

40 ANSWERS

for Teens' Top Questions



GREGORY L. JANTZ, PHD AND GREGG JANTZ, JR.
WITH ANN MCMURRAY

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NOTE TO TEENS

This is a great book to read. I can say that because I helped write it. Every question begins with a note from me to you, telling you what I thought about my dad's answer. This book has a lot of things you should know about adolescence. It's full of things me and my dad have already gone through or will go through during my adolescence.

You can talk about things you've wanted to talk about but didn't know how to start the conversation. Hopefully, it will make your teen years easier.

Teens want their parents to respect them. This book is not only about kids getting to know parents, but parents getting to know teens and why they think things. It's about mutual respect and both getting to know the other. Maybe this book could lead to a friendship between teens and parents.



I think this book helps to open up communication between parents and kids.

God can intervene in your life while you're going through adolescence, so pray big! It's great to find out that God can do all these things that you never really thought he could do. You're going through some hard times and it's like, "Oh, God's right here; he can help me."

—Gregg Jantz, Jr.

Note to Parents

For many of us (I'm the parent of a teenager, too), adolescence sneaks up and we're caught unprepared. We're unprepared for:

- The changes in our son's or daughter's body
- The changes in that parent-child relationship, finding ourselves relegated to the backseat of our teen's affections
- The issues we thought we'd long buried that somehow get dredged back up in the turmoil that is the teen years


We remember the difficulties we had as teenagers, some of which we've never really gotten over and dread the thought of repeating, this time from the other side of the generational divide.

Simply put, puberty can cause panic. I felt it myself when, inexplicably it seemed, my oldest son entered puberty. I turned around one day and said, "Wait a minute! When did that happen?" While he was at school and I was at work, while we were living our lives, the clock kept ticking. I'll admit I thought I would have more time before my child became a teenager.

TALK ABOUT IT

This book is written, in some small degree, out of that "Where has the time gone?" sense of panic. Just about the time you want to sit your kid down and have that heart-to-heart you've been somewhat dreading, you realize your kid is a teen and he or she becomes notoriously difficult to pin down. Even though teens may vehemently deny it, they care about what their parents think, including what parents think of them.

I believe parents want to have meaningful conversation with their teenagers but find it difficult to create moments for true communication to occur. If those moments aren't planned for, prepared for—and yes, prayed for—life happens and those moments don't. When those moments don't happen, wishes grow up into regrets.



"Teach
us to number
our days, that we
may gain a heart of
wisdom."
—Psalm 90:12

Being a therapist, I've been able to see over the years how significant those regrets are for both parents and the teenagers who end up as adults and parents themselves. A window of opportunity exists between parent and child during the adolescent years, when the baton of adulthood is passed.

As a parent, you see the horizon of adult separation looming in the distance and you want to make use of the time you have left with your teenager still at home.



Teens
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is written to bridge
that gap.

Teens and their parents need and want to talk to each other but find it hard to do so. This book is written to bridge that gap. My hope is you will read this book with your teenager and take advantage of the opportunities provided for authentic dialogue.

The forty questions chosen for this book came out of conversations with my son. Believe me, they are not the only questions your teenager will have, but they provide a basis for you to start talking, for those other questions to bubble up to the surface. The questions run a gamut of serious to silly, but that is the nature of teenagers.

DO YOUR PART

After each answer for teens is a section for you, the "Parent Notes." This is where I'll be speaking directly to you. In the first "Parent Notes" you'll find some helpful suggestions for working through this book with your teen. It is my hope you and your teen will read through this book as a joint commitment to get to know each other a little better, a little deeper.

There is great joy in a deep, adult relationship. Now as an adult, I have that depth of relationship with my own parents, and it is a relationship I long to have with my sons when they mature. Working through the writing of this book with Gregg has given me a taste for who he is going to be when he grows up, and I am eager to learn even more about who he is and who he is becoming.

This is a book designed to allow for greater insight into the person your teenager is and is becoming. The clock is ticking; now is the time. Pick up this book and start the discovery. Your teenager is worth every minute.

—Gregory L. Jantz, PhD



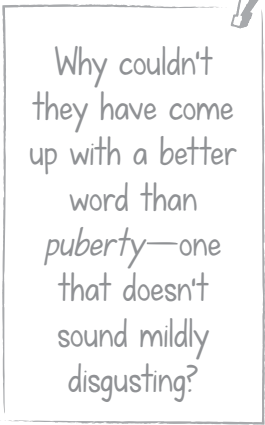
WHY SHOULD I READ THIS BOOK?

