

Preparing for Puberty

– An Approach for Living Wisdom Schools

If we were preparing for an important job interview, we would take the time to develop the best possible presentation. In preparing our children for puberty, we need to be no less thorough. As parents and teachers we need to provide our children with the best guidance we can give so that they are well-prepared for this challenging stage of life.

The importance of puberty: Puberty marks the turning point in a child's journey from infancy to adulthood. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of this transition. The physiological changes of puberty profoundly alter the child's self-perception. The dawning awareness of sexuality and its accompanying attractions introduce a powerful new dimension to the way a young person relates to the world. It is important for parents and teachers to work together to prepare children for a healthy and positive adolescence.

Appreciating the treasures of childhood: There are qualities of childhood like spontaneity, trust, simplicity, and joy that are often overlooked by our society. In a Living Wisdom School we value these qualities and are committed to helping children carry them consciously through their adolescence and into adulthood. These qualities are subtle and in a sense fragile when confronted with the powerful forces unleashed during adolescence. Adult support and intervention can be crucial.

Sex and modern culture: We live in an age where sex is glorified. Physically attractive movie stars are idolized. Sex is a key factor in marketing everything from automobiles to soap. The lyrics to many popular songs are filled with sexual references. The pitfalls of sex, however, are usually ignored. Great care is needed to prepare our teenagers for such a challenging aspect of life.

The hazards of adolescent relationships: According to the U.S. Department of Health, 46% of all teenagers become sexually active during their high school years. In addition to the usual dangers of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, a Living Wisdom School is concerned about the emotional consequences of sexual activity. Mixing the intensity of sexual experience with the developing sense of self is like blazing a spotlight into a candlelit room. The gradual, delicate process of maturation can be side-tracked or overwhelmed by premature sexual involvement. Intimate relationships and their endings (almost a certainty during the high school years) often produce such tumultuous emotions as dependency, rejection, betrayal, and guilt. Experiences like these can take months or years to heal and can seriously damage the very qualities of childhood (spontaneity, joy, etc.) that we are committed to nurturing.

Specific actions that parents and teachers can take in a Living Wisdom School:

1. We can provide a balance of group activities so that teens have the time with their own gender to develop a sense of comfort with their bodily changes, while also having enough coeducational interaction to learn how to behave around the other gender.
2. We can set clear guidelines for coeducational social events that include: no overnight events that involve both boys and girls, attentive adult supervision at all times, and providing a ride after events instead of having children find their own way home.

3. We can cultivate our children's will power, and the accompanying quality of self-control, by giving them responsibilities around the house and asking them to earn money to help pay for some of their activities.
4. We can lessen the effects of sexual attraction by delaying the use of makeup, perfume, and cologne and by selecting clothing that doesn't call attention to the body.
5. We can encourage quiet moments, times in nature, and the practice of meditation as means of helping children develop the sense of peace and intuitive perception that can provide an inner source of moral guidance.
6. We can support personal excellence in schoolwork, music, sports and other activities that can broaden and strengthen a child's self-concept. If you can't identify something, then invite other adults to spend time with your child sharing their passion. It is amazing how contagious enthusiasm can be.
7. We can encourage an uplifting involvement with movies, music, and media of all types, including the monitoring and/or limiting of internet activities like Facebook and Twitter.
8. We can discourage dating until the end of high school when our children hopefully have gained the maturity needed for making romantic relationships a positive experience.
9. We can satisfy our teenagers' innate need to expand the orbit of their lives by supporting positive new experiences like adventure trips, service projects, and dormitory living. In these ways we can reduce the potential for involvement with drugs, alcohol and other hazards.
10. We can nurture friendships between inspiring adults and our teens. These friendships and their potential for meaningful communication can be invaluable during the teen years.