

Preadolescent Care from 9 to 11 years

What an exciting time this is for both you and your child! You may be noticing some physical changes, especially in girls by the end of this period, that herald the onset of puberty. Both boys and girls appear to be physically agile. It seems as if they never stop running, skipping or jumping. This is also an age that is dangerous in that they will attempt feats that can be injury-producing, such as tricks on a skateboard or jumping out of a tree. Children this age enjoy seeing a task or project to completion.

Children this age continue to play with peers of the same sex. However, they are beginning to have transient relationships with members of the opposite sex. Sex education should be on-going with personal values and positive self-esteem emphasized. Ask your doctor for information about these very important subjects.

This age can be a relatively calm period for your child. Preadolescents are fairly easy to get along with. They enjoy being with the family and are affectionate with both Mom and Dad. However, at the end of this period, you may begin to notice a change in mood, especially in girls. Get ready! You are about to enter adolescence.

Eating

Children at this age seem to be constantly hungry. Appropriate snacks should be encouraged and junk foods allowed only in moderation. Breakfast is very important. Make sure your child has a nutritious breakfast every day.

Continue to offer your child selections from the basic food groups at all meals and snacks. Teach her about food. Of the major food groups, your child needs: around 24 ounces of milk and milk products; 4-6 ounces of the meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, and nuts group; 2-4 fruit servings; 3-5 vegetable servings; and 6-11 bread, cereal, rice, pasta group servings per day. At least one serving of fruit per day should be a citrus fruit or juice. A yellow or dark green vegetable should be served at least 3 to 4 times a week. A bread serving is one slice or a cup of cereal.

Avoid “empty” calorie snacks such as soft drinks, chips, candy, and cookies. If given, these should be in limited amounts. Encourage snacks of fruit, popcorn, peanut butter, stuffed celery, raisins, cheese strips, etc.

It is especially important during this period to evaluate your child’s food consumption along with the amount of exercise she is doing. Obesity is quite worrisome in this age group and studies have shown that children who are overweight at this time have a greater chance of obesity in adulthood.

Sleeping

Your child may not be experiencing particular sleep problems at this age except for an occasional nightmare. However, your child may not be getting enough sleep. With the combination of homework, TV, and extra after school activities, many children are sleep-deficient. Children this age require 9-10 hours of sleep per night. It is important that your child obtain a consistent amount of sleep as sleep lost can not be made up later.

Development/Play

You may notice how “social” your child is becoming! Even though the family is still very important, friends and their opinions are highly valued. They enjoy their friendships and spend time on the phone or write letters to distant friends.

School is very important in your child’s life now. Most subjects are enjoyed and they are beginning to have the ability to problem solve. Individual interests and skills vary. Some prefer reading; particularly a book series, comics, or magazines appropriate for their age (consider subscribing to some). Some enjoy writing; encourage keeping a log or diary (maybe on the home computer), but respect your child’s privacy. You may notice that your child enjoys collecting articles such as stamps, baseball cards, postcards, or creating a scrapbook or photo album. Encourage these activities. Music and art interests should be cultivated.

Children this age are very industrious. You may notice that your child helps with household tasks, pet responsibilities, and small domestic projects. This is a good time to teach your child how to cook simple foods and how to use common tools, household and sewing utensils.

Children this age enjoy being together. They play board games, cards, or watch TV. “Toys” for this age include: sports equipment, records or cassette tapes, microscopes, cameras, craft kits, equipment related to camping activities, board games and video games. Your child may join a club in your neighborhood or at school or enjoy an organized group such as scouts or a religious group. Support these kinds of activities in your community.

Safety

Because of the type of play that your child enjoys, it is extremely important to teach and reinforce the practice of activity-appropriate safety measures to prevent and limit his risk for injury. These activities include team and individual sports, bicycling, swimming, and those likely to cause bodily damage such as trampolines, skateboards, and roller blades.

Continue to teach your child that all firearms are unsafe and should be presumed loaded. **STORE ALL WEAPONS UNLOADED AND LOCKED IN CABINETS. AMMUNITION SHOULD BE SIMILARLY LOCKED BUT IN A DIFFERENT LOCATION.** Most firearm injuries occur in and about the home. Consider asking questions about the presence of firearms at a friend’s house. Teach your children the **NEW** rules of gun safety: **N**ever touch a gun; **E**very gun is loaded; **W**hen in doubt; get out.

Drug education must be ongoing and should include illegal substances as well as alcohol and nonprescription medications. Tobacco temptations are everywhere. Discourage usage in any form including cigarettes and “dip.” Ask you doctor for more information.

Dialogue and Discipline

An open dialogue with your child about growth, puberty and sex can help insure that they learn facts within a framework of values that your family feels is important. It is time to prepare your child for the changes of puberty and maturation. This includes not only the physical body changes but the emotional changes as well.

It is important to teach about menstruation (periods) and erections and nocturnal emissions (wet dreams) before they occur. Along with the changes of puberty, you may notice a heightened interest in sexual behaviors such as masturbation (you should know this is normal and reassure your child that this is normal). If this is uncomfortable for you, ask for help and/or additional references from your doctor.

Suggested Handouts, Readings, & Videos

Safety for Your Child 10 Years⁴, any Bicycle TIPP Safety Sheet⁴, *What Kids Want to Know About Sex and Growing Up* video, *Changes*³, Playground Safety⁴, Sports and Your Child⁴.

Additional Resources

Caring for Your School-Age Child by the American Academy of Pediatrics (after 9/94);

What's Happening to My Body? Book for Boys by L. Madaras and D. Saavedra

What's Happening to My Body? Book for Girls by L. Madaras and A. Madaras

Period by J. Gardner-Loulan, B. Lopez, and M. Quackenbush

Ending the Homework Hassel by John Rosemond

The Mother's Almanac II by M. Kelly

Your Nine Year Old by L. Ames and C. Haber

Your Ten to Fourteen Year Old by L. Ames and F. Ilg

Crisis Proof Your Teenager by K. McCoy and C. Wibbelsman

Raising a Child Conservatively in a Sexually Permissive World by S. & J. Gordon

Experts Advise Parents ed. By E. Shiff

Parent/Teen Breakthrough: The Relationship Approach by M. Kirshenbaum and C. Foster

Positive Discipline for Teenagers by J. Nelsen and L. Lott

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