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## From Tots to Teens: Growing in the Family

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FROM TOTS TO TEENS

*growing in the family*



**AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE**

**SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE and U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

# *growing in the family*

## FROM TOTS TO TEENS

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### **GROWING UP: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Growth is a most important process in life for all of us and especially so for the child from birth through adolescence. In the first third of life we gain our body growth, establish our habits, learn to think and to use ideas. We build skills of communication, we discover that there are many problems in living. We find that we have feelings and emotions and we begin to use and control them. We become acquainted with people of all sizes and shapes, all ideas and beliefs. We have a wide variety of experiences. We prepare for living in the broadest sense of the word.

A famous anthropologist believes the world is now changing faster than we are. Tomorrow's world will move with unbelievable speed. Major atomic and space influence is here and we can say, "When our children go to the moon" instead of "If our children ever get to the moon." Believing that our children lack certain necessary attributes for effective living when they grow up in this strange new world she asks, "Are our children ready for the demands they must fulfill?"

Specifically they lack much: they speak only one language and are prone to judge the rest of the world by their own protected environment and the American standard of living; they have never faced tragedy or horror because they have been shielded from all unpleasant experiences, and they are placing less importance on personal competency and achievement in a rosy belief that a team approach alone can do the job. Whether we agree with this viewpoint or not, there is a challenge to think about the future's demands on parents to help children grow to meet whatever kind of life will be theirs.

Growing is the process of increasing in size, in breadth of understanding, in depth of feeling, in range of interests, in number and variety of activities, and in responsibility for self. It is difficult because it covers so much—it is satisfying because it has its fun and achievements. In fact, growing up is one of the most exciting adventures we ever experience. It is understandable that parents are interested in how their children grow.

The most important task parents have is to help children develop from completely self-centered little individuals in babyhood to competent

social beings in adulthood. This is trying because neither parent nor child always recognize the many steps in normal growth nor are they ready to accept the changes that must occur in both if growth is to move onward.

Children grow in many ways. While they are growing physically, they are also growing emotionally, mentally, socially and spiritually. All overlap and cannot be seen entirely separately. If each of these areas is recognized as important and necessary to build a good balance for the "whole" child, parental efforts will count for much.

### **THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN DEVELOPMENT**

The first responsibility of parents and teachers who sincerely want to help a child grow to his fullest capacity is to try to understand all children's needs and patterns of growth, and particularly those of their own children.

Often parents grow alarmed at certain kinds of behavior which are an entirely normal part of development. If mother or father realize that the gang's approval of the 12 year old youngster's dress and action is important to him at that age, they accept this as typical behavior and are not hurt or puzzled by it. Understanding can reduce anxieties. It helps in knowing what to expect.

The many charts, lists, and outlines available in child development books indicate what children are like at different ages. These are useful in helping us learn about development when we remember to use them as guides rather than as rigid measures of what our child can or should be doing at a particular chronological age.

### **GROWTH PATTERNS VARY GREATLY**

**Growth in normal children follows an orderly plan** through many stages. There is a great difference in the rate of growth between individuals and for the individual. Within the pattern some will spurt ahead or lag behind. No two children are exactly alike. Scientists have found that we grow rapidly and then slow down, grow again and slow down once more. This unevenness of growth holds true whether it applies to our bodies, our feelings, or our minds. Parents cannot hurry this development but they can see that nothing interferes with the child's growth.

**Growth is a fast and continuous process** even though it is not steady and rhythmical. It is inevitable as it carries us onward from birth. We grow in some way during our entire life cycle. Early childhood is a period of rapid development.

**Each child is a growing, changing person** with needs and potentialities which are his alone.

**Growth is complex;** as society and families are subject to rapid change, it will remain complex.

**Boys and girls develop at different rates.** Girls' bodies grow faster and mature more rapidly than boys' bodies. Boys grow to be larger than girls.

### **THE CHILD'S BASIC TASKS IN GROWING**

As each child grows, he has certain definite steps that he must take. These tasks are required of all persons. They are not chosen but are practically forced upon the individual by his own inner drives, the culture or society in which he lives, or by his own age group (his peers) with whom he lives. It is as though each individual has a set of lessons or problems to solve at each stage of this growth. As these are learned or solved, he goes on to the next stage of growth. Because these problems or skill attainments come at about the same time in development for all persons and because they follow a recognizable pattern, they are called **developmental tasks**. Each person regardless of age or sex has a set of **developmental tasks** that are his particular learning needs at each stage of the life cycle. No one else can accomplish these tasks for us.

To name a few: the baby must learn about new things by exploring; the school age child must learn to make friends in a circle outside his family when he goes to school; the teenager must learn to become independent and self-directive and still get along in his family; parents must learn to "let go" of their children as they grow; and middle-age persons must discover best how to adjust to a slower physical pace. We could make a specific set of tasks for each person for each stage of life.

Sometimes we are very aware of these tasks and other times we are not. Whether we accomplish them or not, time will not wait. If they are satisfactorily accomplished, we move forward eager to meet life. If they are not accomplished, we lag in ability to become adult.

