

Jonathan & Erica Catherman

BESTSELLING AUTHORS



RAISING THEM READY

**Practical Ways to Prepare Your Kids
for Life on Their Own**

Praise for *Guiding the Next Great Generation*

“This powerful text serves as a road map to help guide the next generation toward current and future successes. Using relevant stories, proven models, and practical strategies, Jonathan Catherman offers the reader an opportunity to navigate the challenges faced in harnessing the unlimited potential of our teens. Moving beyond the traditional and often outdated notions of leadership, *Guiding the Next Great Generation* is a must-read to help inform and empower teachers, coaches, stakeholders, and parents to use strengths, stewardship, and purpose as catalysts to help guide and develop future leaders. This text will now be an integral part of our teaching and learning curriculum for years to come.”

Matthew Ohlson, PhD, director of the Taylor Leadership Institute and associate professor in the Department of Leadership, School Counseling & Sport Management, University of North Florida

“We have no choice about aging, but getting old is a decision all humans make. Reading *Guiding the Next Great Generation*, I felt like a student and a teacher. Jonathan has created a must-read guide for generations of leaders.”

Ron Kitchens, CEO of Southwest Michigan First and author of *Uniquely You: Transform Your Organization by Becoming the Leader Only You Can Be*

“Jonathan Catherman presents a compelling case about the potential for today’s youth to become the next great generation. With chapter after chapter filled with practical tools and insights, this book is a must-read for parents, teachers, and coaches, as well as any adult who is in a position to support, guide, and positively influence young individuals, helping them discover how to live a life of service and purpose. After reading *Guiding the Next Great Generation*, you’ll be inspired to do even more to equip young

people in your life with the skills needed to solve the challenges of tomorrow and prepare them for greatness.”

Nicole Suydam, president and CEO of
Goodwill of Orange County, CA

Praise for *The Manual to Manhood*

“Consider this your survival guide on the sometimes rocky road to becoming a man. You’re going to love this book!”

Dr. Les Parrott, author of *The Parent You Want to Be*

“*The Manual to Manhood* is an engaging, fun, and insightful how-to guide for guys on how to become a man. For those who want to build self-confidence, become independent, and fulfill your full potential, this book is for you.”

Sean Covey, author of the international bestseller
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens

“Every guy needs to know how to do everything in *The Manual to Manhood*. Jonathan is offering ‘young men in the making’ the truth about commonsense, real-world ways to gaining respect and avoid embarrassment on the challenging road to manhood. Every young man should read this book!”

Rick Johnson, bestselling author of *Better Dads*,
Stronger Sons and *A Man in the Making*

“*The Manual to Manhood* is the perfect book for parents, teachers, coaches, and mentors looking to help boys learn valuable life lessons, develop strengths, and discover their unique identity on the journey to manhood.”

Matthew Ohlson, PhD, College of Education, University
of Florida, education and school improvement consultant,
and proud father of three sons

BOOKS BY JONATHAN AND ERICA CATHERMAN

The Girls' Guide to Conquering Life
The Girls' Guide to Conquering Middle School
Raising Them Ready

BOOKS BY JONATHAN CATHERMAN

The Manual to Manhood
The Manual to Middle School (with Reed and Cole Catherman)
Guiding the Next Great Generation
Becoming the Next Great Generation

RAISING THEM READY

**Practical Ways to Prepare Your Kids
for Life on Their Own**

Jonathan and Erica Catherman



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INTRODUCTION

You know what they say: “There’s a first time for everything.” Have you ever noticed we hear these words only when someone is trying to make an uncertain situation feel a little more comfortable? Maybe that’s why every loving mother and father has taken a deep breath and whispered to themselves in their most self-assuring tone, *There’s a first time for everything*, while facing two uncertain parenting firsts. Their first day home alone with a newborn baby and the first day home alone after their baby is all grown up and sets out on their own.

Both days arrive packed with great anticipation and more than a few questions. Looking down at their sleeping child snugly wrapped in a blanket like a baby burrito, the magnitude of their infant’s fragility leaves many parents awash in a mix of emotions. One minute they are overcome with joy and the next, anxiety. On that first day home alone, it’s completely understandable for parents to quietly ask themselves, “Are we really ready for this?” Years later, a similar question creeps into the thoughts of even the most seasoned parents. As they watch their grown child pack up, wave goodbye, and set out on their own, it’s totally normal for parents to wonder out loud, “Are they really ready for this?”

