

The Family Connection

News to Use for families of young adolescents

Volume 7 Number 4

Build Responsibility – Gradually!

What is the work of young adolescents? And what is the work of their parents and family at this time in their lives? Young adolescents are busy creating the experiences that will help them determine who they are as they move towards adulthood. Your job as a parent is not to stand back and watch, nor to strictly control so that children have no ownership of these experiences. Your job is to find that delicate balance between protection and freedom to help your children become thoughtful, well-rounded adults. What can you do to guide yet not suffocate them?

Allow your son or daughter to plan and cook one meal each week for the family. This includes planning the menu, shopping for ingredients, preparing the food, AND cleaning up. Talk about what constitutes a healthy menu, family members' individual tastes and dietary needs, and budgetary and time constraints. Work with your child so he doesn't feel deserted. Let him make

mistakes that won't cause any harm but will help him learn from the experience. You may wish to start out doing a few meals together so your child doesn't feel overwhelmed. Remember, this should be fun!

For your next family vacation or weekend time, let your child plan part of the trip. Talk with her about your destination, financial concerns, and resources she may wish to use to research her ideas, e.g., the Internet, AAA, and friends who have been to similar places. This is a great way to teach time and financial management.

Help your child learn to give back. Helping others can become a natural part of who he is. He may choose to do something with a parent who is already involved in a project—visiting an elderly friend, babysitting for a family who cannot afford childcare. He may want to initiate his very own project—raking a neighbor's yard or shoveling her walk, or reading to young children at a daycare center. It is easy for parents to overschedule their children with



sports, lessons, and other activities to the point where children feel they have no time to help others. You can make a significant difference in your young adolescents' lives by loosening the schedule and allowing them to experience the wonderful feeling they get from giving back to their community.

These are a few of the many ways you can help your young adolescents develop the skills and habits they will need to be successful adults. The learning should be gradual, fun, and meaningful.



Understanding Differences

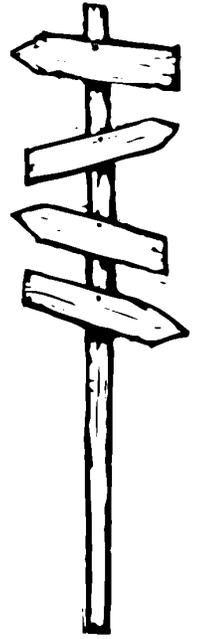
Multi-culturalism, cross-culturalism, diversity – these buzz words are a part of our daily lives, in and out of school. To some, they hold a significant importance, while to others they are unclear. In *The End of Education*, Neil Postman states that “diversity is the story that tells of how our interactions with many kinds of people make us into what we are.” It is critical, at this time in our world, that we help our young adolescents understand and appreciate the differences each group brings to a situation and find ways to use those differences to work together.

Young adolescents are increasingly aware of how they are different and many try very hard not to stand out in a crowd. You can help your children appreciate their unique qualities such as ethnicity, talents, learning styles, or physical characteristics. They can learn to see these unique qualities as strengths and recognize strengths in others.

We live in a global village. Guided by open-minded parents and caregivers, young adolescents can begin to learn about and work with all members of the village for a better future.

→ The *Family Connection* is published by National Middle School Association as part of its ongoing commitment encouraging family and community involvement in the education of young adolescents. NMSA is unique among educational organizations because of its commitment to addressing the needs of middle level students – youth ages 10-15. Membership in NMSA is open to all persons interested in and concerned about middle level education. Teachers, administrators, parents, teacher educators, college students, and other educational professionals are well represented in NMSA's membership. Call 1-800-528-NMSA to receive further information about membership and middle level resources.

ParentsAsk



Question: What can I do to balance my 12-year-old's summer schedule and my concern that she not lose her learning momentum?

Answer: Summer learning is critical to maintain skills and pursue areas of interest students don't have time for during the school year. What they don't need is more of the same. Kids want activities that are fun, exciting, and challenging. While reading is an important summer activity, here are a couple of other family-friendly ideas as well.

With family or guests visiting this summer, have your young adolescent prepare to escort guests around your community. This gives her a chance to uncover one or two new and interesting sites to visit. Give your young adolescent the task of researching your town and writing to your guests with information about fun activities for their trip. Local historical sites, museums, businesses, and colleges offer tours and free information.

Ten- to fifteen-year-olds become bored when they lack opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their town and when they don't have time to socialize with friends and adults. So, get them involved in community service or neighborhood projects where they can work with others. Is there an empty lot to clear, a flower bed to weed, a stream to clean, or a house to paint? Encourage your youngster to babysit or assist with the local recreation program or the library story hour.

TIPS Making the transition from middle school to high school painless

What parents should look for:

- 1.** Well-planned and ongoing transition activities that prepare students for the very different atmosphere of the high school should be a regular part of both schools' plans. In particular, high schools must have a transition plan that does more than register students for classes. The high school should make an effort to learn about your son or daughter by having their high school teachers talk to their middle school teachers and use the information and recommendations to help students make the adjustment.
- 2.** Students should play a major part in transition activities. Their academic and social strengths and needs must be accurately addressed. Students should have significant input, explaining what they are good at and what areas need improvement. To help with this sometimes difficult transition, some high schools place students on teams where they attend classes with other students and get to know their teachers well. Other schools provide advisory programs assigning each student an advisor or mentor—an adult advocate.
- 3.** The school may be different but the kids are not! Some may not be ready to adjust to the more rigid, separate class structure of the high school; others may not have the self-discipline to make it on their own with less teacher attention; still others may not be able to handle the time demands of co-curricular activities and maintain their studies at the same time. The bottom line is that the high school should adjust to the needs of the students, not the other way around. Both schools share in the responsibility for seeing that the transition from middle school to high school is smooth. As more high schools recognize how well common middle school practices like teaming, advisory programs, and academies meet adolescents' needs, the transition process gets easier. In the meantime, every parent should recognize that this transition is not a singular event—it is a process well worth the combined attention of parents, teachers, and students.



Summer Reading for Parents

- ✦ *Promoting Harmony - Young Adolescent Development and School Practices*, by John Van Hoose, David Strahan, and Mark L'Esperance
- ✦ *The Roller-Coaster Years: Raising Your Child Through the Maddening Yet Magical Middle School Years*, by Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese
- ✦ *H.E.L.P. - How to Enjoy Living with a Preadolescent*, by Judith Baenen

These resources are available through National Middle School Association's (NMSA) Web site, www.nmsa.org, or by calling NMSA at 1-800-528-6672.