Anticipatory Guidance for Parents: 15-17 years

The transition to high school can be difficult. Teenagers are gaining more independence and parental relationships can become strained. A parent’s job is as important as it ever was and difficult conversations about uncomfortable situations must occur between parent and teen.

**Nutrition**
This is a time when more choices about food and eating will be made by your child. It is important that healthy choices are supported by the parents in the home by providing healthy options and involving your child in shopping and meal preparation. This may help them learn how to avoid high-fat, high-sugar foods when they are not with you for meals.

The best foods to have in the home are:
- A wide variety of fruits and vegetables
- Whole-grain breads and cereals
- Lean meats like chicken and fish
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy foods
- Limit exposure to candy, soda, chips
- Plenty of water with meals and in between meals

Try to eat together as a family as much as possible. It is important for youth this age to eat 3 meals a day.

It is important adolescents this age get enough calcium. This helps their bones develop during growth spurts. Foods high in calcium are:
- Low-fat or fat-free dairy products like milk, yogurt, cheese
- For those who can’t eat dairy, try dark, green leafy vegetables, beans or salmon
- You can also try calcium-fortified orange juice, bread, cereals and soy beverages

**Body Image**
This is one of the most important issues in youth this age and older. Youth can be especially sensitive to their physical appearance, how it is changing, and how it compares to their peers. Parents can play an important role in supporting a healthy body image by helping with good nutrition choices as discussed above, as well as by encouraging physical activity and a healthy weight.

Try and remember to:
- Encourage daily physical activity
- Limit time in front of the TV and computer to less than 2 hours a day by providing alternatives
- Get involved in physical activities with your child or help them get to recreational activities or organized sports
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of water, especially while being active and most importantly to prevent heat-related illnesses

If you have concerns or questions about your child’s body image or nutrition choices, discuss this with your doctor or healthcare provider.

**Oral Health**
As your child starts taking more responsibility in their own healthcare, it is important to stress the benefits of brushing the teeth and flossing to prevent tooth decay and gum disease. You can help by taking your child twice yearly to dental visits. Check and see if your dentist recommends a fluoride supplement to prevent cavities.
**Relationships**
Young people are more likely to remain healthy and make good choices when they remain connected with family members providing a positive influence. Even though their friends are becoming more important to them at this age, family ties have an important role in their lives.

It is important to try and talk regularly to your child. Try and comment on positive things that he or she does or has learned.
- Set clear and firm rules, giving the child responsibility at home and a role in the family
- Get to know your child’s friends and encourage good decisions about choosing friends
- Discuss with your child the importance of saying “No” when feeling peer pressured
- Make your expectations clear about clothing choices, time with friends, and recreational activities
- Supervise your child
- Spend time with your child and make time daily to talk about their day, not just about rules and expectations
- Help your child figure out what they are good at and what hobbies they may want to develop
- Emphasize the importance of school and help your child complete homework and be on time for school; be aware of their grades and discuss these with your child
- Encourage your child to read
- Work with your family as a unit to solve problems
- Praise positive behavior and accomplishments
- It is not too early to talk about drugs, alcohol and sex, especially if your child has older siblings or friends

**Puberty and Sexuality**
Females of this age have most likely already started their menstrual periods or will start soon. This can cause a wide variety of emotions in your child and it is important to discuss this change with her and provide her with the help and resources she needs.

Be proactive and talk to your children about how to resist pressures to have sex. Be there for them when they need support or assistance. It is important that their questions are answered and that consequences such as pregnancy, STDs and lifelong disease such as Herpes and HIV/AIDS are discussed. If you need more information on this, there are resources available. Teenagers may find themselves attracted to the opposite or the same sex. Questions about gender identity and sex can lead to important discussions about your teen’s life choices.

**Mood and Emotional Well-Being**
This age is the highest risk age group for the development of mental health problems like depression, anxiety, learning disorders, and conduct disorders. Attention disorders should have been diagnosed by age 7

Youth this age start to experience more stress as their ability to make decisions increases and as they are exposed to more peer pressure. It is helpful to involve your child in making decisions as they are learning how to problem-solve on their own.

Some behaviors to look out for that may suggest your child is experiencing depression, anxiety, drug use/abuse or learning problems are:
- Fighting and bullying
- Worsening academic achievement
- Not following rules
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping excessively
- Social isolation

If you feel like your child is experiencing any of these problems, it is important to discuss them with your health care provider. They may need to be evaluated for substance abuse, mental health problems, or challenges learning.
Smoking, Alcohol, Drugs, Sex/Pregnancy

It is important to discuss how to resist peer pressure to smoke, drink, have sex or use drugs. Parents can play a large role in their child’s well-being by knowing where they are and who they spend time with. Discussing rules and having clear boundaries is helpful. It is always good to praise your child for positive decisions, but if they make a poor choice, talking about it with the child is key. It may not be a bad idea to have your prescription drugs and alcohol in a locked cabinet. If you suspect your child is having sex, it is important to discuss this with them.

Safety

Your child may be reaching the age where they have a learner’s permit or are driving on their own. It is important to remind children to wear seatbelts when in the car. Make sure to talk to your children about the importance of never driving while drunk or using drugs. If you suspect your child has a problem with this there are resources available to help.

Make sure your child has a number to call for a ride or someone to pick them up if they ever feel unsafe when out with others.

Remind your child to wear a helmet on bicycles and to use other safety equipment as appropriate in other sports.

All guns, if in the house, should be kept behind a lock, with ammunition separate.

Positive Parenting

• Start preparing your child for college or secondary education by encouraging good grades in high school and asking about where they are applying. These can be obtained through Bright Futures-if you need help, let me know.

Preventing Illness

• Wash hands often.
• Don’t share drinks or food with others
• Have your child’s immunizations up to date
• Limit or eliminate smoke exposure

When Should I Call the Clinic?

• If you are worried about your child
• If they have a fever great than 100.4F
• If they are throwing up and cannot keep fluids down

This sheet provides general information and is not specific to your child. If you have questions or concerns, many resources are available to help you.

GHS Health System Family Medicine Clinic
706-721-4588
After hours: 706-721-8400

Early Childhood Special Education
Screening and services for developmental delay or disability are available through your county’s Board of Education

Richmond County Board of Education 706-826-1000
Columbia County Board of Education 706-541-0650
Aiken County Board of Education 806-641-2428

Early Childhood Family Education
For classes about raising your child, call your local school district
Health Departments
For information regarding car seat safety, WIC programs, hearing screening, immunization programs, call:
Richmond County 706-721-5800
Fort Gordon WIC clinic 706-787-4263
Columbia County
   Appling 706-541-1318
   Evans 706-868-3330
   Grovetown 706-556-3727
Aiken County 803-642-1687

Child Abuse Reporting
406-721-3381

Committee for Missing Children
1-800-525-8204 and call 911

Smoking Cessation
For tips on how to quit smoking, as your doctor or call the Quit Line at 1-800-270-STOP. Second hand smoke has been proven to cause and worsen childhood asthma and lung cancer. Keep your children healthy.

Poison Control Center
Toll-free 1-800-222-1222