When the years between their first day home and first day away go as hoped, we know a remarkable transformation has occurred in the lives of our children. Once small and dependent on their parents for everything, our kids somehow survive the diaper rashes, home haircuts, bike crashes, and puberty to miraculously grow up to become happy, healthy, independent adults. Or so we've hoped.

Let's just say it now and get it out in the open early. Being a parent is difficult. Actually, let's be more specific. Being a consistent, patient, engaging, accessible, responsive, rational, present, safe, and loving parent who raises their children to become confident, capable, and kind young adults—now that's difficult.

When by the grace of God we manage to guide our kids down the road between childhood and adulthood in a way that releases them into the world relatively unscathed, then you'd think we could relax. But we won't really. Not all the way, that is. Because though our parenting responsibilities fade over time, we'll always be there for our children as they face life's many demands.

From personal experience, most parents have a pretty good idea of what's on the long list of demands their kids will face while growing up. Then there's all the new stuff our kids are dealing with that didn't even exist when we were young. This means raising kids right in our rapidly changing world includes raising them *ready* to take on the types of challenges and threats that we didn't know about when we were their age.

So, what does it mean to raise kids ready today? To many parents, “ready” sounds like a titanic task. Ready for what? Half the time our kids feel blindsided by stuff they never saw coming. Resilient as we know kids can be, the demands of our world can easily inflict great damage on the hulls of their fragile minds, hearts, spirits, and bodies. From internet trolls and online bullies to a global pandemic and political unrest. Social injustice, racial inequity, academic pressure, the burden of stress, boredom, and the always-in-their-face comparison of their life to the perfectly staged #bestlife of online “influencers” can leave many kids feeling confused and less than

important. How do we safely and successfully help our children navigate through the stages of their young lives when we know such great and often damaging forces lie in wait?

There is no easy answer to this very real, very difficult parenting predicament. Yet, there is one thing we know for certain about raising children who grow into confident, capable, and kind adults. Those who are taught to take care of the seemingly little things in childhood are more prepared to steward the much larger opportunities and responsibilities of adulthood.

We became first-time parents in early 2001. We doubled down three years later with the addition of a second child to our young, ambitious family. In the two decades since, more than a few things have become crystal clear to us as parents. Mostly through trial and error. Here are our top ten favorite lessons learned in the years between our kids' first day home and their leaving home to launch into life on their own.

10. Potty training a child and a puppy at the same time is extremely poor planning.
9. Kids desperately want to see and be seen, to hear and be heard, to know and be known, and to love and be loved.
8. Family needs to be the kindest people and home the safest place on the planet.
7. There is no accurate calculation for converting the distance between highway rest stops to the maximum volume of a ten-year-old's Gatorade-flooded bladder.
6. The absolute worst measures of a child's value are mirrors, "likes," grades, and trophies.
5. Attempting to revive the glory days by living vicariously through our kids is a recipe for disaster.
4. Cell phones and high-speed Wi-Fi access are privileges we share with our children and are not to be confused with their inalienable rights.

3. There is nothing in the world our kids can do to make us love them any less.
2. Not liking what our teenager is doing is not the same as not loving them.
1. Their greatness tomorrow begins with our guidance today.

The truth is, we have racked up more well-earned parenting lessons over the years than can possibly be counted. It's probably safest to sum them all up in the understanding that when it comes to learning about parenting, reading books can help, but nothing beats real-life experience. Looking at our own adventures in parenting, we feel the need to say we are not writing this book in hopes of releasing a new set of child-rearing practices or from the need to share our version of perfect parenting. That would be an impossible task, because as we all know, there is no such thing as perfect parents. Just real ones.

There is also no shortage of books on the topic of raising kids. Our office shelves and side tables are stacked with examples. Familiar cover titles include raising children who are kind, cooperative, gifted, whole, grateful, strong, organized, loving, smart, caring, good, and better kids. Authors range from PhDs, presenting five hundred pages of peer-reviewed academic research, to the been-there, survived-that alpha parent with a legion of loyal roaring followers.