GREGG'S NOTE to Teens

I'm not a fan of people telling me what to do. If someone wants me to do something, they should at least tell me why. My dad starts off by explaining why you should read this book, so you can decide for yourself what you want to do. You aren't a kid anymore and he knows it.

So who gave you this book? Who put you up to reading it—your mom or your dad? You may be one of those kids who naturally like this adolescence stuff, but, probably, reading this book—or any book on adolescence or maybe even any book—wasn't your first choice of things to do.

Whoever got this book and *strongly* suggests you read it did so because they care about you. And they know what's coming—adolescence and puberty. (Why couldn't they have come up with a better word than *puberty*—one that doesn't sound mildly disgusting?) But just saying you're about to go through puberty or you're going through adolescence really doesn't tell you anything except that other people think adolescence is a big deal. It's like they keep expecting you to break out in boils or grow another eye or something odd like that. You're just you and it's weird to have people looking at you and expecting strange things to happen.



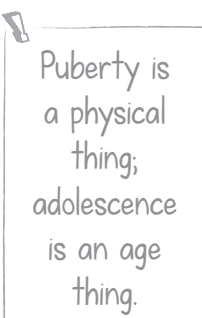
Why couldn't they have come up with a better word than *puberty*—one that doesn't sound mildly disgusting?

On top of all that general weirdness, add anything dealing with sex and reproduction and I don't blame you for approaching this book like eating Brussels sprouts. After all, you were doing just fine as a kid. Life was good. You knew what you were supposed to do and were able to pull off being a kid most of the time.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PUBERTY AND ADOLESCENCE?

And now—puberty. Some of you may be really excited about puberty and adolescence, but most of you probably wonder what puberty and adolescence are going to mean. You have a lot of questions about how this thing is going to turn out.

Those are important questions because, even if you wanted to, you can't avoid puberty or adolescence. Once you enter puberty, which is a physical

Puberty is a physical thing; adolescence is an age thing.

thing, you enter into adolescence, which is an age thing. Hitting puberty and going through adolescence happens to everyone. Some kids do puberty earlier in adolescence; some kids do it later, but every kid goes through puberty sooner or later.

Puberty and adolescence are like big tests coming up. You don't know exactly when you'll take those tests, but you know you can't avoid them. Knowing you've got these tests coming up, what are you going to do?

You have options:

- a.** You could just do nothing and try to figure it all out on your own when you get there.
- b.** You could ask your friends who may or may not know more than you do.
- c.** You could ask a parent or another adult, but sometimes they don't answer the questions the way you want. And sometimes they tell you a lot more than you want to know. And sometimes they just look at you funny and don't really answer at all.
- d.** You could read a book to find out more and be better prepared.

Why not do what you can to be prepared? You're already in school every day (at least it seems that way), preparing yourself academically. You may be in sports and you understand how important it is to prepare yourself physically.

Preparation is not new to you; you're already preparing yourself in other areas of life. You want to be prepared because school is a big deal and sports are a big deal.

Puberty and adolescence are also big deals. They're the way you move from being a kid to being an adult. Along the way, you're going from who you are now to who you're going to be, and a lot about you is going to change. It's not like you're going to change into a different person; you're going to change into more of who you really are.

HOW DOES THIS WORK?

Here's how this book is going to work: It's a book of questions and answers about adolescence, puberty, and a lot of the stuff that goes with them. You can read one or as many questions and answers as you want at a time—it's your choice. After the first couple of answers, which are designed give you basic information, you can read the rest in any order you'd like.

Along with each answer, there will be three options of things you can do:



Some of you will go through this book with the parent or adult who gave it to you. "Talk It Out" is a way for you and that other person to get a conversation started. You can use "Talk It Out" whenever you want—before, during or after you've read through the answer. Again, that's up to you.



To help you put what you've just read about into practice, "Act It Out" gives you an assignment, something you can do as a part of your normal day. This thing won't be hard to do; it will be something simple.



Getting good information is great, but what's better is when you take that information and apply it to your life. "Think It Out" is a way for you to apply what you're learning to you and nobody else. You don't have to tell anybody what you're thinking if you don't want to.

This book is written to you. However, many of you will be going through this book with a parent or other adult, probably the one who gave you the book in the first place. Be patient with that person; there are parts of this book that will be hard for both of you to go through, but doing this book together will be worth the effort.

Really, all of this—this book, preparing for adolescence—is up to you. Adults can give information, offer advice, promise to be there for you, but adolescence is a road you've got to take for yourself. If I were you, I'd learn as much as I can, get as much support as I can, and take this time in your life as seriously as possible. There are few things more exciting and amazing than this journey to adulthood. And no matter what we tell you, all of us adults are just a little jealous.



What do you like best about your age right now?



