



## *Snapshots of Wonder*

### **KICK-START WITH ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS**

- It's only too late to try to talk to your adolescent if you never actually do it. Don't be scared off if it's awkward at first. They may roll their eyes, but they'll secretly love that you tried to talk to them.
- Kids rarely complain that they don't want a relationship with their parents; they just wish they had a better one.
- For our kids, their perception is their reality. If we are dismissive about how they feel, it will be harder to show them a new perspective. Start by understanding how and why they feel the way they do, and they will eventually want to hear more of what you think.
- Take out some old 6th grade pictures of yourself and connect your heart to your own early adolescence before you start this Family Experience. You might even bring it along for the first conversation, or better yet--bring a different and more embarrassing one for the start of each conversation. Nothing breaks the ice like letting our kids poke fun at us!

### **FRAMING UP OUR PURPOSE**

The first Family Experience is full of potential for creating lasting memories and healthy dialogue with your 6th grader. Because this is a season of so much change, it seems as if our kids can become unsure of themselves almost overnight. Sometimes we notice it when they just feel bad about everything. Sometimes they have a bad attitude. Sometimes they even make bad choices because of it.

The word we want you to keep in mind during this Family Experience is **wonder**. Wonder is when we experience something that is unexpected but amazing or that is so thrilling it takes our breath away. Wonder is the moment we remember that our life and purpose come from the beautiful imagination of God the Creator. We want our kids to look at how they are shaped and wired and experience a deep sense of wonder.

Here are a few biblical truths you can share or use as the backdrop of your conversations. Feel free to look up these verses in a translation that resonates with you.

### ***God's creation is so good because He is so great.***

*"For you formed my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful. My soul knows that very well. My frame wasn't hidden from you, when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my body. In your book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them." --Psalm 139:13-16 (WEB)*



Your child was probably really good at wonder when they were young. Figuring out that  $4+4=8$  stunned them. Watching a huge, bright green grasshopper captivated them. Most likely, they thought every colored page they finished was a work of art and that every game of chase on the playground demonstrated their superhuman speed! Probably the most important truth you can imprint on your 6th grader's heart this year is that, just like all of God's creation, they are "fearfully and wonderfully made."

***When change happens, and life is hard,  
God is still there. And He is big enough  
to handle the tough stuff.***

"Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak. He increases the strength of him who has no might. Even the youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall; But those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and not be weary. They will walk, and not faint." --Isaiah 40:28-31(WEB)

As children get older, wonder begins to slip away a little, and they don't trust it as much. And when they trust it less, they don't see themselves the same way anymore. Suddenly, it's harder to believe that they can do anything. There are a lot more questions that they can't answer, and unkind voices tell them that they aren't very good at anything. That's your cue to tangibly remind them that God has not

changed and to show them God's strength when they don't feel very strong.

**God wants to do amazing things in and through us.**

*"...but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins' (he said to the paralyzed man), 'I tell you, arise, and take up your cot, and go to your house.' Immediately he rose up before them, and took up that which he was laying on, and departed to his house, glorifying God. Amazement took hold on all, and they glorified God. They were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'" --Luke 5:24-27(WEB)*

The people with Jesus that day had probably let go of wonder. They had probably lost hope that God could show up in such a remarkable way. But here is Jesus not only loving a paralyzed man but also healing the brokenness! The people were gripped with wonder.

The beginning of adolescence is the perfect time for you to help your child hold on tightly to wonder and expect to see amazing things as God shows up through all the changes and unexpected problems. Find ways to create space for your child to see the bigness and boldness of God's creation--everything from a gorgeous sunset on the beach, to towering mountain ranges, to her own reflection in the mirror. Do what you can to help them trust that there are no mistakes or mishaps in God's artistry--only masterpieces like Himself.



## **IDEAS FOR KEEPING WONDER ALIVE TOGETHER**

- Visit the Grand Canyon and walk out onto the glass skywalk bridge.
- On a clear night, go somewhere away from city lights and lay in the grass under the stars for an hour.
- Watch someone you love doing something they are really good at and think about how they are gifted in such a unique way.
- Stand in front of the mirror and pray that God would help you see all that He loves about you.
- Experience a sunrise or sunset on the beach.
- Climb a mountain. There are trails to the tops of mountains everywhere!
- Train to run farther than you thought you could--maybe try a 5K or a half-marathon. You'll amaze yourself. Better yet, do it together!
- Listen to the life story of someone from another country.
- Try something that has always scared you.



## ***Parent Guide for 6th Grade Family Experiences***

It's time. You knew it was coming, but you had no idea how fast it would actually get here. I am talking about the day when your sweet baby actually grew up and is now beginning the process of changing into a young adult.

