



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO

Parenting Through the School Years

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Introduction

Parenting is often described as the hardest and most rewarding thing a person will ever do – and for good reason. Raising a tiny, helpless newborn to be a mature, trustworthy, successful young adult is a wonderful yet daunting responsibility.

Fortunately, God has not left us to flounder unaided. His word contains many instructions about bringing up children. It also contains many examples of different families, some of whom have done a better parenting job than others.

There is no such thing as a perfect family. It's true that many noteworthy Christians have come from generations of pastors, missionaries and families with strong Christian values. But they have also come from dysfunctional families where godless practises like idolatry and drug use were the norm.

By his grace, God gives parents the privilege of shepherding the children he places in their lives. We recognise that God's ideal for marriage and family has been broken in a fallen world. We acknowledge that many are dealing with sole parenting, blended family situations or raising a child with special needs. Parents in situations like these may require a special measure of care and assistance, which they hopefully receive through the church.

Most importantly, we recognise that God's grace and power are infinitely greater than any human situation, and he can do exceedingly, abundantly more than we could ask or imagine – including in our families.

All parents want their children to grow up healthy, happy and able to fulfil their potential. For Christian parents, the primary aim should be leading their children to saving faith in Christ and setting them on a path to maturity.

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. **Eph 4:11-13***

This guide covers some essential keys to parenting through the highly formative school years. We hope you'll find encouragement, clarity and guidance for raising your children within its pages.

We'll start by looking at the foundational early school years and progress through to senior school. But first, let's dig a little deeper into the role of parents.

The Purpose of Parenting

Parenting is one of the highest callings God places on people's lives. The Bible is clear that children are a gift and blessing from him.



*Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court. **Psalms 127:3-5***

God doesn't expect parents to be perfect – only Jesus attained that! He asks us to look to Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, and follow his example as best we can, seeking his help (Heb 12:2).

The Bible is filled with instructions for parents. And as Paul points out in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, all Scripture is useful for instruction and training in righteousness, "so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work". This includes equipping children.

Children are fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image. It is the parent's role to see their children flourish and live a purposeful life.

There are some overarching parenting themes that apply at all stages of a child's development. They include:

The importance of discipline

Several verses call parents to train and instruct their children and warn about the consequences of failing to do so (see, for example, Proverbs 1:8-9 and 29:15, 17; Ephesians 6:4). Children raised with loving discipline are said to bring peace and delight to their parents. In contrast, those left to their own devices bring disgrace.

The Bible goes so far as to say that parents who fail to discipline their children actually hate their children (Prov 13:24).

Disciplining your children can be difficult and painful for everyone involved, as Hebrews 12:11 notes. However, it later "produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Starting your child on the right path

One of the most cited verses about raising children is Proverbs 22:6: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."

While children must ultimately make their own decision to follow Christ, parents can help by sharing the gospel with them and being good role models of a life committed to Christ.

Nurturing your child's faith

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul describes how Timothy's faith was nurtured from infancy through instruction in the Scriptures, "which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus."

Doing regular, age-appropriate Bible study together can help your children develop sound doctrine. Using 'teachable moments' can help foster Bible knowledge and Christian character. For example, you can share verses like Ephesians 4:32 with bickering siblings.

Families can also pray, practise hospitality and attend church and other Christian events together. Some will choose Christian schools as partners in training their children towards godly young adulthood.

You can make use of the many wonderful Christian parenting resources available from Christian bookstores like [Koorong](#) and organisations such as [Focus on the Family](#).

Good communication

Communication is vital to any relationship. From early childhood, encourage your children to be open with you. Be open in return, in an age-appropriate manner.

Your children may get to a stage where it seems the last person they want to talk to is you. However, they still yearn for your support, advice and encouragement.

Keep communication lines open by:

- listening attentively to what your children have to say
- not interrupting with judgments or answers
- talking straight about what you mean
- using non-verbal communication such as eye contact, tone of voice and gestures (eg nod to show you understand)
- keeping your emotions under control – remain calm and rational regardless of what they say
- trying to remain open-minded rather than jumping to conclusions
- asking questions to clarify anything you're unsure about.

Now it's time to turn to specifics for stages of the school journey.

First Year of School to Year 2: **Setting Good Foundations**

As with any process, patterns set early will continue to have an impact. Parenting effort invested in the early school years will reap a wonderful harvest as your children's lives bear the fruit of your commitment.



Establishing rules, boundaries and consequences

God sets rules and boundaries to keep his children safe and help them flourish. Family rules are intended to do likewise.

Family rules help:

- children learn about behaviour that is and isn't acceptable
- children understand that rules are a part of life
- guide how your family treats its members
- foster a peaceful, harmonious home environment
- parents define when a consequence is warranted.

