

Forgetting:

"I have homework, but I forgot to bring my books home."

"I know you signed my permission slip, but I forgot to turn it in."

"Somebody called, but I don't know who it was."

"How can I remember to bring all that stuff home from school?."

One of the earliest signs of the emerging preadolescent is forgetting.

At first we are understanding....After all, we all forget sometimes. But as forgetting increases, we become frustrated and then anxious. Why so much forgetting, especially from a child who, up until recently could have managed a large corporation single-handedly? Whose organizational skills were just slightly below those of the two-minute manager?

Preadolescents' minds are so preoccupied with other issues, ones that are more real and meaningful to them, that they truly do not remember. Adults with a lot on the minds misplace things, forget even necessary items (the car key, the package left on the counter) and have trouble focusing for more than a few minutes at a time. So too does the preadolescent . The preadolescent mind is filled with worries and concerns, big and small. Am I liked? Will I be tall enough? Will I look OK? Why does my wrist hurt? Is grandpa sick? Why is that teacher looking at me? Will the rain forest be totally destroyed? Why does my sister get everything she wants?

Because of the constant anxiety about self and the wider world that preadolescents are now experiencing, remember something like a pencil for class or to put the dinner casserole in the oven at 5:15 becomes almost impossible. This anxiety eases during the end of preadolescence, but is likely to drive us crazy in between.

We can help kids who forget by first of all understanding that, for the most part, they do not forget on purpose. It is truly part of the age. Secondly, we can try some creative reminders instead of nagging. A mother I know put a wipe-off bulletin board by the back door her daughter uses to leave for school. On the board are written daily reminders for things that must go to school: "Lunch," "Books," "Permission Slip" "Money". This mom knows

enough to rewrite everything every day. Old recurring messages get tuned out.

Many Intermediates require that their students carry assignment notebooks, in which students keep notes or write a summary of the day's class work and record homework assignments. If your child's school does this, check it daily. Perhaps even initial it when work is completed so the teachers know you are keeping up.

Encourage your preadolescent to keep a daily list (weekly is too much) with a few things on it to be done that day. It may be necessary to assign a specific time to each task. When the task is completed, draw a line through it to show accomplishment.

Finally, don't hesitate to remind them about appointments and due dates; hand them clothing needed, try to think ahead for them about materials required for a project (unless you look forward to late-evening visits to the Warehouse). This will not last forever. When these same children were learning to walk, we held their hands and made the path smooth. They are now learning how to take on the tremendous assortment of life-tasks and changes: they'll need hand-holding (but not the firm, physical grip previously necessary) for about a year or so as they get started on the road to being responsible adults.