

## What to expect from age to age - Part 2



As we mentioned before, every season that children go through has particular behavioral and emotional challenges, and changes that are part of their development.

On our previous newsletter we explained some of the most common behaviors, difficulties and how to approach them considering your child's age and development.

Today we will continue from age 7 until the teenage years so you can learn more about what's going on behind their behavior and what's expected.

**You're not the only one and your child is not the exception. Some things are normal but still need to be worked on, others have to do more with their story and we might need to seek more help to do the appropriate changes.**

### From 7 - 9 years old



Children will continue to develop their personality, exploring and choosing what they like and what they don't, and may be more expressive about it and may affect his friendships but it's part of developing. They may also express when they feel misunderstood, frustrated or sad about what others think about them, especially what **you** think about them and how you express it. They

may start to complain about rules, parents, friends, etc., because they are different. May fight more often with the parent that is more constantly taking care of them.

#### What they need from you:

- That you listen and validate what they share with you:
  - I know you're feeling angry, or sad, etc.
- Help them find ways to solve what can be solved that's causing them problems. Give them the opportunity to think and try with your guidance.
  - Let's see together what can we do to fix that, or make that better, or help you with ...
- Don't overreact about what they share but be aware of what's behind their words, and pay attention to see if you need to intervene.
- Help them redirect their thoughts from negative to positive.
  - I'm ugly, unworthy, nobody likes me, I can't do anything, you hate me, etc. to:
    - *let's see what makes people pretty? Ok let's see what you have.*
    - *Or, what makes people worthy?,*
    - *who doesn't like you?,*

- *what is hard for you to do that you would like to do? What can you do?,*
- *why do you think I hate you?, I may be upset right now but I will always love you.*
- Be direct and specific when you praise their good behavior:
  - I like it so much when you make your bed every morning.
  - I'm so glad to see how responsible you were with all your homework.
- Don't argue with them when they express their way of thinking, if it's wrong, lead them to explain their point of view and encourage different angles.
- Invest in your relationship with your child, as this will strengthen the foundation for the teenage years ahead, especially because their friends will soon take a more important place in their lives.
- Take time to just be with them without distractions. I.e.: without texting.

## From 9 to 11 years old

Their friends will be more important to them than their parents, they will care more about what their friends think about them than what you think, but it will still be important even if they don't verbalize it.



Their group of friends will be smaller and tighter. They will have their own language, rules of membership to the group, what's important to them and what defines them.

They may start pushing against the rules, and show some disrespect. They may start being more familiar with excuses to explain their misbehaviors, showing their creativity.

In a way, they will seem like toddlers again but their appearance won't, because they will test boundaries again, seeking independence but also at times will be loving and will reach out to you. Promises are important to them, but they will forget about their chores or things they don't like doing. Their brains have more important things to think about like friends, style, fitting in, etc.

### What they need from you:

- Give them opportunities where you can share power with them by providing options so they can learn to make their own decisions. Understand that every misbehavior is an opportunity to teach them and strengthen the values and behaviors for the future.
- Negotiation is a skill they will need for the rest of their lives, and practicing this in a safe place will be beneficial. Also, for children that were institutionalized, and were in charge of their survival, being in control is part of their DNA. That's why if you want to keep the relationship and teach them, you should encourage them to be responsible for their choices, but give them that opportunity to choose. For example:
  - You could negotiate clothing **before** going shopping, within your boundaries: do some research together, learn what's 'in' and explain what could look good on them, have 3 or 4 choices they like and then explain what you approve and don't approve with few words (before even arriving to the mall), & encourage their style within your boundaries. For example ripped jeans and short shorts are "in". Is one or the other acceptable to you? How long? Or how many holes?
  - You could also give them some options about hanging out with their friends. Because they're still young and need guidance, you could say:
    - You can either bring them over or we can go to the movies but

mom or dad is going with you all, we'll sit in the back. What would you prefer? And you can explain, these are the choices if you would like to do something fun, because we love you and we want to protect you.

