

Worries:

As much as parents worry about preadolescents, don't forget that preadolescents worry about themselves. Most have difficulty falling asleep at night; many are inordinately concerned about minor aches and pains; they have trouble making decisions; they wonder about the changes in themselves and their relationships - changes over which they, suddenly, have no control. Although most of their anxieties are centered on themselves, their increasing awareness of the bigger world leads them towards concerns about ecology, social justice, and other moral issues.

One result of this worrying is the need to belong, and to be just like everyone else. There is safety in numbers and continuity. Sometimes dramatic changes in a preadolescent's life are unavoidable: divorce, an illness in the family, a move, or a change in financial status. Often preadolescents refuse to admit these changes to outsiders. They are generally convinced that they are the only, only ones that this has ever happened to, and they do not want to be "different." Preadolescents feel as if the WHOLE WORLD is watching them, and if they say or do (or wear) the wrong thing, they will be so embarrassed they will just die.

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Another way of dealing with this anxiety is to show bravado in other areas. Preadolescents love "slasher" movies: here is something they can face and not be frightened. Some take physical risks, like jumping off the garage roof, or participating aggressively in a sport. But all of them avoid emotional and social risks like being seen with one's parents.

We can help preadolescents through this time by being their safe haven. Even if turbulent times are going on in the household, try to make time to assure the preadolescent that you or someone will be there for them. Allow them to be surrounded by familiar things, even if they are all on the floor. Listen to their worries, no matter how small they may seem. Offer calm, reasonable explanations for their aches, pains, and restlessness assuring them that you will not allow them to fall seriously ill or be left out.

This is also a good time to capitalize on their broader concerns. Encourage them to participate in service projects; discuss current events and their

implications; listen to their thoughts, no matter how idealistic they may be. In a few short years this preadolescent will be a citizen, a worker, an adult contributor to this small and fragile planet's society. During these years, we help preadolescents form a basis for their future actions as responsible citizens. able use it wisely.