional, and spiritual changes they are experiencing or will soon experience. We have prepared questions for both you and your teenager to answer. These first discussions will, by no means, be easy. And they will probably be met with snickers, grins, and one-word answers. Don't be scared off if it's awkward at first. They may roll their eyes, but they'll secretly love that you tried to talk to them.

We encourage you to print off the pages for the three discussions from the **ENGAGE** section and then place them in two separate envelopes marked "Parent" and "Teen" and do not look at them ahead of time. This allows your teenager to feel as if they are on an even playing field with you. Each scheduled day, pick one sheet out of each envelope for the topic of that day and ask away.

At the end of your third discussion you will have an opportunity to **AFFIRM** your student by giving them a special decal for their bathroom or dresser mirror that you can pick up in our church resource center. The decal is specifically designed to daily remind your 6th grader to "Take your cue about you from the One who made you, loves you and redeemed you."

Before you get started with your discussions, take out some old 6th grade pictures of yourself and connect your heart to your own early adolescence. If you don't have any pictures from 6th find any middle school picture of yourself. You might even bring it along for the first conversation, or better yet--bring a different and more embarrassing one for the start of each conversation. Nothing breaks the ice like letting our kids poke fun at us!

Do you remember what it was like to be a middle schooler? Do you remember always being tired, dealing with aching joints or realizing that you're the one who smells? Do you remember having a hard time concentrating in class, getting obsessed with a cute guy or girl, or always changing your look (from country to punk to preppy then back to country?) Thinking back through your middle school years will best prepare you for your upcoming discussions.

Remember it's only too late to try to talk to your adolescent if you never actually do it. Kids rarely complain that they don't want a relationship with their parents; they just wish they had a better one.

3 CONVERSATIONS OVER 3 NIGHTS

Set aside some uninterrupted time with your 6th grader. Whatever location works for you and your student, the key is for it to be consistent and feel official. If you let your teen help determine the place, you may find that they will take more ownership in it. They know where they will be most comfortable having these conversations with you, whether it's in their room, at the kitchen table, or on the front porch swing.

OVERNIGHT CAMPING TRIP

These conversations could also take place on a Friday night, Saturday morning, and Saturday night while on a trip together. Go whitewater rafting on the Ocoee; try caving Raccoon Mountain in Chattanooga; or hit up one of the many great state parks for a special weekend.

WEEKEND TRIP

Is the great outdoors not your cup of tea? Head to a downtown hotel or venture out of town to a sporting event. Try a variety of restaurants in Savannah or visit the lodges at the state park. You don't have to be around a campfire to make it memorable, but you do need to make it a special one-on-one time.

AS YOU TALK WITH YOUR STUDENT, REMEMBER THESE TIPS FOR BETTER CONVERSATIONS WITH MIDDLE SCHOOLERS:

DON'T FREAK: Panic shuts down conversations. Don't act shocked by what they tell you (even though you may be). Try answering with, "Me too. I remember that I experienced something similar when . . ." Start by understanding how and why they feel the way they do, and they will eventually want to hear more of what you think.

REMOVE THE DISTRACTIONS: No TV, no cell phones, and no other family members. Your teen needs to know that you value the time you get to share with them.

GO WITH THE FLOW: Never force conversation. Quantity time leads to quality time. The great conversation might not come in the next few days, but you're laying the groundwork for a meaningful conversation in the future.

BE APPROPRIATELY HONEST: Students need to know the sin and redemption of your story. In some cases, you may want to filter some of the distracting details. In others, those details may be exactly what students need to hear to connect with your story.

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND: The transition in your relationship is a long process. Students are not going to be mature adults for a number of years. However, you need to start cultivating your relationship now so it will thrive later. If all possible, it is best if the same parent or guardian has all three conversations with the teenager. Teenagers tend to respond better when things are consistent.

BE BOLD: This is not easy. But imagine a generation of kids who are willing to boldly tell their stories to the next generation and be used by God to tell his story!

STEP 2: ENGAGE

Below you will find three discussion guides. They are guides, not blueprints or scripts. As you know, the best conversations happen organically. However, sometimes students need help opening up. That's what the following questions are for.

DISCUSSION GUIDE 1: PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CHANGES

Parents let's kick off this discussion by opening up and sharing a little bit of what you went through as a young adolescent. Can you think of an embarrassing "phase" you went through during middle school? We're sure your student would love to hear about that. Can you remember any of the physical changes you went through in middle school and the challenges those brought? Begin your conversation by sharing some of that with your student. *Remember you can pull out your picture as a visual aid!*

FOR EXAMPLE: *"When I was your age, I started noticing my body began to change. My voice changed; I started having to use deodorant; and there were many other changes as well. This is what you can expect, too. At times I felt embarrassed about these changes, so I want us to talk about these changes so you will know they are normal."*

Changes you may choose to discuss: acne-growth spurts; changes in voice; breast development; menstruation; early bloomers (body develops sooner than others) vs. late bloomers (body develops later than others); body hair under arms, on legs, on face (guys); and pubic hair.