- **Let them try** different things, express their own opinions, and make their own decisions when appropriate.
  - If they like Pilates instead of ballet, let them try Pilates. If they like to play the tambourine instead of the flute, let them experiment. Encourage it within boundaries. If they want to be in a class yearlong, they must finish the whole level. This will teach them not to give up when things get hard or boring.
- Don't be too bossy, try to use less "no's" and get creative about how to say the same thing with a different wording.
  - "Before going to the mall on Friday your room needs to be clean, so you can plan ahead and choose what day of the week you're going to work on that". Make sure you keep your word; if the room is not clean they cannot go. They will get angry, but after the storm passes, share the process: clean room on Friday = going to the mall. Messy room = not going to the mall. It will also help them develop planning skills.
- **Keep your word**, if you say something, do it. This way you will model the behavior you want from them and will strengthen their trust on you. They will know what to expect and you will be reliable. Keep your word also with consequences. Make sure the consequences are directed to impact and improve the behavior not to harm their identity.
- **Encourage them to consider other options**. This will help them develop a healthy thinking pattern if you guide them through asking questions like:
  - What do you think they felt when that happened?
  - What would you do in that case?
  - What could be the pros and cons for that?
- **Don't act like a teenager yourself**, don't argue with them because they will continue with arguments and very likely you will lose your patience, end up making a bigger deal of what happened and both be upset or hurt. Hear what they say and make your decision. **Always** go back to them when things are calm and communicate.

## Teenage years



In this season their friends will seem to be more important than family. They will start to search more intentionally who they are and what their place in their world is.

What their friends and peers think of them will be a source of stress, even anxiety to some teens for a while. They might go to extra lengths to try to fit in within their groups. This might involve making bad choices and

even putting themselves in risky or dangerous situations.

They want to belong, and if they didn't feel like they belong for a long period of time while being institutionalized, they will have a deep longing for belonging and may feel ambivalent between belonging to your family and being accepted by their new friends. They also think they know better and by nature they think nothing bad will ever happen to them. Almost like they were invincible.

They will have more arguments to push, and rise against you. This is normal in their adolescent adventure as they seek independence.

Their **brain is changing**, so even if they want to be kind and gentle, they will have emotional ups and downs and won't know how to manage or regulate their emotions.

- Enjoy the good, and trust that the bad will not last forever. Give them time to calm down; they need it as much as you do. **Don't let your emotions control you.**

They will likely become more emotionally distant from you. But when they need you they will seek you. Don't hold it against them. They're still trying to figure out who they are, what to do and how to deal with their body and the world that's constantly changing.

They might avoid being seen in public with you – no matter how cool you think you are, you're still the parent, and that's 'not cool'. They will try to experiment with their image, haircuts, hair color, tattoos, piercings, etc.

They may become sexually active. For your sake and theirs, it's better if **you start** talking about sexuality. Don't be surprised if they know more than you do. Make sure you have a conversation not a monologue, ask questions, talk to them about consequences and even personal experiences with moderation and why it's best to wait and not take it lightly.

They will be more creative and will start to think about the world in really interesting, different ways. Let them do research, and use it as an opportunity to explore their interests and what they could possibly choose as a career.

They will act like your opinion doesn't matter but it does, **what you say about their looks and interests has value to them.** So be careful how you express yourself. If you say they look fat that will hurt them deeply. Instead, you can suggest physical activity together or something that's fun to them.

They will often misread and misinterpret your emotional expressions, if your face is calm or emotionless they may read anger, hostility or disappointment. Make sure you use your words and if you notice they are more sensitive or reactive towards you, explain 'hey are you ok?, I'm not mad at you, I'm just stressed because there's a lot of work' or 'I'm just a little tired because I didn't sleep well last night but it's nothing you've done' if it's the case, **always tell the truth.**

Their sleep cycle will move up about three hours. This means **they will fall asleep later and will need more hours of sleep.** Because of all the changes, growth and all the energy they're using, they will need about 9-10 hours of sleep daily. So when possible let them sleep in during the weekends.