Good family rules are positive, clear statements that outline behavioural expectations. Where possible, frame them around what to do, rather than what not to do. For example, a rule might be, "We talk to each other respectfully" rather than "Don't be rude to each other".

Involve all family members in rule making and try to keep the list short, especially for younger children. A written list placed where everyone can see it will reduce the likelihood of disagreements.

What to make rules about

Rules will look different for each family and should cover what's most important for yours. You might like to make rules about:

- safety – for example, only crossing the road with an adult
- manners – such as saying please and thank you
- behaviour – such as treating others how you would like to be treated
- routines – such as bedtimes and brushing teeth.

Reviewing your rules

Over time, you'll need to review whether your rules are working and update them to suit the needs and circumstances of your family.

Setting consequences

If you're setting rules, it's vital to define consequences for breaking them.

Consequences can be positive or negative:

- your child does what you've asked and receives a positive consequence (or reward), which makes them more likely to behave that way again. For example, they comply with tooth-brushing each weekday and get a trip to the park on the weekend.

- your child behaves a certain way and avoids a negative consequence. For example, they finish their homework before going on screens and avoid losing screen time privileges. This increases the likelihood of the same behaviour happening under the same circumstances.
- your child behaves a certain way and gets a negative consequence. For example, they push their sibling and get a time-out. This decreases the chances of this behaviour happening again.

Consequences can be:

1. Natural: that is, directly connected to the behaviour. For example, if your child refuses to eat, they'll get hungry.
2. Related: that is, linked with the behaviour you want to discourage. For example, if siblings fight over a toy, that toy gets put away for the day.
3. Intentional: some consequences won't be directly linked to the behaviour, but still give your child the chance to learn that actions have outcomes. Examples include loss of privileges (such as taking away screen time or a favourite toy), and time-out (sending your child to an uninteresting place for a short time).

Consequences are most effective when they are:

- clearly explained in advance and associated with your family rules
- used consistently in response to your child's behaviour
- combined with praise and rewards for good behaviour
- kept short, so your child quickly has a chance to do better
- applied in a calm, neutral tone (not out of anger or frustration)
- applied soon after the behaviour
- adjusted to each child's age and abilities.

Establishing healthy habits

The early school years are the best time to establish healthy habits that promote physical and mental wellbeing and boost your child's chance of living a long, healthy and productive life.

Sleep

[Research shows](#) that adequate sleep is vital for optimal growth and development. In fact, inadequate sleep in children has been linked with learning and attention difficulties and higher risk for accidents, injuries, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and depression.

In teens, it has been related to increased risk of self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts.

Enough good quality sleep will help your child concentrate, remember what they're learning and behave well – which increases the likelihood of school success.

Children this age need 10-11 hours of sleep per night.

Tips for helping your child sleep well:

1. Have a bedtime routine – such as putting on pyjamas, brushing teeth, going to the toilet and reading before bed.
2. Winding down before bedtime – help your child relax for the night by reading together or playing some soothing music. Before bed is an ideal time to read the Bible or play quiet Christian music.
3. Switch screens and devices off at least an hour before bed.
4. Ensure your children's sleeping area is adequately dark and quiet.
5. Keep regular bed and waking times.
6. Avoid any stimulant food or drinks, including chocolate and sports drinks, in the late afternoon and evening.

Hygiene

Good personal hygiene will help keep your children healthy and reduce risk of infection. Personal hygiene should include:

- regular hand washing
- daily baths or showers
- learning to wipe after using the toilet
- learning how to blow their nose and cover a cough
- learning to brush and floss their teeth.

Nutrition

Children need good nutrition to support their growing brains and bodies and provide necessary energy. A balanced approach is usually the best, so offer your children a range of healthy foods from the following groups:

- fruits and vegetables
- breads and cereals
- protein rich foods including meat, fish, chicken, eggs and legumes
- dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt and cheese.

Keep processed, salty and sugary foods and drinks to a minimum.

If your child has special dietary needs, consult a qualified dietitian or nutritionist for advice. Visit [Dietitians Australia](https://www.dietitiansaustralia.com.au) to find one near you.



Physical activity

Sitting less and being more active has significant health benefits for children, including:

- healthy body development (bones, muscles, heart, lungs etc)
- improved strength, coordination, flexibility, posture and balance
- development of healthy brain connections, which will aid focus and learning
- reduced risk of developing chronic diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes
- maintaining a healthy body weight.

The Department of Health recommends children aged 5 to 17 years accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day involving mainly aerobic activities. Vigorous activities, plus those that strengthen muscle and bone, should be included at least three days per week.

They also advise breaking up long periods of sitting as much as possible and limiting sedentary recreational screen time to no more than two hours per day.

Tips for encouraging physical activity:

- Help your child try different things and find activities they enjoy
- Be a good role model – be active yourself and do physical things as a family
- Build activity into everyday life – by walking or riding to school, for example
- Praise and encourage your child's active efforts.