Keep this book somewhere in your room where you can see it and remember to read it regularly.



What's the first thing you think of when you hear the words *puberty* and *adolescence*? Write your response.

Parent Notes

Even though you're adults, some of you have never really gone through this type of discussion before. Maybe your mom or dad never did fill you in on what was going to happen to you physically, emotionally, or relationally when the "clock of puberty" struck twelve. Somehow, you just winged it and did the best you could. Maybe that's why you decided you weren't going to chicken out for your own kids.

APPROPRIATE AGE RANGE

I don't really want to impose a hard-and-fast age range for this book, but I'd say it's somewhere from ten years old (for those kids, generally girls, who seem to fast-forward into early maturity) to sixteen years old (for those kids, generally boys, who ramp up more slowly to adolescence). Whatever the age and even if your child has already started down the path to puberty, going through this book together is still a worthwhile adventure. After all, what could be more exciting than getting to know better this amazing person you're parenting?

THE POINT OF IT

This book is designed to help you navigate through the information, concepts, and realities of adolescence with your child. However, you are not the captain; your child is. This journey is not yours; it's his or hers. You can guide and support, but you cannot control, nor should you. This is a time for you to learn, to guide, to be open-minded, and, above all, to be loving.

- There are some kids out there who are self-starters, who will propel the pace of working through this book with enthusiasm and gusto. Don't be discouraged if that's not your kid.
- There are some kids who want nothing more than one-on-one face time with an adult, pouring out their inner thoughts and sharing their deepest dreams. Don't be discouraged if that's not your kid.



This is a
time for you to
learn, to guide, to be
open minded,
and, above all,
to be loving.

- There are some kids who will handle all of this information like natural-born academics, impervious to embarrassment or evasion. Don't be discouraged if that's not your kid.

Don't be discouraged if that's not you, either.

This is new and different and a little weird, especially the sexual stuff. But if it's not you providing the guidance, the companionship, and the presence, your child has a variety of other venues to go to. They can go to each other; they can go to older kids; they can go to the Internet. Simply put, they can go to other sources besides you. And, realistically, even if you're doing this book together, they still will. You want your thoughts and reasons and values in the mix with all the rest. You may not feel like it's true, but your child does care about what you think and what you value. They do listen to what you're saying to them, even when you're not saying a word.

SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK:

Embrace the uncomfortable.

It's okay to be uncomfortable and to feel awkward while reading through and discussing this book with your teen. Admit the feelings and go through those parts anyway.

Make a plan.

Work out with your child the logistics of where, when, and how often to read the book. Make a plan together.

Set a time limit.

Determine a limit on the time you and your teen will spend working through this book. Be flexible enough to continue through that limit at the request or according to the needs of your child.

Listen up.

Spend more time listening than you do talking. If you have to, place yourself in front of a clock, so you can gauge how much time you're doing of each.

Welcome differences.

Don't tell your child what his or her adolescence is supposed to be like. Instead, say, "Here's how it was for me . . ." Every child is different, and, while there are similar experiences for everyone going through puberty, there are enough differences to provide a completely unique and individual experience for everyone.

Enjoy the journey.

Avoid being task oriented. This isn't about getting a set number of pages done in a specific amount of time. Preteens are not adults yet; their thoughts and reasons meander around their experiences. They are concrete, not abstract, thinkers. Abstraction comes later. You need to meet them where they are. Allow them to get where they need to go mentally, even if it means a few side trips.

Pay attention.

While you're on one of those side trips, pay attention. Your child is trying to get from point A to point B and will not always use the most direct path. Be aware of how your child maneuvers through these higher-order reasoning skills and take note.

Value the time.

The clock truly is ticking and, relatively speaking, your time with your child is short. Having this kind of time, agreement, and attention from your child is a precious commodity, so use it wisely.

Withhold judgment.

As adults, it's easy to judge children. We can be quick to pronounce our opinion, our verdict, on what they think and do. Sometimes, we should, but not always—and, generally, not often. Working through this book should allow you the time to stop, wait, and listen before you pronounce your verdict on the thoughts and behaviors of your adolescent. Working through this book will also allow you the time and the relationship necessary to successfully plead your case with your child, who deserves to know not only what you think but why.

**Keep it
appropriate.**

Remember, you don't have to give all the details of every life experience you've had. Be aware of the age and maturity level of your child, and don't burden him or her down with too much, too soon. We are told to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15), so love your child enough to carefully consider how you present the truth of your own life.

Enjoy it.

Above all, find a way to laugh and have fun. Laugh at yourself most of all.