It's time. It's not time for fear of the future but of daring to lead your preteen into this new phase of their life. We as parents can't let them stumble their way through. We have the great privilege of sharing with them who they are at this moment and what they can become in the future.

It's time. The time has come to ask the hard questions and to answer the harder ones with love and with truth. If our preteens can't trust us to give them straight answers, who can they trust?

It's time. It's time to speak to our 6th graders, but mostly it's time to listen. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 tells us that there is a time for everything and now is your time to gently but truthfully lead your preteen into the wonderful journey of the Family Experience.

It's time.

Here are some tips to help guide you through the 6th Grade Family Experience:

We encourage you to talk with your teen and let them know that you want to help them be

prepared for what they will be experiencing over the next few years.

If at all possible, it is best if the same parent or guardian has all five conversations with the teenager. Teenagers tend to respond better when things are consistent.

Explain to them what the Family Experience is and why you have chosen to use this resource to encourage a strong bond between the two of you.

Discuss with your teenager that you would like to schedule five different days to have a 10-15 minute, uninterrupted discussion with them regarding what changes they will be going through in the near future.

Pick five days that work for both of you. If you let your teen help determine those days, you may find that they will take more

ownership in it. Every Saturday, twice a week, or even once a month will work if you both are in agreement on the timing.

It's a good idea to allow your teen to determine where these discussions will take place. They know where they will be most comfortable having these conversations with you, whether it's in their room, at the kitchen table, or on the front porch swing.

Agree that there will be no outside distractions during this period of time. No TV, no cell phones, and no other family members. Your teen needs to know that you value the time you get to share with them.

***It's time to speak  
to our 6th graders,  
but mostly it's time  
to listen.***

We have prepared discussion questions for both you and your teenager to answer. We encourage you to download them and then place them in an envelope marked "Parent" or "Teen" and do not look at them ahead of time. This allows your teenager to feel as if they are on an even playing field with you.

Each scheduled day, pick one question out of each envelope and ask away!

***Agree to answer the questions as honestly as possible.***

With each Family Experience, we have included a Kickstarter that you can share with your teenager. This conveys the biblical context of the maturing process and includes encouragement for parents as well as an

explanation of the purpose of each Family Experience. Your teen's spiritual growth is happening just as quickly as their physical and emotional growth, and we want to address that, also.

Included in each Kickstarter is a list of suggestions for practically incorporating the themes of each Family Experience into your daily lives. Some of these ideas involve a bit of adventure for you to share together!

These first discussions will, by no means, be easy. And they will probably be met with snickers, grins, and one-word answers. But you have made a path to true communication with your teen, and that is priceless. Don't give up!



## ***What's Going on With My 6th Grader?***

**The 6th Grade Year is an exciting year filled with the transition from childhood to adolescence. Here is a guide to help give you a glimpse of what might be going on inside your brand new 6th grader.**

### **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

- A "Hormone Cocktail" kick starts puberty and prepares the body to begin the process of growing into adulthood.
- These hormones are not released consistently and may cause "wild mood swings," brought on by this hormonal imbalance.
- Boys may begin to grow facial and pubic hair.
- Boys may notice their voice "cracking" and sounding deeper.
- Girls may grow pubic hair and develop breasts.
- Girls may get their period.
- There may be a high energy level, but it is balanced by a high need for rest.
- Girls typically experience growth spurts before boys do.
- Bones and muscles are not growing at the same rate, which may lead to feelings of awkwardness and clumsiness.
- There is an increased need to pay attention to personal hygiene.

### **EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### ***The 6th grader may:***

- Become moody and easily frustrated
- Experiment with "off-color" humor and silliness
- Show more concern for body image
- Begin to express feelings more frequently
- Experience emotions in extremes
- Be characterized by curiosity
- Become more socially expansive and aware
- Express less affection for parent
- Encounter periods of sadness, depression, and desperation, which can lead to poor coping habits



## RELATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Friendships change, due to new schools, boyfriends/girlfriends, and change of affinity groups.
- Girls tend to build friendships in groups of 2-3.
- Boys tend to build friendships in “packs” of 8-10, based on affinity.
- Boys struggle with being “loners” if they do not find a pack of friends.
- Wild mood swings cause relational turmoil in friendships.
- Struggles occur with being rejected by a friend or left out of a group of friends.

## SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- Concrete thinking begins to give way to abstract thinking, which creates a new world of questions about faith and spiritual things.
- The desire to question and disagree with their parents’ beliefs arises, but it is tamed by fear to express those doubts.
- Their major concern for God is how He can help them in their daily lives.
- There is a struggle to see the relevance of the Bible in their daily lives.
- Through relationships with significant adults, spiritual lessons are more “caught” than taught.