PARENTS ASK YOUR STUDENT:

1. Have you noticed any of these changes with yourself or your friends? Which ones?
2. How do you feel about what is happening? What makes you nervous or afraid about anything you see happening with yourself or your friends?
3. One change that happens during this time is that we become aware that other people in a room might be thinking about us. Do you feel like that is true of you or your friends? When do you feel the most self-conscious?

Now give your student an opportunity to ask his/her questions from the envelope.

After your conversation ends, close with prayer.

PARENT PRAYER: Pray with your student that God will help them during this time of change and will give them wisdom as they are faced with new feelings and changes in their lives. Pray that God will give you patience and understanding as you help to guide them through this time.



STUDENTS ASK YOUR PARENTS:

1. How did you feel when you were my age and went thorough these changes?
2. Some of my friends seem to be further along than I am and some seem to not be changing at all. Why is that?
3. I've always wondered _____ about puberty.

DISCUSSION GUIDE 2: COMMUNICATION

Over the next few years, your parent/child relationship will go through an overhaul. It is the transition from an instructing, parent/child-like relationship to a guide/mentoring relationship. Often, there is a natural disconnect that occurs during this developmental stage that forces the change. However, the healthier method is to keep the lines of communication open and ease through this transition. It won't be easy. There will be fights and disagreements. However, the ability to communicate is beneficial for the parent and the student.

PARENTS ASK YOUR STUDENT:

1. Over the next few years, there are going to be times when you are moody, frustrated, or mad without really knowing why. How would you like us as a family to respond to you in those times?
2. How do you feel like we both argue? Is one of us a shouter? An under-your-breath talker? A withdrawer? When we disagree with each other over the next few years, what are some "rules of engagement" that you think we can follow to help us fight fair?

Now give your student an opportunity to ask his/her questions from the envelope.

After your conversation ends, read this verse aloud from Proverbs 15:1 // *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

PARENT PRAYER: Pray that God will help you and your family live this scripture out in your daily lives.



STUDENTS ASK YOUR PARENT:

1. When you were my age, did you ever get into arguments with your parents? If so, how did you handle it?
2. Do you think that you and your parents did it the right way? How would you like us to do it differently?
3. If I disagree with you, what is the best way to tell you that?

DISCUSSION 3: A FAITH OF THEIR OWN

Just like a student's body and mind are going through changes, so is his/her faith during middle school. For the first time, students begin to process whether they believe what their parents believe. It may sound odd, but students saying, "I don't believe in God" at this age can be healthy. After all, it shows they are working through their beliefs for themselves and they are comfortable expressing their doubts.

The goal of this conversation is for your student to hear your story. Allow them to see your faith as something that has evolved and changed. Allow them to hear about your doubts and questions. This will give them the courage they need to start processing their faith and will equip them with the words to express their ideas.

Start by reading 1 Timothy 4:12 aloud: *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.*

PARENTS ASK YOUR STUDENT:

1. What are the biggest questions students your age are asking about God?
2. I'm proud that you are maturing and searching for a greater understanding of things. Would you be willing for us to find the answers to your questions together using the Bible? What else can I do to help you on your quest to find answers?

Now give your student an opportunity to ask his/her questions from the envelope.

STEP 3: AFFIRM

Close this experience by now presenting your child with the mirror decal you picked up from the church resource center. You can use this script as a guide for the presentation.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

"I am so glad you are my son/daughter and I have enjoyed the time we have spent together throughout our three conversations. Through this Milestone Experience, we've talked about the physical, emotional and spiritual changes you are experiencing. I know that at times these changes feel chaotic and scary but I wanted to give you something to remind you that no matter how you feel, God's love for you never changes. This is a decal that you can stick on your bathroom mirror or your bedroom dresser. Let me read these words to you." [Read the words to your child: "Take your cue about you from the One who made you, loves you, and redeemed you."] Hopefully, this decal will be a daily reminder to you as you walk through the changes of adolescence that your focus should not be on what other people think about you. You can be confident knowing that God made you, loves you, and redeemed you. I am so proud of you and I hope this experience has shown you that I am here to walk this journey with you as you prep for adolescence."

After your conversation ends, pray together with your student.

PARENT PRAYER: Pray that God will give you the courage to admit when you don't know the answers to your son's or daughter's questions when they come to you. Commit yourself to studying Scripture together to find the answers to your student's questions. Ask God to help you both grow in your understanding of God's word.



STUDENTS ASK YOUR PARENT:

1. Did you always believe the way you do now about God?
2. When and why did you change?
3. What did you do for answers?