Good luck on the journey. Expect progress, but don't be surprised if there are a few missteps along the way. That's just life. You're not the first parent to maneuver through the adolescent phase with a teenager, and you won't be the last. So jump in and join the crowd!

QUESTION 2

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL WITH PUBERTY?

GREGG'S NOTE to Teens

Adults make a big deal out of puberty, but I don't see it as a big deal. We all grow up with it. It's just one of those things you kind of just go through without question.

You can't really talk about adolescence without talking about puberty. Let's discuss what I mean by both.

If you've been in a health class, this may be a repeat of some of the stuff you were told. Maybe you haven't had that class yet, and this is all new information. But if you *did* take that class, and if you are anything like I was when I took it, you may not have paid very close attention.

WHAT PUBERTY IS

Simply put, puberty is when you stop being a child and start being able to *have* a child. Put another way, puberty is the point where your body becomes capable of sexual reproduction. So you can see why puberty is a big deal to your parents and other adults and why it's really a big deal for you, too.

Puberty is a word no one really talks about until you're getting close to entering it. Then, all of a sudden, you're supposed to know what puberty is and what it means. I've always thought the word *puberty* sounded a little weird. It comes from a Latin word, *pubertas*, which means adulthood.



Puberty is when you stop being a child and start being able to *have* a child.

AGE RANGE

For many centuries, puberty, or becoming an adult, was said to happen for girls at age twelve and for boys at age fourteen. In earlier times, people got married and had kids at younger ages than we do now. Maybe that's because people died earlier, too. They just seemed to live their lives in a shorter span of time.

! Some kids will enter puberty earlier and others will enter puberty later, but *everyone* will enter puberty.

Even today, though, the age range for the start of puberty is around anywhere from age ten to fourteen. But before you start thinking there's something wrong with you if you started puberty before ten or you're older than fourteen and puberty hasn't happened yet, wait; every kid is different. There's nothing wrong with you. Some kids will enter puberty earlier and others will enter puberty later, but *everyone* will enter puberty.

RITEs OF PASSAGE

Going from being a child to being able to have a child is a big deal. Some cultures mark puberty by having a ceremony or an event called a *rite of passage*. A *rite* is another word for a ceremony. The word *passage* refers to going from one thing to another; in this case, from childhood to adulthood. So, a rite of passage is just a special event or ceremony that says you're becoming more of an adult.

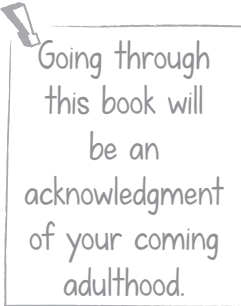
In some cultures, the rite of passage involves receiving special teachings from elders of the same gender, and then going off on a journey all by yourself. The rite of passage also involves some sort of test or quest that involves patience, strength, and an ability to do something difficult. After you successfully complete the test or the quest, your passage to adulthood is complete. You come home and other people treat you differently, as more mature and ready to be an adult.

The Jewish adolescent rite of passage for boys is called a *bar mitzvah*. The bar mitzvah is a ceremony that takes place when a boy is thirteen and considered ready to assume adult religious responsibilities. Part of the ceremony is a big party, with food and gifts and lots of friends and family.

For a Jewish girl, the rite of passage is called a *bat mitzvah* and happens when a girl is twelve. Another culture that has a rite for girls is the Hispanic *Quinceañera*, which happens on a girl's fifteenth birthday.

You've probably noticed many families in our culture don't really do that. The closest many kids get to a rite of passage is when you are allowed to get your driver's permit or go on a solo date. For a guy, it may be when you start to shave; for a girl, when you can start wearing makeup. In other words, around here, that rite of passage thing can be all over the map or, most often, not at all.

If you're in a culture that recognizes and celebrates puberty with a special rite of passage, that's great. I hope you enjoy the experience with family and friends. If your family doesn't really do anything to celebrate, maybe you can use going through this book as your own rite of passage. Going through this book will be an acknowledgment of your coming adulthood. Your willingness to power through the more difficult subjects in the book can be like a test of character for you. Maybe when you've gone through the book, you can suggest a special trip or event to celebrate.

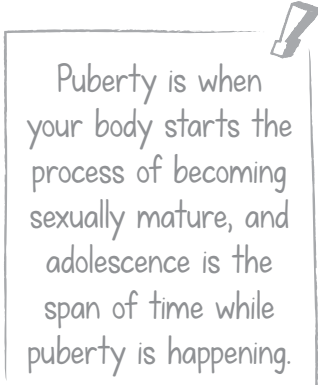


Going through this book will be an acknowledgment of your coming adulthood.

