AGES 10 TO 13

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AN IMPORTANT PART OF PARENTING INVOLVES KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR CHILD AT ANY GIVEN AGE. As they grow, children change and acquire skills, and they require different things from you. The following section highlights some of the things you might expect to see in your emerging adolescent. School and after-school activities are an important focus, and safety and privacy concerns emerge in a more significant way during this stage of your child’s development.
Physical health of your child

There are many aspects of your child’s physical health. One is nutrition, which will be discussed later. Another is exercise and fitness. For many reasons, as a parent, you need to encourage healthy habits such as physical activity. You can engage your child in many activities that promote physical fitness. A few examples are:

- Going for a bike ride together.
- Running at your local high school track or a park.
- Kicking or throwing a football, or hitting a baseball.
- Taking a walk in the neighborhood.
- Swimming at a community pool.
- Walking around a local shopping mall.

Additional strategies for encouraging physical fitness: Extracurricular activities such as joining a local sports team are great ways to promote physical health and build your child’s social network. Make sure your child doesn’t spend all of his or her play time on video games. If you allow video games, consider games that require kids to be active, such as the Wii.
GOOD NUTRITION IS CRUCIAL TO YOUR CHILD’S OVERALL DEVELOPMENT. Not only is healthy eating important for your child’s growth, but getting the right nutrition will make your child feel good.

Following the color-coded My Plate, developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is a good way for kids to remember to eat from all the food groups. Dietary guidelines to go with this food guide can be found at http://www.choosemyplate.gov/.
how do i handle general school and homework issues?

Children ages 10 to 13 have been in school long enough to understand the expectations of their teachers and their school, but that does not mean school-related issues will not arise. Your child might have difficulty concentrating in school or might not get homework done in a timely manner. There might be an issue with the teacher of a particular class. There might be problems between your child and his or her peers. Addressing these issues quickly is the best way to keep them from escalating and to prevent stressful situations.

Some tips for dealing with homework and other school issues:

- Your child should do homework when she or he is well-rested and not hungry. It is good to give your child a break from schoolwork when she or he first gets home from school. Let your child have a say in when she or he wants to get homework done, but try to follow a routine so your child knows what to expect.

- Provide a quiet environment for your child to do homework, and make sure he or she has the necessary materials and supplies.

- Your child should try to do the most difficult parts of the homework first.

- Split the homework time into smaller sessions if your child has difficulty concentrating for a long stretch.

- Make sure your child is eating a healthy diet and getting enough sleep. These healthy habits are important in assuring that your child can perform well in school.

- If you think it would be helpful, create a homework contract that you and your child can sign. A contract would outline your child’s responsibilities and your responsibilities as they relate to your child’s homework. For more information, see http://TweenParenting.about.com/od/educationissues/a/Homework-Contract.htm.

- Check with your child’s teacher to find out how he or she expects parents to be involved with children’s homework. It is sometimes hard to know where to draw the line between helping your child with homework and doing it for him or her. Teachers may differ on whether they would like you to correct your child’s homework before it is handed in.

- If your child gets emotional about doing an assignment, make sure to have her or him take a break first to calm down. Talk your child through the assignment, and help her or him divide it into smaller parts. One possibility is to help your child write the assignment on paper. Reassure your child that she or he can do the assignment and that you are there to help.
Your child’s teachers might notice that your child needs extra assistance in the classroom. Or you might notice that your child is having problems completing homework or receiving good grades. You need to step in if you see any of these problems. It might turn out that the problems your child is having are general adjustment difficulties that can be resolved easily. Or it might be that your child ought to be tested for learning difficulties, concentration difficulties or other mental-health-related issues.

How do you know if your child needs to be tested? Some factors to consider are:

- If teachers are confused or frustrated by your child’s performance in school — for example, they know that your child is very bright, but he or she won’t settle down to do work — that can be a red flag that your child should be tested.
- Learning disabilities run in families. If someone in your family, particularly you or your child’s father, has had a learning difficulty, it might be a good idea to have your child tested.
- If your child dislikes school, it might be because he or she must put in more effort to succeed at it than other kids do. This might be a sign of learning difficulties.
- Early language problems might also be a sign that your child will have learning challenges.
- Most important, trust your instincts. If your gut feeling is that something is wrong with your child’s performance in school, it is wise to follow through with testing.