Relaxation

It's also vital to ensure your child gets some 'down time'. Many children today are overscheduled and hurried as parents rush them from one activity to another.

Children need plenty of time to unwind, play and explore their creativity. Teaching them how to relax now will be of huge benefit as pressure increases in later school years.

Some ways to encourage relaxation include:

- creating time and space for free play and imaginative activities
- practise relaxing hobbies such as craft, gardening and reading
- teaching your child deep breathing
- listening to relaxing music
- avoiding overscheduling.

Developing a routine

Closely associated with healthy habits are good routines. Working on these now will help your child establish greater independence and self-discipline, which are needed for success in later years.

Young children won't remember all they need to do in a day and will need more of your help. You might like to create a chart of daily tasks. Use pictures for younger children. This could be a list they tick off each day or a blueprint to follow. You might like to link rewards with completion of tasks they find difficult or don't like.

Examples of things to include are:

- personal hygiene activities like toileting, hand washing and brushing their teeth
- preparing uniforms, getting dressed and ready for school
- doing homework and reading
- bath time and getting ready for bed.

Nurturing your child's faith

As Paul notes in 1 Timothy 4: 8, physical training is of some benefit but doesn't compare with the value of godliness.

*These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. **Deut 6:6-9***

This passage clearly describes how Christian parents are to nurture their children's faith – deeply, intentionally and consistently.

Research has confirmed the goodness of God's design for families – those who eat, pray and play together are stronger. Here's some tips for investing in your child's spiritual growth.

1. Build a question box

Think about some challenging questions your children might ask, like "How do we know God is real?" and "Is Jesus really God's son?" Write them on cards and place them in a box. You can include answers on the back, or have your children think them through and discuss them with you.

2. Bedtime memory verses

One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is Bible memory verses. Write or print them on cards, and use bedtime to rehearse them. You might like to tape your current memory passage to your child's wall or bedframe as a nightly reminder.

3. Reflecting on Scripture

Try writing Bible verses in dry-erase marker on a mirror your child uses regularly. That way, you can reflect on Scripture while going about daily tasks like brushing teeth and hair. After a week, you could wipe off words here and there and let your children fill in the blanks.

4. Finding faith in your family tree

Is there a spiritual legacy in your family? Your child could interview extended family members to learn more about their faith journeys and what being a Christian means to them. Also, share your own testimony with your children. Hearing it will enhance your child's sense of belonging within your own family, and that of God's family.

Other tips for fostering faith in your child

- Pray together – it's wonderful to praise God together and watch him answer your child's prayers
- Play and sing worship music – especially songs that have Scripture in the lyrics
- Read the Bible together and discuss it during family mealtimes
- Read books about Bible characters and heroes of the faith
- Attend church as a family
- Watch age-appropriate Christian movies
- Practice hospitality – invite missionaries, pastors, Christian workers and people in need to your home.

Don't forget to share the gospel with your child. There's no greater blessing than leading your child to a saving faith in Christ.



Forming healthy relationships

Warm, responsive and stable relationships are crucial to your child's development and wellbeing. Aside from a relationship with God, the most important one is with you.

Once your child starts school, they may want to be more independent, but they still need plenty of your love and attention. They may not always be as communicative but will still look to you (and other adult role models) for guidance and support.

Tips for building strong parent-child relationships

- Give your child lots of positive attention by being warm and interested in their lives. Ask questions to help keep conversations flowing, such as, "Wow, why do you think she said that?"
- Do enjoyable activities together, such as gardening, cooking or playing in the park. Use that time to talk about what's happening with your child.
- Avoid asking loads of questions about school when your child gets home. Instead, wait until you sense they're in the right headspace to talk and ask simple, specific questions.
- Share meals together and create family rituals, such as movie or games nights or weekend hiking or bike rides. These build shared memories and family bonds.
- If your child asks about difficult topics, answer honestly in age-appropriate language. Establishing open communication now teaches your child they can always talk to you.
- For help with answering your children's hard questions, visit [Answering Your Kids Tough Faith Questions](#).

School-age friendships

School brings an expanding network of contacts, and friendships are important to your child's self-esteem. Having good friends gives children a sense of belonging and helps them develop important life skills, such as getting along with others, taking turns and resolving conflict.

Tips for helping your child with school-age friendships

- Get to know your child's friends – so you know who your child talks about and the type of influence they may be having.
- Organise playdates and sleepovers to foster friendships and get to know other families.
- Remind your child about social skills, such as introducing themselves when they meet new people and not interrupting others.
- Help them get involved in enjoyable activities where they'll meet friends, such as sports or hobbies.
- Get them involved in your church's Sunday School and/or Kids Club.
- Talk to your child's teacher if you have concerns about their social development.

