

# Raising Daughters

*Bombarded by media images, song lyrics, and movies portraying young girls as seductive women, it's no wonder so many girls are trying to grow up before their time. How can Katy parents take steps to shield their daughters and make sure they won't grow up too fast?*

*Written by  
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Katy mom Maria Hardegree encourages her 11-year-old daughter Maddie Grace to get involved in extracurricular age-appropriate activities



Photo by Jason Lehecka

Today's society teases girls with the idea of being an adult. Popular TV shows like *Gossip Girl* and *90210* make it look easy to grow up quickly without much consequence. These Katy parents and health experts offer strategies for making sure their daughters don't grow up too quickly.

## Paying Attention to the Details

In our fast-paced lives it could be easy to overlook slight signs that your daughter is growing up too quickly, like wanting to get a spray tan, wear makeup, or even listen to provocative music. Parents should be mindful of additional warning signs like asking for things that are more appropriate for older teens, wanting clothes that make her look older, resisting family time, and rejecting a favorite activity prematurely, shares Mary Lyles, Ph.D., LCSW of Katy Family Counseling.

But what can cause this type of behavior? "I think the biggest pressures come from the media, especially concerning appearance," shares Katy family therapist Nelda Wilson Brooks, M.Ed., LMFT. During the most formative years of their lives, tweens are highly susceptible to these messages. "At this time of life, following the crowd may seem easier than standing up to peer pressure," shares Lyles.

When Katy mom Maria Hardegree's daughter Maddie Grace, 11, encountered the pressure to fit in at her new school, Maria encouraged her to concentrate on her unique talents. "We found a church," shares Hardegree, adding, "She became involved in the school choir. She began playing softball. Maddie Grace refused to allow herself to change in order to 'fit in,' and as others began to get to know her, they fell in love with her. Now, she has more friends than I can keep up with!"

## Monitoring Technology Use

Heather Smith of Katy has a daughter, Evon, in seventh-grade, as well as a 13-year-old stepson. At home, she monitors Evon's technology use, including cell phone calls, text messages, and even what she watches on TV. "Evon has very limited access to the internet," shares Smith. "She is on a couple of hours a week, at most, and always right in the living room where we can see what she is doing."

## Standing up to Peer Pressure

Along with monitoring technology at home, it is crucial for young girls to understand peer pressure and how they can resist it. Peer pressure isn't always as obvious as a peer approaching them about drugs. It can be more subtle and caters to everyone's innate want to "fit in."

Lyles suggests parents help their daughter learn about her individual likes and dislikes. "By examining what she really likes, she begins to know herself as a unique and valuable person who doesn't need to follow the crowd to be okay,"

shares Lyles. Hardegree says it's important for parents to be there for their children, knowing that they can always talk to you. "At times, Maddie Grace has described me as 'nosey,'" shares Hardegree. "I tell her that is a compliment! That way, she is certain that I know what is going on in her life and the kids she spends her time with."

When all else fails, tell your daughter she can always "blame" you, the parent. "Tweens and teens need the fallback comment of, 'My parents won't let me,' when asked to do something that is inappropriate," advises Lyles.

## Being a Positive Role Model

Parents should strive to set a good example for their daughters. "Sometimes, the best thing we can do as parents is to let our lives serve as an example, letting your actions be an unexpressed expectation of how your children should conduct themselves," says Smith.

Hardegree believes in instilling good values in her daughter, setting expectations for her grades, chores, and behavior and holding her accountable for her actions. "By making sure that she knows what to expect, I would like to believe I am placing the responsibility of her success square on her shoulders," shares Hardegree.

## Acknowledging Strengths

Parents can do so much at home to boost their daughters' self-esteem and help defend them against peer pressure. "At all ages, children should be encouraged to participate in age-appropriate activities," advises Brooks. "Creativity and intelligence should be acknowledged, not just appearance."

Lyles adds that parents should focus on and acknowledge their daughters' strengths. "Let her know

that she is effective in dealing with life's challenges by giving her opportunities that are age-appropriate throughout her childhood and teen years," shares Lyles. Smith makes sure to give Evon lots of compliments and takes time to put her failures in context, turning them into learning experiences. "I believe the only way to combat these pressures is by open communication in the family and a strong faith in God," she shares.

Hardegree admits there isn't always a way for parents to shield their daughters from the realities of life. Although the pressure to have the right clothes or perfect skin might be the current concern in your daughter's life, the advice you give her on how to deal with that pressure will last a lifetime. Hardegree shares, "I think the best we can do is to prepare our daughters to deal with these issues in a way that ensures they reach adulthood as strong and confident women, with as few battle scars as possible." **KM**

*NATALIE COOK CLARK enjoys freelance writing and sharing stories from her hometown of Katy.*



Photo by Marisa Hugonnett

Katy mom Heather Smith strives to be a positive role model for her 13-year-old daughter Evon

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Local mom Cindy Gharst and her 9-year-old daughter Sarah



Photo by Jason Lehecka

## Parenting Daughters

TIPS FROM THE EXPERTS

- Focus on her inner beauty and not on her appearance.
- Instill strong, positive values.
- Purchase age-appropriate clothing only.
- Encourage her to participate in age-appropriate activities.
- Spend regular one-on-one time together.
- Maintain a strong father/daughter bond, too.
- Get to know her friends and their families.
- Allow age-appropriate media only.
- Monitor and limit her social media activity.
- Offer praise for good decisions and positive actions.



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