



before your
tween daughter
becomes a woman

a mom's must-have guide

Robin Jones Gunn

I'm grateful that Robin Jones Gunn has been both a longtime friend and a mentor because she has taught me in many ways how to gently lead my daughters into womanhood. I'm especially thankful that Robin's personal advice is now available to all! I highly recommend this book for all girl moms. I treasure the memories I've created with my daughters, and I know that others will too!

TRICIA GOYER

Speaker and *USA TODAY* bestselling author of more than seventy books

Moms today are hungry—hungry for help *and* hope, and thankfully Robin delivers both. In a world that tells you to dread adolescence and avoid difficult conversations, Robin casts a better vision—one that flips the script so you can celebrate your growing daughter, prepare her for reality, and help heal old wounds. Grounded in biblical truth, this book is honest and refreshing, helping you become the strong and intentional mom your tween daughter desperately needs!

KARI KAMPAKIS

Bestselling author of *Love Her Well* and *More Than a Mom* and host of the *Girl Mom* podcast

As a woman now in the “nana” stage of life, I can highly recommend *Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman* to grandmothers, too—or for grandparents to give to their daughters. Robin navigates the challenges and joys of raising a daughter with love and grace. I recommend this book with the highest praise!

JANET HOLM McHENRY

Author of twenty-five books, including *Prayer Changes Teens: How to Parent from Your Knees*

My years working as a youth minister did not fully prepare me to become the parent of a tweenaged daughter. I've watched her navigate the tensions of an international move, friendships, growing faith, and her changing body. I've not always had the words to say to encourage her well. *Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman* brought me to tears, giving voice to what I can't quite articulate as I watch my firstborn become a girl on the cusp of womanhood. Robin provides mothers like me the tools and confidence to nurture our daughters with intention. And as we watch them blossom, we are reminded of our own invitation to flourish well.

JENNY ERLINGSSON

Speaker and author of *Becoming His: Finding Your Place as a Daughter of God*

Robin Jones Gunn's *Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman* teaches moms how to honor and cherish their daughters so that their coming-of-age years can be marked by closeness and treasured moments instead of silence or awkwardness. Every mom should read this book, no matter her age, because it's never too late to let our daughters know the truth about womanhood—that we are each fearfully and wonderfully made. This book touched my heart, healed several emotional sore spots, and helped me think about ways to lovingly come alongside my daughter in these precious (and precarious) teen years. I loved reading it!

RACHEL DODGE

Author of *The Anne of Green Gables Devotional*, *The Little Women Devotional*, and *The Secret Garden Devotional*

Filled with creative and practical ideas, *Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman* is a great guide for moms everywhere. With her kind, personable writing style, Robin Jones Gunn does a fantastic job helping moms brainstorm ways to connect with their daughters while honoring our unique personalities and experiences. I can hardly wait to try many of these tips with my own tween daughter.

HILARY BERNSTEIN

Blogger, women's ministry director, and author of *Becoming a Modern-Day Proverbs 31 Woman*

I read Robin's book as a mother of a tween daughter and was moved to tears. My daughter and I struggle to connect at times, mostly because we are so different—and yet so alike. Helping her become a godly woman is my soul's cry, and this vulnerable and God-honoring book has given me direction to support my daughter in becoming a strong woman of faith. It's a strong recommend—a must-have for all mothers of tween daughters!

JAIME JO WRIGHT

Christy Award-winning author of *The House on Foster Hill*



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FOCUS
ON
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The stories and examples used in the “Dear Robin . . .” sections of this book are based on actual events. They've been condensed and edited for clarity and are composites from the many interviews the author conducted as well as comments made publicly on her social media posts. These stories, as well as those that use individuals' first and last names, are true.

The excerpt in chapter 4 is taken from Corrie ten Boom with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place: The Triumphant Story of Corrie ten Boom* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1971).

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*For the young women in my life
with much love*



*“Many women do noble things,
but you surpass them all.”*

PROVERBS 31:29

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foreword

Although my wife, Jean, and I don't have any daughters of our own (we were blessed instead with two sons), I have always believed that raising girls is a sacred trust. It's clear throughout Scripture that there is a special place in God's heart for His daughters, and parents have a weighty responsibility to protect, nurture, and cherish their precious girls. Moms, in particular, leave an indelible mark on their daughters' lives. Through their modeling, prayers, interactions, and wisdom, mothers are in a powerful position to influence the hearts, minds, and souls of their girls.