Today's selection of *how to be a better parent* publications could pack a brick-and-mortar library's shelves as tight as sardines in a can. In our experience many of these books sit on one of two shelves: Some are so thick and meaty, readers quickly get the feeling they have bitten off more than they can chew. Others are spread so candy-shell thin, they struggle to offer parents any actual child-rearing nutritional value.

We have chosen to present you with a book that is written for the parents who are doing the best they know how to raise their kids. This includes all types of kids and all types of parents.

Thankfully most people's awareness and understanding of the broad spectrum of kids' learning, behavior, and physical abilities is greater today than ever before. So is our inclusion of the wide-ranging diversity of who is committed to the caregiving. To the biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents parenting their kid's kids, aunts and uncles, and anyone who has taken on the role of "parenting" in a child's life, we are writing for you. You will know how to navigate the chapters to come and how they apply to your unique family. To your kids. No matter the circumstances.

Perhaps you are young and excited to learn everything possible about guiding your precious jewel in ways that foster a balance between developmental science and the harmony of whole child wellness. Or you might be completely exhausted. Clinging to what remains of your fragile sanity, you're skimming pages in search of any nugget of practical advice. Our first goal in the chapters to come is to connect with both the fresh-feeling parents and those admittedly frustrated and beyond fatigued. We hope to relate with you in both a personal and scientifically sound way that is easily understood and relevant to you. By simply and practically discussing what "raising them ready" means in today's hyper-aware, digital drenched, mid-twenty-first-century life, we believe you will discover some helpful parenting insights you can use today. To do this we have divided the book into three unique and equally valuable parts. We have titled them READY, SET, and GO.

Part 1: READY In READY we clarify the multiple aspects of what it *means* to grow up and become an adult, and why some young people are ready for the challenge while others feel threatened by the demands. We'll look into why babies really should come with instructions and what secret to future success your callow (inexperienced and immature) kids share in common with seasoned first responders, professional athletes, and Navy SEALs.

Part 2: SET In SET we discuss the specific mindsets, skillsets, and toolsets that prepare kids to thrive in the years ahead rather than struggle to survive through the unavoidable demands of adulthood. You'll have a chance to rate your child's skill levels and assess how able they are for their age, and we will provide you with a Launch List of over three hundred combined skills and tools that your kid will benefit from possessing. You may even get some good ideas for their future birthday, holiday, and graduation gifts.

Part 3: GO In GO we encourage you with ways to teach your kids how to become independent in phases by making a Release Plan that includes three stages of letting them go, a little at a time, over time. A plan that values and celebrates your child as they put into practice all you have taught them through Instruction, Guidance, and Counsel.

Like you, we too are still practicing how to be better parents. By practicing, we mean we are dedicated to improving the quality of the soft skills and hard decisions required of us daily as parents. Thankfully, no one mistakenly led us to believe that guiding our kids through their young lives would be easy. If they had, we would feel like epic failures. Instead, we know parenting is a healthy mix of good times and bad moments. Some days we get to claim and celebrate small parenting victories. When we discover something that works in our home, we commit to repeating that behavior as often as possible. Other days we see clearly what isn't working and change our ways. Most of the time we are daily witnesses to the incremental gains our kids make in developing the character and abilities they need to experience both purpose and success. In a way, we are doing our best to work together today so we can successfully live apart from them tomorrow. We know that, for as much as we love our kids and desire for them to remain close, they are not meant to stay home for long. They grow up, mature, and set out to make a life for

themselves. On their own. It's our job as parents to prepare them the best we know how.

