



## YOUR TALENTED TEN YEAR OLD

A decade has passed since you first carried that sweet little bundle home. The bundle is now no longer little, but hopefully as sweet in different ways. Hopefully he/she is an integral and vital part of your family unit, able to act responsibly (sometimes with little prompting), able to anticipate and complete tasks with a reasonable degree of confidence, and able to be cooperative and considerate. At this age, he/she should take initiative in personal grooming and establishing healthy habits, be fully entrenched in school work and activities, and be able to see the sense in a balanced lifestyle with respect to work, play, study, habits and community concerns. Concerns that may limit the achievement of some of these goals are; problems with school performance or learning disability, high activity or poor attention span, physical complaints without anatomical cause (body, stomach, head, limb pain), bedwetting or soiling, social isolation, depression, aggressiveness, disobedience, gender inappropriate behavior, compulsions, tics, procrastination tendencies, obesity, early experimentation with drug, alcohol, cigarettes, sleep disturbances and other problem areas. If any of these behaviors or attitudes are a significant part of your child's life, please discuss them with your pediatrician.

Developmentally, **gross motor coordination** progresses to include easy involvement in sports such as T-ball, soccer, gymnastics, skating, skiing, and many others. Individuality with respect to choosing these areas of involvement for your child is crucial in the establishment of self-confidence and peer acceptance. **Fine motor skills** include the ability to draw a three dimensional cube, more elaborate drawings, and honing of already acquired skills. (Remember, programs are available for the more slow of hand). **Verbally**, mastery of irregular verbs continues to improve, and self-expression should flourish. Attention should progress to greater than an hour on specific tasks (although some adults never even get to this stage). Your child still thinks "concretely" until about age twelve (although abstraction begins to peek through). This progression allows deductive thinking, conclusion formulation from raw data, and considering hypotheses and possibilities in situations that are not inherently obvious.

**Health habit** activities to encourage and example include; well-balanced nutritive food intake of correct proportions (things are changing in this respect, so ask your doctor), avoiding junk-food and fast food, maintaining appropriate weight, engaging in regular physical activity that involves endurance three times a week, flexibility every day and strength development at least two times per week. Regular dental care, (flossing and brushing), as well as checkups are advised. Sleep patterns that enable easy attentive waking before school are important. Television and video (passive) viewing should encompass less than one hour each day with exceptions for special shows, assignments, or sporting events of note. Involvement in community events and organizations is to be fostered to teach accountability. Hobbies such as collections, needlework, woodwork, music and the arts do wonders to alleviate boredom, give confidence and teach about many experiences. Allowance should continue with raises for age and

*Special Notes About  
My Child:*

responsibility. To teach worth of money – take them shopping on occasion and let them try to balance the money with needs at hand. Spend time at the library, concerts, art shows, sporting events together, and always encourage pleasure reading. Do not substitute time together with monetary offerings or gifts. Your child wants and needs you more than your money.

It is often helpful at this point to introduce some *sexuality education* if questions have not lead into this discussion naturally. They know more than you think, so do not pull punches or try to mystify the events occurring bodily that will eventually enable reproduction. Do seek help in the areas you do not feel well informed about. The library, health teachers and physicians are good sources. Girls especially, need preparation for menarche about this time, as the average age for first menses hovers around 11.5 years. Most importantly, make sure your admonitions about abstinence or temperance are centered around a moral or ethical system that you yourself believe in, want to pass on, and follow rigorously. Gender identification continues to be established, and some interest in the opposite sex may begin about this time. The average age

for first intimate sexual encounter is diminishing so early guidance and counseling is vital. Masturbation is a universal activity – this is a difficult area to give broad guidelines in, and excessive or public activity needs to be addressed with a health care provider. Overreaction and false threats are never productive and are often harmful as the child struggles to come to grips with early sexuality. This will become a greater issue as adolescence is entered, so try to get a handle on your own feelings – perhaps a discussion with your own physician or clergy person will help clarify any confusions. Do not confuse the feelings of physical intimacy that begin to develop for emotional and psychological intimacy – the two seldom progress at the same rate with the latter trailing the former by a wide margin. Finally, studies have shown that families who discuss sexual issues openly and without fear have children with greater ability to delay sexual activity.

Other parental activities of importance at this time include continued enforcement of household rules. There should be timely reward of privilege for compliance and withdrawal or specific punishment for disobedience, (continue to be consistent). Show interest in the child's school and other activities, continue to provide adequate supervision, and continue to serve as a parental role model. This does not mean you will be perfect. It does mean that you are honest in admitting mistakes, that you operate in a framework that is consistent with your stated and enforced morals, and that you do not abdicate traditional parental responsibilities, which are crucial for secure maturation of your children. Bless them with praise, meaningful touch and availability; foresee a wholesome future for them.

**Safety** concerns continue their importance, and center around knowing where your child is and whom he/she is with at all times. Tobacco, alcohol, and even illegal substance experimentation commonly starts in this age group, often as a product of boredom and peer influence. Treat these issues with a combination of safety, morals, and legal violations and provide adequate counsel, appropriate restraint techniques, and try not to react with a high degree of emotion in the child's presence. If you drink or smoke, be prepared to give reasons for your behavior if you want to continue to be respected and obeyed. Provide a stable home environment and plenty of interesting constructive time with peers and family, and you will minimize the risks of more heavy involvement in these areas. Sports activity, (including bike riding), needs to occur with proper equipment (e.g. bike helmets), and proper fitting clothing and shoes. Tools, equipment, fire, boating, water, skating and other potentially dangerous activities need review. Check home fire equipment and escape plan. Allow use of tools and equipment if responsible use is demonstrated. Continue sun screen and insect repellent use rigorously!

A physical exam will be performed and any necessary updates, immunizations or screening exams performed. Please mention any particular concerns to your pediatrician.

School and *peer influences* become a larger and larger part of your child's world, despite all efforts to keep virtues those of the home. You can maximize your role by staying in tune with the values and virtues taught in the classroom and those expressed by peers and comparing them if they differ to your own. This will not only strengthen the parent-child bond, but will also enable you to evaluate just why you behave in life a certain way. Get to know your child's friends, find out what is attractive to them. Impulse control problems may make it more difficult for both children and adults to enact desired codes of moral conduct. Seek help for this if necessary.

“Surrender to all our desires obviously leads to impotence, disease, jealousies, lies, concealment, and everything that is the reverse of health, good humor, and frankness. For any happiness, even in this world, quite a lot of restraint is going to be necessary.” -- C.S. Lewis

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