If it is determined that your child needs special assistance in school, your child has a right to have an individualized education plan (IEP) to help him or her meet goals. One resource that can give you information about IEPs and special education is the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) website, www.pattan.net, and the toll-free number 800-879-2301. This number is for the Pennsylvania Special Education ConsultLine, and it would be the best place to check for developments within the special education field, particularly those that apply to Pennsylvania. The consultants answer questions and concerns for free. If you are outside Pennsylvania, you can ask the consultants for general information, federal information or resources in your area.

The PaTTAN website provides parent guides on topics such as these:

- Parents’ rights.
- Charter schools.
- Early intervention.
- Special education for school-age children.
- The individualized education plan process.
- Behavior and intervention support.

If you are having difficulty obtaining services under your child’s IEP, it is a good idea to check with your local mental health association for supportive services. For example, the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania has a program called Parents Involved Network that assists and advocates for parents and their children in the special education process.
extracurricular activities

As your children get older, they will likely be involved in activities through school, at a community center or with your religious organization. It is important for kids to be involved in these activities, which provide outlets and healthy social connections as children grow and develop. If your kids are involved in activities, you might have a little more free time. Be careful not to over-schedule your children, though, because that can only increase stress for your child and for you.

Remember that if your child is involved in sports or other activities, the emphasis should be on having fun and getting exercise, not on competing and winning. Your child should never feel pressured to be involved in an activity or sport if your child is feeling like he or she doesn’t have time to do it on top of homework and other responsibilities. In most cases, however, it is helpful to have a physical outlet in order to help your child concentrate on homework later. You can always talk to your child’s coach about your child’s difficulty getting homework done to see if practices or other sports-related demands can be minimized.

Another way to get your child excited about extracurricular activities is to get involved in the community or in a sport or fitness activity with your child. Doing these activities as a family will help strengthen your relationship with your child and allow you to spend quality time together.
Most child development experts agree that starting around age 11 or 12, children can be left alone during the day for short periods of time. How do you know if your child is ready for this kind of responsibility?

Make sure your child knows the following:

- What to do when a stranger is at the door.
- Whom to call and what to do in the event of a fire or medical emergency.
- Not to disclose to a stranger on the phone that she or he is alone.
- How to reach you in the event of an emergency.
- When you expect to be home; tell your child you will call if you’re going to be late.
- Where the first-aid supplies are and how to use them.
- The names of her or his pediatrician and a nearby hospital.
- The rules for when you are out and he or she is staying alone — for example, which friends can come over and which activities are not allowed.
The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of combined TV and computer time daily for children ages 10 to 13.13 This limit can be hard to follow, especially if your children pressure you for more time or if you are stressed and find that the TV and computer can keep your children occupied. But it is important to keep in mind that the more quality time you spend getting to know your children away from the TV and computer, the healthier you, your children and your family will be.

Here are some tips for TV and computer usage:14

- Make sure all homework and chores are done before your child spends time watching TV or using the computer. Then offer alternatives such as after-school sports, hobbies and family activities.
- Turn off the TV and computer when your child is doing homework (unless your child is using the computer for homework) or when your family is having dinner.
- Do not allow your child to have a TV in his or her bedroom.
- Plan the TV programming so you know your child will be sitting down to watch a specific program during a specific time period. Avoid channel surfing. For the computer, it is helpful if you use a timer so you remember how long your child has been using the computer.
- Encourage your child to watch educational programming and use educational websites.
- Set a good example for your children by not watching too much TV or spending too much leisure time on the computer.
- Screen what your child watches on TV by watching it with him or her sometimes. Install Internet safety programs or parental controls on your computer to prevent your child from encountering websites with adult content.
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**First aid and choking**

Preventable accidents are the reasons most children need CPR. According to the American Heart Association guidelines and the Mayo Clinic, children ages 10 to 13 should be given CPR the same way as adults.¹⁸ For more information on CPR and first aid, please see [http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-cpr/FA00061](http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/first-aid-cpr/FA00061).