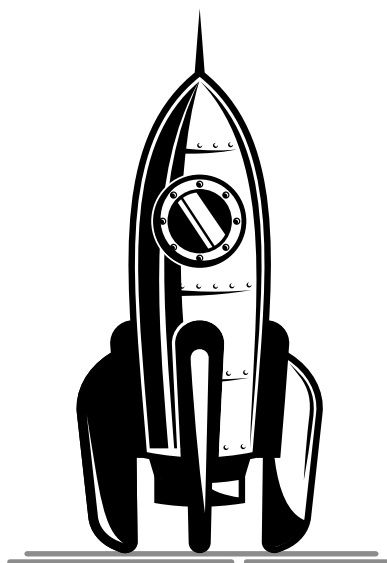
It helps that in addition to being a husband and father, I (Jonathan) am a sociologist. Over the past three decades I've dedicated my career to researching, writing, and consulting on the shifts in generational norms and about life skills and personal character development in youth. The greatest personal and professional blessing in my life is to be best friends and true partners with my wife and coauthor of this book, Erica. We met as teenagers, married in our twenties, and raised our family by loving and working together side by side. One of Erica's core beliefs is to "Adventure on!" She keeps our family focused on seeing life as a series of wonderful adventures, each well worth experiencing to the fullest. Beyond being an amazing wife and mother, Erica is an instructor, mentor, and coach who has been an advocate for gender equity in student athletics since before we married in the summer of 1996. We have coauthored multiple bestselling books and countless articles and been guests on all types of media interviews, and together we direct an independent foundation that provides mentoring resources to schools, community groups, and family resource services around the world. Both personally and professionally, we are better together.

We count it a great privilege to share this book with you. As you read about the science, experiences, stories, and a few of our own personal opinions about parenting, please remember one thing above all else. Parents are the most significant influence in a child's life. That makes you a very important person. We know you want the best for your kids. For them to grow up to have a better life than your own. We want the same for ours. This means the privilege and responsibility we share as parents include great stewardship of the few years we are given to raise them ready.

Adventure on,
Jonathan & Erica Catherman

PART 1

READY



1. ADULTING

adult-ing

noun

The practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks.

It's Just a Phase

Parents and pediatricians agree. Predicting the exact path and pace kids will take on their journey from childhood to adulthood is a complicated and often imprecise forecast. What begins with nine months of prenatal nurturing will not end until well after you have watched them pack up and leave your home for a life on their own.

In the whirlwind of their early years, your child's physical, mental, emotional, and social growth spins through a series of complex and often confusing developmental stages. From their first word, first step, and first day of school to their first date, first car, and first place of their own, their brains and bodies are in a near constant state of growth and change. They never are the same person more than a few days in a row.

Odd as this may sound, there were times when it felt like our own kids were growing up too slow. Especially when a dozen diaper

changes a day smelled like twelve too many. Then in what felt like a blink of the eye, they started asking for cell phones, the car keys, and what it costs to rent an off-campus apartment at college. How you feel about the pace and track of your kids' development probably depends on which end of the child-rearing years you stand. Looking ahead or thinking back, we all know they can't stay young forever. Adorable babies become cute kids. Kids grow into weird and at times wonderful teens. And teens eventually graduate into the highly anticipated phase of life that in recent years has become known by the catchy title of "adulting." At least that's how the story goes in most families.

The chronicles of childhood memories told by Boomers and most Gen Xers include stories of how growing up was a buildup to accepting the many responsibilities that came with becoming an adult. Some families went as far as to mark a specific date with a traditional and often formal final step over the threshold between childhood and adulthood. Oh, how things have changed in recent years. Today, many young people see the act of adulting as a series of off-balance, social-media-documented, parent-funded, temporary test runs into adulthood. Two steps forward, one step back. No need to rush into things.

Whatever your family's expectation is for the exchange of age-related titles and behaviors, it's good to start by answering a critical question about your child: When it comes time for them to leave the nest, how prepared will they really be for life on their own?

To start this discussion, we feel it's important to make the distinction between kids who grow up into adults and kids who simply grew up. The difference between the two is night and day and evident in the desire common to parents: "All we want is for our kids to grow up into adults who are happy and healthy, and who will find purpose and success in the world." You have probably said something similar about your child. As any good parent should.

Pause for just a minute to take another look at that statement.

“All we want is for our kids to grow up into adults who are happy and healthy, and who will find purpose and success in the world.”

