



Advice for the Home Team Toolbox by Dr. Debi Warner

Dear Dr. Debi,

Our twins are graduating from Middle School. Our daughter is putting her little princess days behind and wants to redo her room. Our son likewise doesn't play with his action-figures any more but won't part with them and is moving ahead into bigger real action. Our summer promises

to be a big change for all. Any suggestions? Signed, Missing our Little Ones and Scared of What's Next

Dear Growing Up,

Awww. Those graduations are so festive for all. But the parents must brave so much to allow their young ones to grow and change – to become what we had hoped for all along. For parents it is bittersweet, since we are attached to the child we love, but they are becoming a new person and we need to fall in love with the emerging youth also. The youth they become is more self-determined than the child that was dependent on us. They pursue their own interests, not ours. We learn to follow their vision, and hope to add our help and wisdom too.

We are happy for their joy, their achievements, having done all that homework and read through those books. We recall their proud faces when they got a good grade. We recall evenings of strained effort striving to overcome a math problem or project assignment. It has paid off and they are at the landmark they had hoped for – graduation. Now their task is to sort what they leave behind and set ahead what they will become.

Oh my, this sounds pretty deep. Well, it is a big deal, especially for the kids. Formative years, yep. These kids are in them. Right now, you are at the cusp of it all. It is like cooking a recipe. You get out the ingredients, consider what you are making, blend and check your progress, and it becomes the food as it cooks. Same with the kids. The ingredients are those things that pertain to who they have been and what they are becoming. Together you look it over and form an idea of what you are baking. Yet it is their recipe, so they take the lead. You also advise, encourage, set limits, and provide help.

So, their room appears outgrown; it is chaotic and unpleasant. Toys are strewn; clothes overstuff the drawers. Favorite outfits do not fit, but take up drawer space. A child who once was fussy about their collections now is careless. They are unhappy with the space and

irritable about touching it. It becomes a can't win and you give up, maybe by grounding them or just ignoring it. No one is happy. You all need a fresh start.

So, let's look together at the ingredients and what they mean. All those outgrown clothes and toys are a connection for the child with their younger and comfortable self. You are not the only one fearful of growing up. They are thrilled with the excitement of new developments, but know they will miss the warmth of close cuddles and story time, even if they don't say it. The old stuff keeps them connected to who they have been and the love they have absorbed. You need to find a way to keep some of that stuff close by in their life, perhaps in a more orderly way.

As they redo their rooms, you also can provide structures for the new – parent approved – activities. You can talk together about their interests this summer as you develop a plan for the room. It will also generate plans for the fall as you support their action in those things, with sports or clubs, and even trips here and there. You can delve into their interests, but be sure that they have the lead. Don't rush ahead. Don't make it your agenda; it must be theirs. As you do this, you will be practicing a parent-coaching stance, which is good to have in your toolbox for sure.

Their communication style is changing, not because they are distancing from you, but because they have a new brain. It is astounding what the brain does at the middle school time. It grows, it refines in focus, and grown-up abstract-type thinking just blooms, although it is not balanced with wisdom yet. Suddenly this child can debate the causes of pollution and war. They may become opinionated, but most astonishingly they are suddenly intellectually alive! What a surprise to the unsuspecting parent.

So, this room thing, and their new interests can be a great platform to begin getting to know this new kid under your roof. Listen, begin to form common outlooks together. Do projects – like their room, and also other chores too, in order to establish a new rhythm and language together. That part of the process is the cooking of the recipe. You might not know it, but the listening is like baking; they form so much from it.

So, the room is not just a mess to be bulldozed, it is an opportunity for growing up and growing communication and new relationship resources together as you all learn and listen along the way.

Happy Home Team! *Dr. Debi*

Dr. Debi Warner is the Founder of Renovation Psychology® radio host, and author of the book, Putting the Home Team to Work, available now online at RenovationPsychology.com. Dr. Debi provides advice for greater domestic harmony to folks who are renovating their home – for True Home Improvement. This column is offered for enjoyment and enhancement and is not intended to replace your personal medical care. Photo by Bob Jenks, St. Johnsbury, Vt.

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