**Child abuse**

Make sure you talk with your child from a young age about being careful around people they don’t know. At ages 10 to 13, if your child is being abused by someone he or she knows, he or she may verbalize this to you. However, many perpetrators of abuse, especially sexual abuse, manipulate children so they stay silent. It is important to know the signs of physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Do not overlook the signs of possible abuse. Physical signs such as bruises, abrasions and broken bones, particularly if they are repeated injuries, could indicate a problem.¹⁹ Behavioral changes such as excessive crying, lack of appetite, mood swings, lack of communication or regressive behaviors (such as bedwetting, sucking a thumb or having accidents) can be signs of abuse.²⁰

Ask questions of your child. If you are not satisfied, seek help from your pediatrician or a child therapist. If you still have concerns after talking to your child, remove the child from the environment you suspect is abusive, call your child’s pediatrician and consider calling the child abuse reporting line in your area.²¹ Go with your gut feeling and seek help if you suspect abuse.

It is important to note that if you or your child knows the perpetrator of the abuse, calling to report that person can lead to relationship break-ups or family estrangement. While this can be very painful for you or your child, your child’s safety and well-being are absolutely most important. Parents who do nothing when they know abuse is occurring can be charged with criminal offenses or child abuse.

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As your child becomes an adolescent, it is normal for her or him to want more privacy. You might find that she or he would rather spend more time talking with friends than with you. Your child might also become more private about her or his developing body.

It is important to respect your child’s need for privacy. Welcome your child when she or he does want to talk to you about school, sports or activities, friends, or whatever is on her or his mind, but do not push your child to disclose things she or he may not be comfortable talking about, unless you suspect abuse. Also, be careful not to create rigid rules for your child — she or he might end up rebelling.

If you treat your child with respect but continually stress to your child that you are there for her or him and that you are interested, your relationship should have fewer problems.
While there is considerable variation in the onset and duration of puberty, boys tend to begin to show signs of it between ages 10 and 14, and girls between ages 8 and 13. Examples of changes that happen to boys are a growth spurt; growth and development of genitals; appearance of facial, body and pubic hair; voice deepening; and onset of the ability to ejaculate. Likewise, changes in girls include a growth spurt, breast development, appearance of pubic hair, growth and development of the reproductive system, and the onset of menstrual periods.

Early in puberty, both girls and boys may struggle to adjust to their bodies’ changes. Their personal appearance may become incredibly important to them at this time. They may become more sensitive or more easily embarrassed, particularly if their development is earlier or later than that of their peers. By late adolescence, however, they will usually have adjusted to the changes in their bodies and their self-image will be much improved.

What can you do to help your child when he or she is experiencing puberty?

• Talk to your child about the changes she or he can expect. For example, if you have a daughter, you can tell her that she can expect to get cramps when she first gets her period and that her periods might be irregular. You can teach her how to use pads or tampons. If you have a son, point out that his voice may begin to deepen and that he may have nocturnal ejaculations or involuntary erections, which are completely normal.

• Avoid joking about your child’s development because he or she is likely to be easily embarrassed or sensitive to your remarks.

• Watch for indicators that your child might be developing a distorted self-image. As stated above, it is common for pubescent teens to feel bad about themselves at times. But if this continues into late adolescence or becomes severe, be sure to follow up with your pediatrician or a mental health professional.
Parenting school-age children can be both extremely demanding and extremely rewarding. Every day brings something new and exciting, but it also brings new challenges for parents. Helping children balance school and social activities can set the stage for tackling your child’s other daily activities. Taking time and understanding the unique needs of children in this age group will undoubtedly help you enjoy this special time of life.
homework

1. What do you think are your child’s strengths?

2. What makes him or her unique?

3. Which of the topics covered in this section provided new and/or helpful information for you?

4. What do you think is the most challenging aspect of parenting your child at this age?

5. List at least three activities you might engage into help promote your child’s positive development.
endnotes