Do you see the two similar yet separate qualities parents want for our kids? In order for them to enjoy their best life possible, they need to *grow up* and become *adults*. Technically speaking, to grow up is the progression between childhood and adulthood that includes reaching full physical and mental maturity. Having accomplished both, hopefully simultaneously, our kids should have a good shot at experiencing all the happiness, health, and a reasonable measure of success we think they deserve. Unfortunately, some kids manage to make it all the way through childhood only to find they grew up unprepared for their unavoidable adult life. That’s because not all adults are grown-ups.

The distinction is not just a matter of semantics—those who are grown-ups and those who grew up. The former requires maturing in ways that shed previous childish ways of thinking and behaving. The latter simply celebrated enough birthdays to pass through puberty. They started off in a baby’s body and over the following two decades grew into their physically developed adult self. All it took was time, and a lot of groceries. What the latter adults lack is maturity.

On the other hand, to become a grown-up, a child needs to develop in ways that are far more than purely physical. True grown-ups have also developed mental maturity. **Maturity comes when life lessons shape wisdom and judgment to form the mindsets, skillsets, and toolsets kids need to shed childlike dependencies for the confidence and capabilities of adult-level independence.**

We have friends our age whose kids, like our own, are all grown. With great anticipation they are setting out into the world to further their education, begin their careers, and start families of their own. They are fully grown-up—mature, independent adults. We also know families whose children grew up but failed to launch. Though their kids have reached physical and legal adulthood,

they still act in ways that require others to do for them what they could or should do for themselves. They grew up into physically developed, mentally immature, dependent adults.

Can you see the difference? Attributes versus age. Independent versus dependent. Grown-up versus grew up.

It's Just a Matter of Time

Legally speaking, there is an official-sounding term used to mark the date when a young person is formally considered an adult and granted the legitimate standing of the age. Though exactly where different countries draw their lines on equal status and treatment under the law varies between nations, the same legal language is commonly recognized worldwide. When citing the collection of laws that officially grants an individual lawful control over their decisions, actions, and physical person, the most often used label for the age of formal adulthood is the *age of majority*.¹

As one might expect, most nations in the world grant the legal age of majority to their youth in celebration of their eighteenth birthday. Yet there remain a few outliers whose religious and cultural traditions, backed by civil codes, hold open the door to legal adulthood for girls as young as nine lunar years old (eight years and nine months) and to boys who are all of fifteen lunar years.² The not-so-old age of fifteen solar years is good enough for a few other countries while a half dozen more officially plant the kiss of legal independence on their citizens in celebration of their sweet sixteenth birthday.³ On the opposite end of the teen years huddles a baker's dozen count of homelands who shelter their youth until nineteen, twenty, and even twenty-one years old before allowing their minors to become full majors.

Contrary to popular belief, the United States' individual states are not all united on the official age of legal American adulthood. The majority of states, forty-seven of the fifty, agree that fresh-faced minors become legitimate adults on their eighteenth birthday.

This must feel like an unfair privilege to youths in Alabama and Nebraska, as they must wait to blow out nineteen candles before receiving full personal autonomy.⁴ Tack on two more years and Mississippi takes the cake by pushing their minor's rightful bestowment of majority all the way up to twenty-one years old.⁵

To complicate matters even more, there is a second set of “age of” standards that we use to measure a person's progress on the road to adulthood. Where the age of majority provides legal *recognition* of adult status, the age of *license* provides legal permission to engage in certain acts reserved for age-specific degrees of adulting. The most obvious and often debated are when a person is granted the legal license to drive, vote, get married, and consume alcohol. The usual answers are sixteen to drive, eighteen to cast a ballot or tie the knot, and twenty-one to buy booze. That is unless . . .



... **you are driving** in one of the five states that issue licenses to teens younger, or the eleven states that require motorists to be older, than sixteen.⁶



... **you are voting** in a third of the states that allow constituents who are seventeen but will be eighteen by the general election to cast a ballot in the primaries.⁷



... **you are getting married** in one of the states where, with consent of a parent, young couples can tie the knot at the blissful ages of twelve to seventeen years old.⁸



... **you are drinking** in one of the twenty-nine states that allow minors to “partake” on private property with parental consent. Or in the six states where it's okay to down a cold one at home without mom or dad's approval. Or in the eight states that allow parents to buy their kids a round in a bar or restaurant. Or you are tipping one back in the twenty-six states where minors of all ages can

partake for religious purposes, the sixteen states that allow under-age consumption for medical exemptions, the eleven states where drinking is allowed for educational purposes, or the five states where the sauce is suitable for minors who can claim they drink for work related to government purposes.⁹

Beyond the borders of the United States and depending on your global whereabouts, both the age of *majority* and the age of *license* can swing in any given direction. It really all hinges on who's currently in power legally, religiously, and culturally. In the end, there's only one state that can offer any level of consistency in measuring legal adulthood within its boundaries. The state of confusion.

