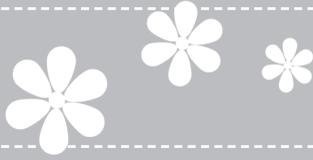


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# 1. ‘TWEENS: CHANGES AND TRANSITIONS

## SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLE

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven”  
(Ecclesiastes 3:1, NKJV).

### ICEBREAKER—GROUP DISCUSSION



#### 1. REMEMBER

- Think back of your own childhood when you were 8-12 years of age. What were your struggles?
- Are the struggles of this age group different today from those you had?

#### 2. REVIEW

- Review the Bible verse in our spiritual principle, how does it apply to parenting?

#### 3. REFLECT

- Reflect on this special time in your child’s life. In what ways can this time of transition be a positive blessing for you and for your child?

## OVERVIEW

Ah, the “between” years. The term used to describe the time in life from 8 to 12 is better known as the ‘tween years. From shyness to independence, from baby fat to puberty, this can be a wildly exciting and tumultuous time of life for you, as a parent, and for your ‘tween.

It is a time of changes and transitions. There may be no other time in life when one will experience as many changes—physically and emotionally. It is hard for us, as parents, to keep up with the changes that seem to come as quickly as the sun rises and sets. Your little one is a babe in arms no more. Dependence on you has morphed into independence and, in many cases, a stubborn will. Your child’s social circle has widened to include social acquaintances that have become very important in their life.

“For those of us who have decided to follow Christ as our only hope for gaining truth, purpose, direction, and eternal security, there is NO obligation that has greater significance than parenting. None.” (Barna, 2007, p. 4).

It is interesting to note that as research began on this book, there was noticeably less information for these “sandwich years.” Information was readily available for new parents and for parents of teenagers. This in between time, however, is not given the platform that it truly deserves.

So, where do you turn and how can you keep up? The smooth ride of parenting that you may have settled into from birth to age seven has just become bumpy and unpredictable. In this chapter we will look at the overall picture that is

emerging in these “tween years. Keep in mind that we will go in to specifics in subsequent chapters. In looking at the “big picture” we will consider the following topics:

- Transitions
- From Dependence to Independence

## TRANSITIONS

You are already beginning to realize how quickly time is passing you by in your parenting years. Just yesterday you were changing diapers and standing over your baby’s crib watching them as they slept. You wish that you could make time stand still and savor the moments of childhood. Yet, if this happened you would miss out on the joys that each new stage in the development of your child brings. Each stage brings its own challenges but it also brings unique joys. Celebrate the transitions that these ‘tween years bring. With God by your side you can say, “Bring it on!”

It is important to put things in perspective. While parenting may seem to take on a new role for you, try to imagine what is going on in the body and mind of your changing child. The transitions may not be easy for them and you need to be prepared to help support, educate, and guide them through the transitions.

Parenting preteens, or ‘tweens, can be a challenge. Discipline, school, homework, time with family—everything is renegotiated as your child transitions from dependence to independence. Hormones kick in as puberty approaches, and the pressures of the peer group magnify significantly. The things that your child needs now, more than ever before, is to feel they have a secure nest as they launch themselves into the exciting but scary world. Children who feel disconnected from their parents lose their anchor and look for it in their peer group. Home needs to be a haven from the craziness of the world. It needs to be a place where your child always feels loved and welcome—a place where they look forward to coming at the end of every day.

The only way to provide a firm family foundation amidst all the transitions that come in these ‘tween years is to maintain a strong bond with your child. In fact, much like the toddler years, parents are the ones who can help determine whether the ‘tween years are turbulent or terrific. And, don’t forget, a strong foundation now will also assist you as these ‘tween years merge into the teen years.

How can you build a strong family foundation for your eight to twelve year old? What are some practical and positive ways that you can parent during this “‘Tween Transition” time? Let’s look at some practical applications to some potential problems.

## TIPS FOR ‘TWEEN TRANSITION TIME

**1. Prayer, Family Worship, and Teaching Values.** Remember that this is best done not by lecturing, but by asking questions. To get your child talking, become a brilliant and patient listener, empathizer, and question asker. It’s also an opportunity to teach; don’t be afraid to share real life examples of the consequences of bad decisions. These are available in the news every single day. Also, share stories about your own life to set a positive example. And, most of all, remember to have that daily family worship. Jesus should be

involved in every activity that you do as a family. The spiritual principles in the Bible should be taught and applied in the home. Make it real for the specific issues that your child is facing.