**Here are the child's basic tasks in growing.** These continue through all age levels in differing degrees.

**1. Developing a self-image that he recognizes and respects.** The child learns to accept himself and to feel accepted by others.

**2. Developing a pattern of affection.** The child learns to show and to share affection. He will begin to think of ways to make others happy and of feeling comfortable with the opposite sex by early adolescence.

**3. Achieving independence and self-management.** The child learns to become independent within the framework of dependency and at the same time to look forward to self-direction.

**4. Relating to a social group.** The child grows in ability to play, work and worship with others. He learns also to accept and meet society's demand for competence in what he does.

**5. Learning one's sex role.** The child becomes aware of sex differences and learns how to identify himself with a masculine or feminine sex role. He develops attitudes toward sex.

**6. Accepting one's body.** The child learns to accept his body with its strengths and weaknesses and to feel confident that he is normal.

**7. Finding one's place in work.** The child learns how to work at something successfully and usefully. By early adolescence he has a positive attitude toward work and is increasing his experience with the adult work world.

**8. Finding adventure and joy in living.** The child learns to increase his acquaintance with his environment and to find pleasure in the active use of his mind and body. By early adolescence he learns to use leisure time creatively.

**9. Developing a value system.** The child learns to better take directions from others and to direct himself from within. He acquires an increasing interest in fair play and justice. By early adolescence he is learning to put his own philosophy of life into words.

#### **ADULTS HELP CHILDREN TO GROW**

If parents know what kind of growth a child should be having at a particular time, why not see that such growth occurs? That, of course, is the goal; but the method is not easy. The parent can't add a cup of this and a pinch of that to insure good growth because much of growth is within a person rather than outside. Neither is the situation quite comparable to caring for a plant by providing proper amounts of food, water, heat, and sunshine. Growth can be achieved only by the person growing and by no one else for him. However, adults can help children grow by providing the environment and the opportunities through which the individual himself can grow.

A child's entire drive is toward growth. He does not want to stay small in either physical growth or in his ability to handle life.

How fast or how well the child grows depends on the feelings of the adults about him and the feelings within himself. These feelings are far more important than any set of rules for growth. Feeling free to grow and feeling able to grow are the keys to growth.

#### **CHILDREN'S GROWTH CAN BE ENCOURAGED**

Give them affection, a sense of belonging, help, and approval.

Expect behavior consistent with the child's age level and capacity. Understand his developmental needs, his "ages and stages."

Stress important values but overlook minor things.

Be at ease with your children. Let them know that you enjoy them

and enjoy doing things for and with them. Keep your sense of humor functioning.

Behave like an adult so they have an adequate grown-up pattern to follow. Don't pretend to be perfect.

Let them raise questions, express doubts, try out their own ideas.

Let children make some mistakes but help them in their struggles when they need it. Recognize that all conflict is not undesirable.

Help them understand the limits of freedom in their behavior and be ready yourself to provide for increasing freedom.

Provide opportunities for them to accomplish their tasks.

Move along with your children. As they change, you must change too.

### **PARENTS NEED TO LOOK AT THEMSELVES**

Thinking parents want their children to develop their own personality, their own interests and enthusiasms, their own way of doing things. They do not try to raise "a chip off the old block." Rather they try to expose their children to opportunities which will try their wings and give their interests a chance to grow. They refrain from pushing their set ideas onto the children, and encourage them to see that there are usually several good ways to look at an idea or to do a thing.

Good parents attempt to understand how their own fears, ambitions and lacks keep the children from growing normally. We all know a mother who—not popular or happy in her own childhood—is over-anxious for her daughter to be popular; or the father who insists his boy participate in sports because he himself was not a good athlete. A parent may be over-cautious with his child and limit his activities because of his fears. Everyone attempts to relive his own life in his children's, but it must be done within limits and with the full realization of why we are doing so.

Emphasis on what children need from adults to properly grow might mistakenly lead parents to believe that they must always be ever-loving, patient and unselfish, and asking nothing for themselves. But parents will not find all their satisfactions in helping youngsters grow up. The most self-sacrificing parent is not necessarily the best. So let's add that it is essential in successful child raising to find satisfaction in an adult life of the parent's own. Adults have their own needs for love, understanding, the feeling of belonging, for fun and adventure, for achievement just as do their children.

If we can give and take, love and be loved, achieve personal competence and maturity, it will be easy to help our children in the growing up process.

When you are discouraged with what you seem to be accomplishing in bringing up "Junior" remember two things:

1. You can do the wrong thing in the right way and still come out pretty well. This is true because the way we meet situations in our life and our whole relationship with our children influences them far more than one or two mishandlings.

2. Even though you make mistakes with your children you almost always have another chance for the relationship with your children goes on from day to day, changing and growing also.

Helping children to grow to their full individual potentials requires a parent to have knowledge and understanding. It means being a person oneself and being willing to let children also be persons. It means having attitudes that will provide freedom for children so that they can grow at their own rate and in their own directions.

Understanding and helping children grow is difficult—but it is exciting, challenging, and rewarding.



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