If you suspect bullying, you'll need to do something. Start by reading [How to identify if your child is being bullied at school](#) or search the 'bullying' category at [Focus on the Family](#).

Settling in at school

A huge part of parenting children this age is helping them adjust to school life. Once you've decided on a school, you can make the transition easier by familiarising them with the environment.

For example, attend school tours or teacher greeting events, and show your child where to find toilets, classrooms, and the pick-up area. Talk to your child about basic school rules, such as asking the teacher during class before going to the toilet.



Practical tips for school readiness

Here are several more ways to prepare your child for starting school.

1. Buy uniforms, stationery, bags and other necessary items

Before the first day of school, make sure your child's uniform, shoes and bag are adjusted to fit comfortably. [The Australian Physiotherapy Association](#) website has advice about well-fitting shoes and bags. Purchase all necessary stationery and lunch accessories and label everything clearly with your child's name.

2. Be prepared for mixed feelings

Starting 'big school' can be both exciting and nerve-wracking! Talk positively about school and reassure your child you think they'll be fine. Aside from providing moral support, you could read books about starting school and organise playdates with children booked into the same school.

You might also be emotional about your child starting school, so be prepared for managing your own feelings. Try to keep your anxieties from your child and remain positive and calm. It can help to talk to other parents who've been through it. And have some tissues at the ready!

3. The first few weeks

Novelty and excitement are high right now, but solid routines will see you through when these inevitably wear off.

Try to consistently drop off and pick up your child with plenty of time to spare. Make time after school to have a healthy snack (most children are ravenous then) and chat about their day. Ask open-ended questions like "What was the best thing about your day?" and "What was difficult about your day?"

Don't stress over academic or social progress too soon. If your child is happy and enjoying school, they're off to a great start.

4. Support their early learning

Experiences now will shape your child's view of school. One of the most important things you can do is show interest in your child's learning. As the Department of Education point out:

"Research has shown that when schools and families work together, children do better, stay in school longer, are more engaged with their school work, go to school more regularly, behave better, and have better social skills. Parent engagement also results in longer term economic, social and emotional benefits."

Get involved by asking them about school, supervising homework, helping in your child's classroom and attending [parent-teacher discussions](#).

Another great support is reading with your child. Among other things, daily reading enhances brain activity, improves comprehension, and develops vocabulary and critical thinking. For more about helping your child's reading skills to develop, Australian Christian College and Koorong have developed an eGuide which you can download for free:

- [Reading with Children: A Guide for Parents](#)

Avoid putting young learners under excessive pressure to perform – this can steal the joy from learning, imagination and creativity. Praise their efforts as well as their achievements.

5. Seek help if you're concerned

If you're concerned about how your child is settling in at school, organise to talk to their teacher.

Early cybersafety awareness

It's never too soon to start teaching your children about safety in cyberspace. In an age-appropriate way, share potential dangers with them by saying something like, "Some people use the internet in ways that can be scary or hurtful. Always come to me if anything makes you feel uncomfortable."

As your children get older, you can provide more details. It's worth investing in high-quality internet filtering software, like [FamilyZone](#) or [Covenant Eyes](#).

Years 3-6: **Growing Responsibility**

By now, you're familiar with school life and have likely established solid routines. Next is helping your children transition successfully into pre-teens. Here's some parenting essentials for this stage.





Teaching organisational skills

Your children can start taking more responsibility for themselves. You can help them develop greater independence by teaching them to do things like packing their school bag, making their lunch and getting ready for school each morning.

You can also involve them in simple chores such as setting and clearing the table, loading the dishwasher and hanging out washing. This gives them a sense of what's involved in running a home and the value of everyone's contribution.

Identity and dignity

Your child will experience many social and emotional changes as they move from childhood towards adolescence. They are figuring out who they are and where they fit in society. Exploring their identity might include experimenting with music, clothing styles, friendships and media.

Help your child by encouraging them to find their identity in Christ rather than worldly things. To explore what God says about his children, visit:

- [Who does God say I am](#)
- [What God thinks about you](#)

Foster their involvement with Christian friends and mentors, through activities like church attendance, kids club, and Christian camps.

Visit families.org.au/parenting and search the 'relationships' category for many helpful articles, including tips for encouraging family conversations, navigating different personalities in the home, and how to show steadfast love to your children.

Building on positive behaviour

Hopefully you've set good patterns, and now it's about reinforcing them. You may need to update your family rules to cover more things, like use of technology and seeing friends. Review consequences to ensure they are appropriate, too. By this age, your children are better able to reflect on their behaviour, so take advantage of this.

Maintain good communication by actively listening to your child's needs and concerns and involving them in family decisions. Plan before having difficult conversations, take your child seriously, and continue praising them for good choices.

Being a positive role model is a powerful way to shape your child's behaviour. Model following the family rules and treating others how you would like to be treated, and your child will be more likely to do the same.