**2. Stay Connected.** Have dinner together as much as possible. Kids who have dinner with their parents do better in school, are less likely to use drugs or alcohol, are less likely to have sex while in high school, and are less likely to experience depression or anxiety. In their desire to expose their children to as many extracurricular experiences as possible, some parents stop by the nearest fast food place or call and place an order for food delivery, and then sit in front of the television eating that delivered meal. Sharing a home cooked meal around the table not only benefits the overall physical health of the family it also provides an unequalled opportunity for family conversation about daily activities, challenges, and successes. It allows for topics to be discussed with your children that otherwise would not happen.

In addition, spend some private time together every day with your child; many parents find that about fifteen minutes at bedtime can make a big difference. Car rides provide other opportunities to stay engaged in your child's life. Establish a rule of no iPods, smart phones, or other technological gadgets in the car so you can use that time to connect with your child. And of course, that rule applies to you also!

**3. Recognize the Increasing Need for Independence.** Be aware that as watch our children grow up before our eyes we tend to feel less powerful as parents and we often compensate by becoming overprotective. Instead of breathing down your child's neck, agree on and enforce specific standards. Set reasonable limits. For instance, no phone calls during dinner and after 9 p.m., no online chatting, or no television or other electronic gadgets until homework is finished etc. Make sure that all of you set are clear and be consistent with enforcing them.

**4. Don't Underestimate Hormones.** Your child's body is changing and they may be experiencing mood swings, distractibility, competitiveness, and preoccupation with the opposite sex. 'Tweens can even find themselves in a full-blown tantrum without understanding how it happened. During those times, kindly tell your preteen that you see how upset they are and you want to give them time to pull themselves together before you discuss it. Ask them if they want you to stay, or to leave the room to allow them time to calm down. Your preteen doesn't understand his or her moods any more than you do right now. Later, give them a big hug,

"As our tweens change, we change. The parenting process is a mutual give-and- take experience in which we raise our tweens and they raise us too. Through their experiences we learn more about being a faithful parent. As they change, and as we change, we can thank our Lord, Jesus Christ, that He remains the same, loves us, forgives us, and sustains us through His body and blood as we experience those changes. He understands those changes because He experienced those changes too. He lived as a human and experienced human change so we would know the power of God's love and the strength of the promise of His forgiveness and righteousness" (Bucka, J. 2004, p. 22).

reassure them of your love and acceptance, and really listen to what they have to say. Even if you can't agree with their position, acknowledge your child's perspective, and work to find a win/win solution for both of you.

- 5. Be Aware of the Danger in Popular Culture.** Let's be honest with ourselves. Your young child is in a world filled with drug and alcohol use, depression and teen pregnancy. Yes, they want to fit in with their friends, but they count on their parents to keep them safe. They aren't ready for the attention they get when they wear revealing fashions. Their brain development is not ready for the movies and television shows they may wish to watch. They need you to enforce strict rules regarding technology, clothing, friend choices, etc. 'Tweens want and need your guidance, even if they are unwilling to admit it or express it.
- 6. Be Involved in Academics.** Make what's happening in their classroom your business as a parent. They need your help in developing time management skills, insuring that homework gets done and big projects are worked on over time, instead of the night before they are due. Maintain high expectations and insure that homework doesn't get neglected in favor of screen time and social time.
- 7. Help Establish Positive Health Habits.** Your child still needs at least nine hours of sleep every night, healthy food choices, and regular exercise. Instilling these habits can take real creativity on the part of parents, but they greatly reduce moodiness and you'll be happy they're well established when your child hits the teen years.
- 8. Be Aware of the Specific Needs of Girls and Boys.** Girls will need your help handling media images of women, cultural expectations about attractiveness, the pressure to be sexy, her relationship with food, and her body. Remember that girls naturally fill out before they shoot up, and be careful not to impose society's insistence that only thin is attractive. Notice any issues she may have as her breasts begin to develop and curves start forming. Be aware of the research showing that most 'tween girls are very anxious about the bodily changes and portrayal from media of what beauty is. Girls particularly need their fathers to continue offering physical hugs and open admiration for what a beautiful daughter they have, in an atmosphere of total safety and appropriate boundaries.

