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from boys to men

How to cope, as your baby boy transitions into a testy, tricky teen

By Robin Immerman Gruen

Pesky white pimple, check. Boggus body odor, check. Challenging child who talks back, check. We bet you're wishing for the terrible twos again, which in hindsight were simple. But the transition from kid to capable young adult isn't necessarily tricky, trying or even challenging. Rather, puberty can be rewarding, peaceful and even—breathe—beautiful. Here are three rules to make the transition easier for everyone.

LEARN THE LANGUAGE

By definition, puberty is a time of accelerated physical, hormonal and psychosocial/emotional growth. The process usually begins around age 12 (but can start earlier or later) and can last a few years. So, what can you do before the onset?

According to Northbrook pediatrician **Dr. Jonathan Necheles**, parents should talk with their child about the changes that are soon to take place. "Try to have conversations that focus on how normal these changes are," he says. "Explain that



Beth Pastron of Highland Park with her sons (left to right) Jordan, Nathan and Logan.

these physical and emotional changes are expected and represent a healthy transition into adulthood."

Although your son may resist talking about the changes and may even pretend not to listen (ignoring is a common response), chances are high that he is actually absorbing the information.

MOTHER, DON'T SMOTHER

As awkward, uncomfortable and even embarrassing as you remember puberty being, it's doubly difficult and traumatic for your son. Top that with his overwhelming desire to keep you out of the loop, and we bet that your once-doting kid is now hiding in his room more than

in your kitchen.

What you can do?

According to **Beth Pastron**, a mom in Highland Park, giving a bit of space to your pubescent son is helpful. "After school is never a good time, because my son is tired and burnt-out," she says. "If I give him time to unwind, we can usually find a comfortable space and time to talk about what's on his mind."

CHIT-CHAT, NOW TRUST

You've said your piece. Now it's time to let him run this show. You can still lead the way, but allow him to guide you (or at least think that he is).

Don't forget to acknowledge when he

MEET THE AUTHOR



Robin Immerman Gruen, Chicago

A freelance writer based in Lincoln Park, Robin's on a mission to find the perfect gift for her

man. On the short list this Father's Day: bbq tools, a framed picture of the tots, and a guide to "doing laundry and dishes" by oneself.

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The Dish: Dealing with Pubescent Sons

AWARENESS ...

"Keep in mind that a lot is going on in your son's mind (and body) during this time in his life. He has questions, most of which he doesn't want to ask. But don't be surprised when something comes out of his mouth that you least expect. Be ready, and don't act shocked."

—Beth Pastron, mom to Nathan, 18, Jordan, 16, and Logan, 12

ADVICE ...

"Be available to talk and keep initiating conversation. Listen carefully. You'd be amazed at what you overhear in the car when they don't think you're listening. Also, try not to dwell on the physical changes. They know their voice is changing and they know why. No need to point it out to them unless they ask. Acknowledge it once and move on."

—Patty Jercich, mom to Matt, 20, Katie, 16, and Sam, 15

HUMOR ...

"Humor always works. We have a lot of fun discussing new subjects, and I hope this continues— even though I am aware that he may begin to keep more to himself as he gets older. The best trick I know is to get him in the car with me. This way, he can't really escape, and we can focus on any matter, while still having time and space to think."

—Ruti Modlin, mom to Guy, 13

AMMUNITION ...

"As boys mature into men, the hormonal changes can affect their skin. Excess oil production can build up in the facial pores, which lead to blackheads, whiteheads and once infected, acne, which is common among 13-17 year-old males.

"For mild blackheads and whiteheads, good skin care includes appropriate exfoliation and cleansers containing mild salicylic and alpha hydroxy acids; or more gentle cleansers that contain triclosan, a common and effective anti-bacterial agent.

"Those with occasional pimples may benefit from the addition of a treatment product with a higher concentration of salicylic acid, and depending on the severity, the addition of a benzoyl peroxide cleanser or spot treatment. Those with severe acne and large red angry cysts should be referred to a dermatologist, because they may require antibiotics."

—Dr. Steven Dayan, doctor and father

does something right or achieves one of his goals. Winnetka mom, Lauri Maney, who has three children including 14-year-old Andrew, says, "I think it's just as important to recognize your son for his good choices."

Little things are easy to acknowledge and it sure beats yelling about all the things that go wrong. And when things do go wrong, staying in the loop can keep you close without feeling like you're trying to control or punish him.

"My husband and I offer to drive as much as possible, have people into our home and just be around and available," Pastron says. Good advice as you watch your once little guy grow into a great man. 🍌

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