WHAT ADOLESCENCE IS

Okay, so now we know what puberty is, but what about adolescence? Why is adolescence different from puberty? Remember when I said puberty was a body thing and adolescence was an age thing? Puberty happens when your body says "Now," and it can happen over a wide span of years. Why? Because every body is different. The word *adolescence* means the period of time between puberty and adulthood—basically the teenage years.

So, to recap, puberty is when your body starts the process of becoming sexually mature, and adolescence is the span of time while puberty is happening. Puberty is based on your body, and adolescence is based on age.



Puberty is when your body starts the process of becoming sexually mature, and adolescence is the span of time while puberty is happening.



If you could design a rite of passage for yourself, what would it look like?



Stop and take a good look at yourself in the mirror when you get ready every day and pay attention to how you look, not just your face but all of you.



Why should you care that you're entering puberty? Write your response.

Parent Notes

I hadn't really given this rite of passage idea much thought until I had kids of my own. When I was growing up, I don't remember puberty being presented as a big deal. But now that I have kids of my own, puberty and adolescence have certainly taken center-stage. The thought is mind-boggling: my child is becoming capable of producing a child. This is certainly something I look forward to in the future, but I'm having a harder time coming to grips with this truth in the present. Do you feel the same way I do about your own kids entering puberty and adolescence? If so, welcome to the club! There are a lot of us members.

KEEPING TRACK OF PUBERTY

Without definable rites of passage, puberty can be difficult to track. Kids don't always rush forward with an announcement of their first sign of pubic hair. With health classes being taught in the schools, many parents have gladly abdicated their parental responsibility for "the talk" about puberty to

a textbook and the school nurse or gym teacher. But as much as you might longingly wish you'd opted out yourself, you haven't. Good for you!

As you come to grips with your emerging adolescent, you may want to go back and remember what, if anything, constituted your own rite of passage. This gives you an opportunity to borrow from the best of the past and create something better for your own child. Many of us didn't have anything near a positive rite of passage. Instead, it was something like a quiet, furtive request to a mom to pick up something from the feminine hygiene aisle at the store, or a sarcastic jibe in the shower after gym class. For many of us, there was no sense of accomplishment or positive anticipation involved with puberty. Instead, it was something our parents considered inevitable but somewhat inconvenient—and definitely uncomfortable for everyone involved.

If puberty was not handled well in your family growing up, now is the time to determine to do something different. Here are few suggestions for working with your child to create his or her own rite of passage:

Make it collaborative.

You might have the perfect rite of passage in mind, but remember, it might only be perfect in your mind. This isn't your rite of passage; it's your son's or daughter's. Whatever you do needs to be decided on together, with the scales tipped in your child's favor on this one. This won't be the special time you want if your child feels he or she is merely along for the ride.

Make it special.

This rite of passage should be a special event. If you've taken your son to baseball games every year, don't consider just another baseball game as the event. If you've taken your daughter to get mani-pedis since she was eight, going to the salon one more time doesn't qualify.

Make it elsewhere.

When at all possible, get away from it all. One of the hallmarks of many cultural rites of passage is a removal from the normal routine of life. This could be a special camping trip or a trip out of town to see a special event or attraction. Rites of passage derive meaning from the sense of leaving as one person and returning as someone seen as different.

Make it relevant.

A rite of passage is meant for an older generation to instruct a younger one. This is the time for you to put on your parent hat and be prepared to pass along what you've learned from your own life and what you want to impart to your child. So be intentional and think about what you want to say. And leave younger siblings with your spouse or another trusted adult.

Make it adult.

This is about acknowledging your child's capacity to appreciate and participate in adult activities. You don't have to go out and skin a lion, but whatever you choose should convey your acceptance of your child as maturing.

Make it stick.

You'll negate the significance of this rite of passage if you return to business as usual where your child is concerned. Consider what changes to rules and responsibilities you're ready to negotiate as part of your child's maturation. Discuss these changes during your time with your child and gather feedback. Be flexible and willing to adjust specifics after talking these over with your child. Whatever you jointly decide needs to become the "new normal" upon your return.

Make it same gender.

Rites of passage are designed for male children to learn from male adults what it means to be a man. Rites of passage are designed for female children to learn from female adults what it means to be a woman. This is where respect for each gender is taught and modeled. If you are a single parent with an opposite gender child, try first to work out the details with that child's other parent. If that isn't productive, consider another same gender trusted adult in your child's life. Look to extended family, friends, or members of your faith community who know and have a connection to your child. Present these individuals as candidates to your child, recognizing that your child has the final say.

Consider going through this book together as a rite of passage, whatever your respective genders. The completion of the book could coincide with a special event as a way to commemorate and express your gratitude for the opportunity to undertake this journey together.