Continue investing in your relationship by spending quality time together, sharing your feelings and trying to connect with their world, by listening to their music or watching videos they enjoy, for example.

A sense of humour and the ability to apologise for your own failings are also important.

Learning to manage conflict

Conflict is a part of life and learning to manage it effectively is a crucial skill. Children who can do this tend to be happier, have good friendships and learn better at school.

Rather than trying to solve all your child's relationship problems, it's better to coach them in conflict resolution.

Tips for teaching your child to manage conflict

1. Be a good role model – by practising calm, respectful, and thoughtful ways of solving your own relationship issues.
2. Teach your child strategies for staying calm – like taking deep breaths, pausing before responding, and walking away if necessary.
3. Help them identify their feelings – to discover why a situation is upsetting and how best to respond.
4. Encourage empathy – so they can see the situation from the other person's point of view.
5. Teach communication skills – such as actively listening to the other person, not acting on emotions, and using "I" statements to talk about how they feel.
6. Foster problem solving skills – such as brainstorming solutions, thinking through possible consequences, learning to compromise and reflecting on how well their chosen solution worked.
7. Use conflict as an opportunity to practise godly character traits like kindness, patience and forgiveness.

To learn more about fostering biblical conflict resolution skills in your children, check out [PeacewiseKids](#).

Growing in faith and developing godly character

According to Focus on the Family, [research shows](#) only one third of young people brought up in church sustain their faith and church engagement into adulthood. But don't despair!

It's important to remember that Christianity is about a relationship with the living God rather than rules. Continue to do all you can to nurture your child's faith, like studying the Bible, praying together, attending church and talking through tough issues.

As your child gets older, it's a good idea to expand their sphere of Christian friends and mentors, so they understand faith goes beyond their family. Christian teachers, youth pastors and other Christian families can provide great role models.

For more resources to help grow your child's faith and character, visit families.org.au/parenting and search the 'faith' category.

Responsible digital citizenship

Like it or not, today's children live in a digital world. Everything they do online has potential to leave a 'digital footprint' that follows them throughout their lives. At this age, you can start talking more about online dangers and the potential impact of your child's own online activity.

Good digital citizens treat others with respect, protect privacy (their own and that of others), and are mindful of safety concerns unique to the online environment.

Help your child become a good digital citizen by teaching them to:

1. Protect private information

Teach them basics like never sharing personal information or passwords and the importance of privacy. If they have devices, check to ensure privacy settings are correct and location services are switched off.

2. Discern truth from falsehood

Your child must learn that anyone can post anything in the digital environment, which means online information may be false or misleading.

Going online together is a great way to help them look below the surface, ask questions and think critically about what they come across. It's also a great opportunity to teach them the difference between news and advertising and what to do with things like pop-ups.

3. Be aware of scams and predators

Talk about how not everyone has good intentions. Use age-appropriate terms to talk about cybersafety and being wise about what they share online. Reassure them they can talk to you about anything that seems strange or causes discomfort.

Talk about hormones and body changes

It's normal for puberty to start anywhere between ages 8 to 14, so it's important to talk about it before physical changes start.

Start a conversation when your child is relaxed and ready to talk. You could use a book or movie scene as an opener. It helps to:

- use the conversation to reinforce your values, such as respect for your body
- keep conversations factual by using correct terms
- reassure your child that changes start and progress differently for everyone
- not compare your child to others.

For help with talking to your child about puberty, read [Birds and Bees by the Book](#) by Dr Patricia Weerakoon.

Money management

If you haven't done so, now is a good time to start teaching your children basic money management. You could pay them to do extra chores and teach them to divide their earnings between giving, saving and spending.

The Bible has a lot to say about money, including how God wants us to use it to bless others and build his Kingdom. Search the Scriptures together to discover more. See:

- [20 Bible Verses on Money and Stewardship](#)
- [Bible Verses About Money: What Does the Bible Have to Say About Our Financial Lives?](#)



Years 7-10: Increasing Independence

In high school, your child will likely want more independence. They might seek more control over how they spend their time, who with and how they get around. They are also likely to want more privacy.



This can mean changes in your home, family relationships and routine. Godly wisdom is needed to help your children navigate the road to adulthood.

Many children start wanting to spend more time with friends and less with the family. This can feel a bit threatening but is a normal step towards independence. It can help to monitor who they're spending time with, encourage involvement in church activities and foster relationships with Christian role models.

Conflict also tends to peak in early adolescence, so be prepared for some negotiations. You'll probably need to update your family rules again.

Talking about important issues like drugs, alcohol and sex

You might feel awkward starting conversations about difficult issues, but it's vital you do. Otherwise, your child will get their information from other sources such as friends or the internet.

With children today being exposed to serious topics increasingly early, it's never too soon to talk to them at an age-appropriate level. Parents who are well-informed and intentionally involved in their children's lives can best prepare them to make wiser choices.

