

SUMMARY - Tweens, Not Teens *Treasuring the Transition*

Molly Snuggerud

March, 2008

Over 100 parents attended the March Forum on Treasuring the Transition from Tweens to Teens. Molly Snuggerud, from the West Suburban Teen Clinic, shared some insights into this age group; both the joys and challenges. As they begin the change physically and emotionally to adolescents, their moods are unpredictable and their ability to read other people's emotion is usually limited to 'mad' or 'happy' (usually mad). In order to help them own emotions (frustrated, tired, annoyed or overwhelmed). Give them emotional vocabulary as well as some tools to manage emotions (time alone, sleep, snuggle time with you).

It is also an important time to give them increasing responsibilities: make lunches, participate in household chores, babysit and take over responsibility for their school project management, instruments, and athletic equipment. Letting tweens fail and learn from their mistakes is an important developmental milestone at this age.

Another challenge is "becoming my own person" and during this time tweens will test the family values. They may use inappropriate language, and try to watch shows and listen to music that you may not approve. When they try to reel us into a shouting match or a battle of wills, try not to engage. Be firm on your family values while still respecting their individuality. Be clear that respect, and safety are non-negotiable while other decisions may be (such as room cleanliness, or sleepover bedtimes).

The joys during this time are that children during this age are creative, have empathy, love volunteering, thrive on increased responsibility and begin to have internal discipline and goals. Their job is play. It is so fun to watch 10 year old girls put on an impromptu play or boys devise a basketball game on a wooden ramp with their tricycle. Give them plenty of free time for unorganized activities and nurture healthy friendships.

Soon these tweens will become teens and the parent/child connectedness you have been nurturing since birth will be so important. Research at the University of Minnesota has shown that mutual connectedness will help your values stick to your child as they mature. So continue to build and maintain their trust, show affection, continue to do the activities together that you both enjoy, resolve conflicts with respect, and establish and maintain structure. Your job is to make the age appropriate rules and enforce them. If you get in the habit of bending on rules in the early years, they will learn that there really are no rules.

Make sure that you surround yourself with like-minded parents to help you navigate these years. Call the Edina Family Center for help if you find yourself overwhelmed.