As most “adults” want both their proverbial legal cake and the liberty to eat it too, the differences between age of majority and age of license have been the root of countless family quarrels and more than a few court proceedings. Here is just a sampling of opening arguments the kids we have worked with over the years have used on their parents to debate their age-frustrated demands.



“In my driver’s ed class the teacher said quick reaction time and good eyesight are key to safe driving. If that’s actually true, then old people shouldn’t be allowed behind the wheel and young people should.”



“For real. This is taxation without representation. If I’m old enough for the government to withhold taxes from my paycheck, I’m old enough to vote on how those tax dollars get spent.”



“It’s not fair. Nobody should be allowed to put age restrictions on love! Not my old-fashioned parents. Not the church. And definitely not some white-haired law-making politicians who don’t even know me.”



“So, I’m old enough to serve in the military, fight in a war, and die for my country? But not to drink a beer? How is that even logical?”

Sound familiar? If your child is currently working their way through their teen to early twentysomething years, then yes, you’ve probably heard a version of at least one of these claims made in your own home. That or you remember saying something very similar back when you were their age. Can’t you just hear a younger version of yourself disagreeing with your parents . . .

“You have no idea! All my friends’ parents let them
_____” (insert unrealistic expectation here).

Or maybe,

“Stop treating me like a child! I’m practically an adult already!”

How about,

“How can you expect me to act more mature when I’m not
allowed to do more mature things!”

And how did that work out for you? Not surprisingly we can’t remember a single time as kids that any of those illogical lines changed our parent’s mind. Can you recall why your wishes for early access to the privileges of adulthood weren’t granted? Why didn’t your parents allow you to do all those grown-up things you so desperately wanted to try? Because we were—how did they put it—“not ready yet.”

Turns out that no matter how fly we were, singing along with DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince about how “Parents Just Don’t Understand,” it didn’t change the fact that there is a big difference between looking the part of a grown-up and being mature enough to act like one. Even though the physical characteristics of

our once young bodies may have appeared mature on the outside, on the inside our still developing brains lagged more than a few developmental steps behind. The same is true with kids today.

Out of Sync

During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many medical and education experts firmly believed that human brains wrapped up development somewhere inside our puberty years. This long-standing belief has not survived challenges from an ever-growing body of more specific and recent neural research. Studies now confirm that adolescence is the prime time for continued, not concluded, brain growth.¹⁰ While the adolescent years quickly and obviously transform the bodies of boys and girls into young men and women, a separate sync of developmental changes is happening in their heads. Basically, grown-up bodies are built during the teen years, yet their adult minds aren't fully online until well into post-adolescence. This means that while our kids' pubescent physiques are growing up, out, and they are more interested in each other, their brain's frontal lobes' responsibility for the "executive function" of impulse control, planning, and adaptability to change may not fully mature for another ten, fifteen, or even twenty years.¹¹

At this point it's very important we agree that puberty, teens, and adolescence can no longer be considered one and the same. Most members of premillennial generations were raised hearing the three youthful terms used freely and interchangeably. Like when a parent, frustrated with the behavior of their fourteen-year-old child, said to a friend something like,

"Then again, I don't know what I was expecting. They are in the middle of _____, after all."

When we were growing up, you could have filled in the blank by inserting any one of the three words, "puberty" or "teens" or

“adolescence.” They were all used universally to convey pretty much the same meaning.

“Then again, I don’t know what I was expecting. They are in the middle of *puberty*, after all.”

“Then again, I don’t know what I was expecting. They are in the middle of their *teens*, after all.”

“Then again, I don’t know what I was expecting. They are in the middle of *adolescence*, after all.”