Open, non-judgemental conversations about relationships, sex and sexuality can build family trust. Look out for everyday opportunities to raise these issues, like when they crop up in a movie, TV show, or book.

To help parents talk about sex with their children, Focus on the Family have developed a comprehensive eBook, which you can download free at families.org.au/ttyk/sex. You might also like to read [Growing Up By the Book](#).

[Focus on the Family](#) also have an eBook to help you talk to your children about alcohol and drugs. See families.org.au/ttyk/alcoholdrugs.

Mental and physical health

Adolescence is a time of rapid change and growth. Teenage brains and bodies are moving rapidly towards physical, social, and emotional maturity and the going through can be turbulent!

Physically, maintaining healthy sleep, nutrition, and activity routines will help across all areas. Teenagers usually feel hungrier during growth spurts, which require extra energy and nutrients. Try to encourage healthy eating habits by providing nutritious meals and being a good role model.

Australian guidelines recommend teens get one hour or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity and several hours of light physical activity every day, plus muscle and bone strengthening activities at least three days a week.

Sleep-wise, teenagers need 8-10 hours per night. During adolescence, they may go to bed later and wake up later.

The social and emotional changes can sometimes seem more difficult to manage than the physical ones. Here's some tips for helping your child with these changes.

1. Maintain a good relationship

Continue making opportunities to spend time together. Be prepared to listen when they want to talk, which may not be when it's convenient for you! Listen calmly and actively and do your best to always respond with grace and truth.

2. Be a positive model

Your child will look to how you relate to your spouse, friends, family and colleagues for an example, so do your best to model treating others with empathy and respect and manage conflict positively.

3. Active listening

This means focusing fully on your child, so if you can't pay attention straight away, organise a time to do it later. Try to see things from their perspective and 'read between the lines' for the feelings behind the words.

4. Meet their friends

As friends become more important to your child, try getting to know who your child is mixing with. Invite them around and make them welcome. Your home can become a place where your child and their friends witness the love of Christ played out in everyday life.

For more on helping teenagers manage their emotions, see [How to help your kids with their turbulent emotions](#).

Teens and mental health

Good mental health is important for teen development, resilience and relationship building. Having a supportive and loving relationship with you positively impacts mental wellbeing, as do healthy lifestyle habits and avoiding drugs and alcohol.

Other tips for teen mental health

- Show interest in their lives, ideas and feelings
- Demonstrate your love and affection for them
- Praise their efforts and strengths as well as their achievements
- Deal with problems quickly rather than letting them build up

Further information and support for teens with mental health challenges is available from:

- [Christian Counsellors Association](#)
- [Beyond Blue](#)
- [Kids Helpline](#)

Starting to think about life beyond school

As your child progresses through high school, they may start to think about the future. You can guide them by:

- promoting exploration of options rather than pressuring them to make decisions
- encouraging them to think about their gifts, talents and interests
- praying and seeking God's wisdom for their future direction
- talking to different people about their work
- attending career and training institution open days
- seeking advice from your school's career guidance counsellor
- helping them find work experience and/or part-time work.

Practising Christian habits

If you haven't yet, you'll want to start talking to your children about taking responsibility for their own faith. It's time to start stepping away (but not completely!) and allowing God to work in their lives.

You can also encourage them with Christian habits, such as:

- creatively developing their gifts eg writing Christian poems, composing songs, baking, craft
- using their interests to serve eg playing music at church
- attending your church's youth program
- personal devotions/daily Bible study
- attending youth/Bible study group
- mentoring younger children
- prayer and giving.

For ideas on helping teens grow in faith, visit families.org.au/article/how-you-can-help-your-teens-live-out-their-faith.

Find tips for teens who are struggling with faith at families.org.au/article/how-engage-teen-wrestling-faith.



Developing academic discipline

High school also brings increasing study demands. While not all children are academically inclined, developing discipline will give them the best chance of success – with study, work and life.

Focus on effort rather than grades. Emphasise that everyone has different skills, and some students excel academically with minimal input. However, effort and commitment always get people further than talent alone. More importantly, God instructs us to work this way.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. **Colossians 3:23-24***

Homework becomes increasingly important in the secondary years and is linked to achievement. You can help by supervising your child's homework and creating time and space at home for completing it. Talk to your child's teacher if they seem to be struggling with homework.

For more tips about homework and study routines, visit acc.edu.au/blog/homework-ideas.

Social media

This stage also usually brings a growing interest in online activity. Social and other media can powerfully influence the attitudes and behaviour of your teenager. This influence can be positive. Teens can take on board important messages about good health, identity and becoming responsible global citizens. Watching news and current affairs can help them develop critical thinking skills.

However, it can also have the opposite effect. Advertising and social media can negatively influence body image, lifestyle choices and attitudes.