Boys need help integrating their sense of connection, tenderness, and vulnerability—which are a part of all human relationships. It's normal for boys approaching their teen years to act cool, indifferent, and invulnerable with their peers, even when they're actually highly sensitive kids. A responsible, affectionate father or uncle can be a critical teacher as a 'tween boy learns how to be a godly man. And mom needs to keep warmly talking and listening with her son about his interests and experiences, while staying aware that he needs to see himself as competent and independent in solving his own problems.

If you are a single parent, don't despair. Just remember that it is important that your child has positive, Christian role models of both sexes in their life. In chapter 5 we will discuss in greater detail some of the physical changes that your 'tween child may experience.



for parents to help their children feel good about themselves. It is also important to communicate your values and to set expectations and limits, such as insisting on honesty, self-control, and respect for others, while still allowing them to have their own space and to make decisions according to their age and maturity.

It is far too easy for us, as parents, to focus on the faults and to fall in the habit of giving mostly negative feedback and criticism. Although children need feedback, they respond better to positive feedback. Be sure to praise appropriate behavior in order to help your child feel a sense of accomplishment, reinforce your family's values, and create a healthy sense of self esteem. Establishing a loving relationship from the start will help you and your child now, and later on through the teenage years. Remember this rule: Positive attention is better than negative attention. But, negative attention is better than no attention at all! In other words, be sure to give appropriate and specific positive feedback and affirmation to your child as it helps to avoid negative behavior.

## GROUP ACTIVITY



Answer this question privately and then discuss the answer with your group. You may mark all the choices that apply.

What determines how well you are doing at the job of parenting? What is your "parenting yardstick"? From where do you get the standard for measuring your success as a parent?

- Society
- Family of Origin
- Spouse or Other Family Member
- Media
- Church
- Bible

## WRAP UP

If you find yourself on the "transition train" do not despair. It is a normal part of development. It need not be a time to dread. Instead, celebrate the growth that you see taking place. Marvel at the creative power of God. And, enjoy the view as you witness God working to bring about His desires and will in the life of your 'tween. And, just think, you have been given a front row seat!

The remainder of this manual will go into some of these specific transitions in greater depth. This chapter serves as an introduction to the challenges and joys that these specific years of parenting bring.

And, these words serve as a good reminder, "As our tweens change, we change. The parenting process is a mutual give-and-take experience in which we raise our

tweens and they raise us too. Through their experiences, we learn more about being a faithful parent. As they change, and as we change, we can thank our Lord, Jesus Christ, that He remains the same, loves us, forgives us, and sustains us through His body and blood as we experience those changes. He understands those changes because He experienced those changes too. He lived as a human and experienced human change so we would know the power of God’s love and the strength of the promise of His forgiveness and righteousness” (Bucka, J. 2004, p. 22).

## GROUP ACTIVITY



Discuss the statement below. How does it apply to the changes and transitions taking place in your child?

“The germination of the seed represents the beginning of spiritual life, and the development of the plant is a figure of the development of character. There can be no life without growth. The plant must either grow or die. As its growth is silent and imperceptible, but continuous, so is the growth of character. At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be constant advancement” (White, 1954, p. 162).

## TRY THIS AT HOME

Here are some things to try at home this week:

1. Throughout this course we will encourage you to engage in a “Bible Promise Project.” That will start with this first lesson. Find a promise in the Bible that speaks to you, as a parent, about overcoming the challenges of parenting that specifically relate to the topic of this chapter. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place where you can see it throughout the day during the week. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members. Don’t throw them away at the week’s end as these will become valuable reminders in the days ahead that you are co-parenting with God! Keep them in a safe place because we will add to them each week. Make your own Bible Promise Box. Together, these promises will serve as valuable gems that will give you encouragement when the challenges of parenting may seem to overwhelm you. They remind you that you are not alone on your parenting journey. God walks beside you!
2. Find a prayer partner. Pray together daily for the parenting role God has placed you in. Pray for wisdom as you face these challenging years of ‘tween transitions.
3. In addition to praying for wisdom for you, as a parent, pray for your child every day. Talk to God about the kind of person you want them to become. Instead of focusing on things like income or career, focus on the character qualities you want them to develop (honesty, passion for God, servant’s heart etc.).

### A PRAYER YOU MAY SAY

Dear Lord, every day it seems as if my child is changing. That toddler is now a young child. I no longer need to change their diapers or get their bottle ready. This time of transitions is both exciting and a little frightening. Please walk with me every day. And, help me to teach my child to go through all of life's transitions with You in the lead. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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