#### What they need from you:

- To be less critical and judgmental and more attentive and open to discuss instead of assuming things. They need your love, connection and understanding more than ever. But this doesn't mean there are no consequences.
- **Understand** that part of their process is to find their independence from you. Give them the space to do this under your guidance and protection. Over time, their values will likely align with yours because they received your example.
  - Here is where it's important for you to seek to be a whole person, that you practice what you preach, that you are consistent throughout time no matter how much they say they hate you when you say no, or how much they love you when you agree with them.
- Know that **your teen isn't rejecting you**, but is finding their way in the world. It is an important, healthy part of being an independent adult – even if it feels sad.
- Instead of punishing, and lecturing, go for **informing and influencing.** The more you fight against them, the more they will distance themselves from

you, and the more they will lie and hide things from you. When it comes to teenagers, we have no control over them in the sense that it's up to them how much they involve you in their lives and how much influence you make. Make it safe for them to reach out to you when they need guidance.

- Give them information, but don't lecture them. Try to **have a conversation not a monologue**. If they feel threatened or accused they will become distant, self-defensive and won't listen to you. Specially teens that were institutionalized because they automatically feel the need to protect themselves so their brains just shut down.
  - Prepare yourself, **keep calm**, ask before assuming and communicate with them, not to them.
- Information and openness to stay physically and emotionally safe regarding their sexuality and behavior. The better your relationship with them and the more safe they feel with you, the easier it will be for them to receive information from you. But remember, it's not just information, it's about how loved and valuable they feel.
- Don't fight against them. Ask them to share what they're thinking, empower them to use their words, and discuss pros and cons. If they think something is 'that cool', ask them questions to open their mind about what could be the consequences of making that choice.
- You must remain the adult, **take some time out if you need it and come back, or just breathe**. Don't let yourself get trapped in the never-ending circle of excuses and arguments. Remember, if you remain calm, they will eventually calm down.
- Encourage their social connections and give them space to strengthen their relationships. An important part of their development is to decrease their dependence on the family. Encourage and support this whenever you can.
- Help them **find safe ways to take risks** such as sports, dance, music, etc. where they can push themselves, and develop a healthy competitive attitude, social skills, team work, etc.
- Let them know you will always do whatever you can to help them in any situation when they want to come home – regardless of the circumstances and how late or far away it might be. Then you'll deal with consequences.
- Let them now they can talk to you about anything. Don't be afraid for what may come up, it's always better if they seek a responsible adult for answers than their peers.
- Listen to understand, not to respond.

## Remember...

There are important things that need to be done and accomplished during every phase or season in their lives. They will learn, make mistakes, push boundaries, seek their identity and hopefully find it.

Every season is different. Don't take their bad behaviors personally, remember, they're growing and going through deep changes inside and out. They will make mistakes, and they will learn sometimes later than sooner, but it will sink in because they went through it.

*If you do all you can, be assured that their mistakes have nothing to do with your parenting, and everything to do with what they lived and are going through.*

It is paramount that as parents and adults involved in their lives keep a loving and caring yet firm attitude towards them. Boundaries are good even if they feel upset about them at the moment. Remember that boundaries protect and guard against dangers but also bring freedom and safety if kept.

The purpose of sharing this information with you is because when we understand

what is normal and what is going on, it will be easier for us and even encouraging knowing it's not against us and that it won't last forever.

**Adoption, and growing up are adventures where you will have many ups and downs, meltdowns and breakthroughs, healing and mending. So don't give up!**

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### What does the Word say?

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.

Romans 3:23-24

Often, we expect others to behave in a way that isn't possible for them. We can't expect a dog to swim like a dolphin, nor an elephant to run like a cheetah, just as we can't expect a child that has gone through trauma, abuse, abandonment and rough separations during the most crucial times of development to trust freely, forgive quickly and learn new ways immediately.

But we have this hope, that even when we were still a mess, God made a way, by faith:

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.

Romans 5:1-4

And we can trust that even in the midst of trials, because we chose to do something He did with us by adopting us, we can be sure that it is all working out for our good. And *this good may not feel good at the moment*, but it **will** produce something good.

This truth, can and must be shared with the children God's has allowed to be part of our family, because at the end, the most important thing is that they know they're part of the most special family: God's.

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