Your pick. Puberty, teens, and adolescence. They all worked. But that was then, and this is now. Today our biological maturity (puberty), chronological age (teens), and cultural expectations (adolescence) no longer pace side by side as naturally as they once did in generations past. Like the breakup of your favorite ’90s band, the three slowly separated and fell out of sync following the rise of two uniquely twenty-first-century trends in the “normal” youth experience.

First, the awkward age of puberty has somehow managed to start younger. As weird as this sounds, it’s perfectly normal for our voice-cracking, acne-fighting, hormone-moody kids to experience the onset of the joys of puberty between the ages of eight and thirteen years old. That means some elementary girls as young as the fourth grade are starting their periods and many boys really should try shaving their peach fuzz mustaches prior to entering middle school.

Second, the cultural significance of being a teenager is being stretched out on both ends. Tugging down by impatient tweens whose aspirations to try what was once reserved for the older kids is drawing the age of adolescence back into the single digits. On the other end of the teen years, late-to-engage twentysomethings are stretching out adolescence as long as possible. Much to the

pain of their parents, educators, and employers, many young yet legal adults are choosing to delay flying much farther than the comforts of their parents' home. Instead, they are choosing to rehearse gradually "adulthood" long before making an all-in commitment to adulthood.

With such strong forces of change distorting the tween-teen-twentysomething years, social scientists are reassessing their definitions of adolescence while consumer brand marketers are hedging their bets about the future fate of what they'll call the age. Currently we can see only two possible outcomes. Either an official extension of the span of years we identify as adolescence or the eventual extinction of the stage of life all together.

Those arguing for the extension of adolescence to occupy a longer time frame often lay their reasoning, and blame, squarely at the feet of today's parents. Their primary argument states that the shift from childhood to adulthood has become overly sheltered and politicized. Softening cultural norms reinforced by the hovering protections of overindulging wannabe-woke parents has lured families into keeping the kids in happy havens, free from stress and conflict, far too long. In turn, young children are given aspirational access to adolescent behavior earlier and then allowed to shelter at home longer, well into their roaring twenties. The result is that social scientists are saying the new age of adolescence is making moving out after high school optional as twenty-five becomes the new eighteen.

Using a similar argument to reach a completely different outcome, others claim adolescence is doomed to extinction. Due to a lack of clear boundaries on previously age-appropriate experiences and an all-access pass to almost everything on the internet, many believe we will soon come to see adolescence as an obsolete age of the pre-web world. What had been previously reserved for real-life experiences has become a mostly unsupervised online search-and-click through a virtual world for the young and curious.

What becomes of the age of adolescence is still up in the air and will not be officially determined for some time to come. Important to us today is that we see the clear distinctions between puberty, the teen years, and adolescence. This will help us to better prepare our children to thrive in the challenges of each, while increasing our understanding of why and how they'll respond to the demands of life on their own. How prepared they are with the mindset, skillset, and toolset needed to succeed away from the protection your parenting wings provide will determine if they are ready, or not, to soar on their own.

Terms to take into consideration:

Kid is a child or young person of any age.

Child is a son or daughter of any age. The term also refers to a young person below the age of puberty or below the legal age of majority. Child can also be used to describe an immature or irresponsible person.

Puberty is when a child's body begins to physically and sexually mature in a process that transforms them into an adult.

Tween is a young person between the ages of approximately eight and twelve years old.

Teenager is a young person between thirteen and nineteen years old.

Adolescence is the transition period between childhood and adulthood and is derived from a Latin word meaning "to grow up or to grow into maturity." In 1904, Stanley Hall, president of the American Psychological Association, described a new developmental phase that arose after a series of significant social changes occurred at the turn of the twentieth century.¹² New child labor laws and universal education meant kids had more available free time and

fewer of the responsibilities that had previously been expected and even forced on them as teenagers.

Adult is a person after the age of majority as specified by law.

Adulting is the practice of behaving in a way characteristic of a responsible adult, especially the accomplishment of mundane but necessary tasks.

Adulthood is the period in a person's lifespan after adolescence.

Grow up is the progression between childhood and adulthood that includes developing physical and mental maturity.

Grown-up is a physically and mentally mature adult.

Grew up is to have completed physical development.