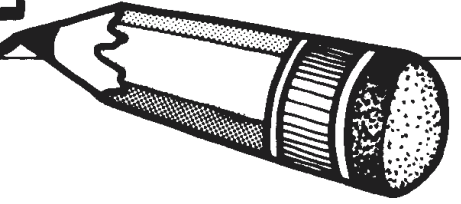
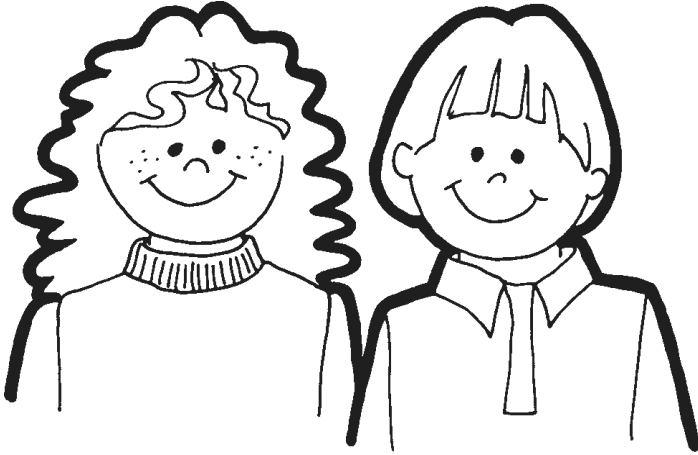


# Parenting Pipeline



*A newsletter for parents of sixth-grade children  
from Iowa State University Extension*



## Boy Meets Girl

Bubblegummers, tweens, preteens — whatever label is used, sixth-grade youth are unique. Approaching the teen years can be happy and harmonious for families, school friends and teachers. But too often parents fear the brink of a storm — the teen years. Fearful parents usually get what they expect. Parents of sixth-graders can prepare themselves for changes and talk to their youth openly. Let your child hear about the positive things you see happening this year as he grows and matures.

### Curiosity — The Teachable Moment

Many sixth-graders are like butterflies. Not only is a physical metamorphosis taking place, but mental and social changes are also occurring. The onset of menstruation in girls and signs of puberty in boys emphasize the difference between men and women.

Physical changes initiate a normal sexual curiosity in youth.

Sexual curiosity is increased through magazines, movies, television commercials, T-shirt slogans, bumper stickers, greeting cards and music videos. Although most parents believe sex education should begin in the home, few seem to find the time or the courage to accomplish the task.

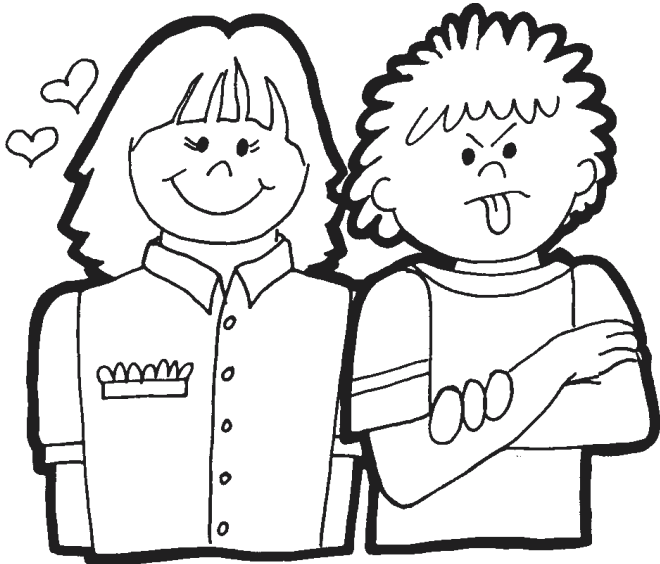
Studies show that parents can be a great influence on the preteen's sexual knowledge. But because parents provide limited information, schools, peers and literature are the biggest sources of sexual information for preteens. Are these the accurate, complete sources of education you want for your child? Preteens deserve factual information for their healthy development. They need to feel free to talk with an informed sensitive adult about all the changes in their lives. They need to have resources and books available to them for personal reading.

Perhaps parents are confused or embarrassed or don't feel like they know what to say. Parents need to be prepared for the preteen questions. "Is necking or making out wrong?" "What is it like to have a baby?" "What is abortion?" "How is AIDS spread?" Lots of other questions on dating, kissing, petting and intercourse are answerable. Parents should view preteen curiosity as the teachable moment for transfer of facts, morals and values. This is the golden opportunity to teach your child. It's not a sign of a promiscuous child. Some children will not ask questions, but they have the curiosity and the need for information. If you do not pass the facts and values on to your child, another source will!

Many local hospitals, clinics and churches sponsor parent-child workshops on adolescent sexuality. A parent and child can attend together, listen to a professional present the facts and begin to open the communication on this topic.

It's important to keep current books with the facts on your bookshelf at home. Children need to refer to them and ask questions. They will re-ask many questions as they try to sort it out. Be honest, and express your values and the facts. Let them know you are approachable.

If you need help finding current resources, contact the local Iowa State University Extension office for suggestions.



## Girl Likes Boy

Girls usually show interest in boys first. Boys may be mildly receptive to this interest or may still be “anti-girl” during these preteen years.

During sixth-grade, boys and girls usually first come together in groups. Togetherness means power, and sixth-grade youth enjoy this feeling of importance. At about 11 years of age, peer relationships become more important. Your child may need to experiment with many behaviors to find his place in the group.

Once groups are secure, scheduled social activities may increase. Group gatherings for ball games and movies will be more common. Parties may become popular. These social events bring boys and girls together physically but will prove their differences in maturity. Girls may style their hair and put on designer jeans and imagine an exciting evening. Boys will approach a party awkwardly, hoping the food is good. Their discomfort with this new scene may be handled by fooling around, joking and other immature behavior. These scenes are part of the social metamorphosis. All stages are not as attractive as the end product.

## This Thing Called Dating

Parents, peers and society may put pressure on preteen youth to pair off. Adults often tease and ask preteens about boyfriends and girlfriends when it is much healthier to ask about group friends. Preadolescents often feel pushed into adult roles. Sixth-graders are not ready for dating and should not be encouraged to have dates.

Today's 12-year-olds have sexual and societal pressures their parents never experienced. Sexual stereotypes and expectations are changing. Male and female roles are no longer so clearly defined as in the parent's preteen years. What is masculine and what is feminine are questions to which parents and children still seek answers. Such uncertainties make finding a role model difficult. Confusion is a common theme for this age group.

David Elkind, professor of child study at Tufts University, claims parents push children to grow up fast but also want them to remain children. They dress them like adults and give them adult privileges — except for such adult options as smoking and drinking. Parents hope their children will achieve social, academic and athletic success early. These mixed messages create stress for youth. Perhaps adults need reminding — 12-year-olds are still children beginning a metamorphosis. Avoid hurrying your children into adult roles and behaviors.

Adapted for use in Iowa from Parenting Pipeline, North Dakota State University Extension Service, by Donna K. Donald, family life field specialist, Iowa State University Extension.

This newsletter is published for families with sixth-grade children by Iowa State University Extension. For more information about parenting education, contact your local county extension office or access the Iowa State University Extension to Families website, [www.extension.iastate.edu/families](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/families).

... and justice for all  
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Many materials can be made available in alternative formats for ADA clients. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202-720-5964.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.