

## Is this normal?

This is the sixth of an ongoing series exploring milestones. Milestones are important points that you reach throughout life. These articles are exploring how we as a Church community can share in these important celebrations. Last time we looked at Primary School, and this month we will look at Lower High School.

Well, as many of us may remember, it is not the easiest time in our life, and there are many milestones that we may celebrate, but maybe not so publicly? Our bodies change – sometimes quickly, but if I remember rightly, not quite quick enough! This is the age where we go from accepting the answers of adults, to questioning them more deeply and then wondering if we can adopt that answer. It is interesting to note that whilst parents feel that their children often start to ignore what they say, that the statistics clearly show that they have a huge influence on long-term goals and life choices.

Traditionally, the church tends to witness young people in this age group disappear out of the life of its community. One major reason why this occurs is not because it is just a ‘phase’ or the ‘age of rebellion’, but because we have not recognized the changing needs of the young people who have entered into quite a strange and sometimes difficult stage of life.

There are not so many ways that as community we can celebrate milestones at this stage of life without causing some embarrassment, so we need to be more tactful. Here are four suggestions:

1. Entry into High School

This is a huge step. You go from being at the top of the school, to the very bottom as you start again. At the beginning of the school year, why not ensure there is time in your Parish worship to pray for these people, maybe present them with a study bible to demonstrate this new stage of growth, questioning and study.

2. Young People Need Young People

As part of checking out what is normal in life, you need other people around your own age who you can share with. Youth Groups are an important part of this process, especially for understanding and living out the faith. Some of the best models of Youth Groups are small groups who meet in the homes of some mature Christians, spending time studying the scriptures together, and just having the opportunity to talk about life. It is interesting to note that separating people into their own gender group is also an important part of developing and growing – you can be more open, and it also recognizes how boys and girls mature at different rates.

3. Young People Need Older People

Young people also need older people who are able to walk alongside (accompany) them on their journey. They especially need someone who is available as a listening ear.

4. Self-Esteem

We need to be positive encouragers of young people. If you change the way young people feel about themselves for the better, it will also affect their relationship with Christ. People grow best in an environment that is safe and encouraging – we as Church can provide that place.

So, next month – late High School.

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