Tips for helping your teen manage media influence:

1. Talk about it

Being aware of media influence helps teenagers manage it better. Discuss things like advertising and sponsorship, so your child understands that not all content is what it seems. Depending on what they are consuming, you may need to talk about photoshopping, violence, criminal activity, sex and exploitation.

Talk to your child about who they're interacting with and the type of things they are sharing online.

2. Encourage questions

When discussing media, encourage your child to ask questions. Aim to foster reflection and critical thinking. Guide your child with deciphering facts from opinion, looking for bias and understanding the misuse of information and statistics.

For example, you could talk about who is behind the content and what they may be trying to achieve, such as political power or financial gain.

3. Manage screen time

It's important teenagers balance screen time with other activities as part of a healthy lifestyle. If screen time is interfering with sleep, physical activity, socialisation, hobbies or schoolwork, it's getting out of hand.

4. Be aware of cyberbullying

This growing problem can be a huge downside to otherwise helpful digital technologies. For comprehensive advice about defeating cyberbullying, visit acc.edu.au/blog/defeating-cyberbullying-a-guide-for-families.

Find advice from an experienced youth pastor for social media dos and don'ts at families.org.au/broadcasts/social-media-dos-and-donts-0.

Christian dating

Burgeoning hormones and developing bodies often bring blossoming interest in relationships and dating. At this age, romantic relationships will be complicated by the physical, social and emotional changes of adolescence, and your child's increasing interest in body image, independence and privacy.

This means they can also add to confusion and emotional turmoil. Wise, sensitive and caring parenting can help your children through this sometimes tumultuous time.

Every family will have different thoughts about dating in the school years, and there's no single right way forward. Many 10-14-year-olds spend more time in mixed gender groups and may enter a romantic relationship. From 15-19 years, such relationships become more common. Some 'high school sweethearts' go on to become lifelong marriage partners.

Of course, all teens are different. Some won't be interested in dating, preferring to focus on studies, hobbies and friendships. If your teen does start dating, strong hormones and emotions can make it easy to overstep a godly line.

The world has much to say about romance, dating and sex, but Christian families need to be led by God's perfect standard for marriage – one man, one woman, for life. Talk to your teen about why God designed relationships this way, that is, for our benefit and blessing.

Premarital sexual purity is about refraining from any activity or contact that seeks to arouse and is as much an attitude as a behaviour. As Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:28, lustful thoughts are equivalent to adultery.

Focus on the Family has loads of helpful advice about dating, including tips for helping your teens set boundaries and stay sexually pure, preventing dating violence and how to know when they're ready to date. Visit families.org.au/parenting and search the 'dating' category.

Managing money

As your child gets older, it's a good idea to give them greater control and responsibility over their money. Whether they have a part-time job, receive an allowance or earn money from doing chores, it's important to teach your teen about effective money management. This will help them appreciate the value of things, how to save for a goal and the joy of giving.

Tips for helping your teen manage money

- Encourage them to develop and manage a budget. For example, look at what they earn each week and have them budget for things like transport and phone costs, social outings and personal wants like clothes or technology.
- Include your child in family financial discussions, such as talking about your family budget, your giving practices or planning to save for a holiday.
- Allow them to make some mistakes (like losing cash) so they can learn from the consequences.
- Give your child a budget for a special event, such as a birthday party or day out with friends, and limit their spending to that amount.
- Encourage them to save some of their pocket or birthday money and set some aside for giving.
- Teach them to track their spending and bills (such as mobile phone bills) so they don't overspend.
- Help them set short and long-term savings goals and open a bank account.
- Encourage them to find out what things are worth and shop around to get the best deal.
- If you lend them money, make sure you craft a plan for repaying it.



Years 11-12: Preparing for Launch

Congratulations – you’ve nearly made it! The final stretch can sometimes be stressful as your child prepares to transition to life beyond school. Here’s some tips for helping them do it successfully.



Managing time effectively

At the pointy end of the school years, your child's life – and therefore yours also – often becomes busier. They may be juggling study with part-time work, learning to drive, sport or hobbies, church involvement and socialising, along with family activities.

While there's no doubt Jesus was busy while on earth, the gospels don't paint a picture of a man who obsessively micro-managed his time or rushed frantically from one task to the next.

Jesus used his time to best effect by approaching his days with peace and purpose, aligning his efforts to his Father's will. Parents can help their teenager manage time effectively by encouraging reflection about how they can use time wisely to achieve their God-given purpose.

Key to [good time management](#) is planning and controlling the time you spend on specific tasks.

Tips for effective time management:

1. Set goals

Managing time well is virtually impossible if you don't know what you want from it. Your teen can benefit from setting short- and long-term goals. For example, a short-term goal might be to finish their homework over three afternoons, so they can train for sport on the other days. Their long-term goal could be to play in the representative team.

2. Prioritise

Assessing what needs to be completed within a certain timeframe allows tasks to be rated according to their importance. Setting priorities for each day, week, month and year can help students accomplish their goals.

When setting priorities, remember to include activities that are vitally important but not urgent, such as personal devotions, adequate sleep and exercise.

3. Get organised

Once priorities are set, you'll need a plan for getting them done. Some people are naturally well-organised, and others need some help. Your child might like to write their priorities in a planner or calendar or use organisational software programs and apps.

Encourage them to start assignments early, steer clear of distractions (like social media) and avoid multi-tasking.



Finding a good balance between study and life

At this stage, school can seem like all that matters, especially if your teen is focused on academic success. Others may be ultra-committed to a sport or hobby.

It's important to remind your teen that God's work is to believe the gospel (John 6:29). His purpose is to transform us increasingly into the likeness of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

There are times in the year, such as during exams, when your student will be extra busy. But if they're constantly overwhelmed or exhausted, or have no time for friendships or church, you might need to help them find a better balance.

Develop a study schedule

To find a good balance, you could create a study schedule with your teen.

- Start with an agenda – have them record dates of all upcoming assignments and exams in an online or paper agenda. Schedule in free time and important activities like youth group, exercise and family time, too. You may like to set deadlines a few days before actual due dates to allow some margin for emergencies.
- Create a master schedule – working from the agenda, block out chunks of time for study or assignments. This will help your student to prioritise their projects and stay on target with due dates. You could estimate how long each project will take, then calculate how much time to allow daily or weekly.
- Make project plans – if your teen feels overwhelmed, help them break their study plan or project into smaller, more manageable chunks. Consider giving each segment its own due date.
- Take regular breaks – concentration usually wanes after working on something for too long. Encourage your teen to take short breaks every half hour or so. They could have a snack or go for a short walk. It's also best to take a complete rest one day each week, as per God's original plan.

Managing stress

Nobody performs at their best under excessive stress. Students need healthy ways to manage the pressures of study while maintaining productivity. Getting adequate physical activity and sleep help keep stress at bay and make learning more efficient.

Encourage your busy teen to take time out and enjoy this stage of life, by doing things they enjoy and spending time with friends and family.



Using gifts and talents to serve others

As teenagers move towards young adulthood, they should be thinking more about how God would have them use their abilities and interests. For example:

- Serving at church eg on music, cleaning or cooking rosters, in kids church
- Helping at school eg mentoring younger students, playing in the band
- Volunteering in the community eg at a youth shelter or soup kitchen
- Going on mission or service trips.

Preparing for life after school

Your teen has probably already been thinking about post-school opportunities like work or further study. While some are ultra-focused and certain about their next moves, many don't yet know what they'd like to do.

Tips for helping your teen prepare for their future

- Talk through their options, including vocational training, university, taking a gap year, or finding work. What seems most appealing and what can be ruled out? Consider the pros and cons of each in the short and long term.
- Consider their interests, personality and aptitudes. For example, they may love maths as a subject and enjoy helping others. Can they combine these in a career?
- Visit open days and career expos together, look at online job sites and the career bullseyes at myfuture.edu.au/bullseyes.
- Talk to teachers, the school career counsellor and people working in jobs they are considering.
- Help them find work experience, part-time work or a volunteering role.
- Encourage their involvement in youth group and church activities.
- Teach them important life skills, like cooking, washing and paying bills.
- Pray and ask God's guidance; read Scripture passages and books about God's purpose for work, such as [Every Good Endeavour](#).
- You might also be teaching them to drive. Remember to teach them basic maintenance skills like checking tyre pressure and oil levels.
- Encourage their relationships with other adult role models and mentors.

It's important your child knows that decisions made and results achieved now are important, but by no means the ultimate end. Help them understand that careers are a journey, and mid-course corrections are extremely common.

Remind them that mistakes help us learn, and no decision takes God by surprise! Our loving, all-knowing Father has a good plan for each of our lives, and the most important decision anyone can make is to accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. Looking at situations from an eternal perspective can bring balance and peace.

Concluding Thoughts

The school years are a huge part of your child's life, but the end of school doesn't mean the end of parenting! Your young person will continue to benefit from your life experience, wisdom, prayer and guidance.

When things get tough, as they inevitably do at some point, remember you are not alone. If you or your child are struggling with your physical, mental or spiritual wellbeing, there are people who would love to help.

Your GP, pastor, youth leader and your child's teachers are all available and equipped to help you deal with specific issues.

We trust this guide has provided helpful tips and advice, but also recognise that parenting is a massive topic with innumerable books, podcasts and more dedicated to it.

References & Resources

- [Focus on the Family Australia](#)
- [Raising Children Network](#)
- [The Department of Health](#)
- [The Department of Education](#)
- [PeacewiseKids](#)

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