Many parents, however, are often blindsided when their children enter adolescence, and they're not always sure how to help guide their kids into this new phase of life in healthy, positive ways. It can feel awkward, uncomfortable, and even a little scary to address certain topics. Of course, there can be many legitimate reasons for this. Perhaps we're grieving what feels like the end of a child's innocence, or maybe we have difficult

memories related to this period of time in our own lives. Or it could be that we simply don't know what to say. Whatever the reason, many parents feel ill equipped to broach the topic of puberty with their kids.

Not only that, but there is much confusion in today's culture surrounding the nature of true femininity, and these days some folks even seem to have trouble defining the word *woman*! In such a climate, it's no wonder that Christian parents of girls often feel overwhelmed by the task of raising daughters who will embrace their unique and God-given role as women in a broken world.

It's vital, however, for parents—and moms in particular—to take the initiative and engage with their daughters about what to expect as they move toward adulthood. Despite the unbiblical and somewhat bewildering messages society sends regarding what it means to be a woman, the good news is that God's Word has not changed. He still has a beautiful plan for womanhood, and even in a postmodern world girls can learn to reflect that unique design.

What do Christian parents want for their daughters? I believe that, above all, they want to raise young women who love Jesus and share that love with others. Part of that, of course, is for girls to understand the irreplaceable role they play in God's Kingdom work. They need to know that the Lord indeed values women, and that they have been "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). And as they prepare to come of age, young women should revel in the assurance that they have been specially created by a loving God for a divine purpose. They

occupy a special and indispensable place in our world. They reflect God's character in a distinct way.

That's why I'm so excited about this book from Robin Jones Gunn. Robin is helping moms navigate a crucial turning point in their daughters' lives in a way that deepens the mother-daughter bond and ultimately points young girls to Christ and their Kingdom-building purpose.

Make no mistake—this isn't simply another “how to talk to your daughter about the birds and the bees” book. Instead, Robin wants to help you guide your daughter toward adulthood by honoring God's wonderful design for women. After all, girls can get *information* about puberty and sexuality anywhere, and in this day and age of ubiquitous technology, that kind of information is unfortunately theirs for the taking. A Christian mother, however, is in a wonderful position to share those specifics in ways that communicate her love for her daughter, God's sovereign anointing on her life, and what the Bible actually says about those crucial topics.

And don't we want to see young lives anchored in God's truth regarding the most important issues they'll face?

Even with that goal in mind, it's all too easy to get caught up in our day-to-day tasks and lose sight of the fact that our children are entering adolescence right under our noses. It's also tempting to allow discomfort or embarrassment to get in the way when it comes to speaking intentionally with our kids about how their bodies are changing, what pressures and temptations they might face in the coming years, and how they can remain true to God's calling even during the turbulent teen years.

Through the counsel set forth in this book, Robin places a loving arm around your shoulders and shows you how to chart a course that will lead to fruitful, uplifting talks and memories that both you and your daughter will treasure for years to come. She presents a beautiful vision to mothers who want to have crucial and relationship-building conversations with their daughters as they embark on the journey toward womanhood. What's more, she reminds her readers that just as every girl is unique, so is every mom—and that's perfectly okay!

Focus on the Family has counted it a privilege to partner with Robin over the years by publishing her Christy Miller and Sierra Jensen series—and now the book you hold in your hands. In fact, *Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman* should hit shelves nearly thirty-five years to the day after the debut of the very first Christy Miller novel! For three-and-a-half decades Robin has impacted the hearts and lives of young readers with inspiring spiritual and moral lessons from her fictional characters. Now she's coming alongside moms (some of whom devoured her novels during their own childhoods!) with wisdom and encouragement as they steer their daughters toward godly adulthood.

So take a deep breath, pull up a comfortable chair, and enjoy Robin's down-to-earth advice, practical tips, and heartwarming anecdotes. I'm confident you and your daughter will reap benefits that will pay eternal dividends!

Jim Daly

PRESIDENT, FOCUS ON THE FAMILY

a note from my grown daughter

When my own mother, Robin, asked me to write this note, I realized that I am always asking, “How do I do this?” Like many of my friends, I search for relevant information on mommy forums. I call on my mom friends, and I scour social media posts aimed at moms like me.

Guiding a tween daughter into womanhood is one of the hardest “How do I do this?” questions. “How do I explain to my daughter the ways that her body will soon be changing?”

Most of all, I love looking to God’s Word when it comes to answering these heart cries of motherhood. One of my favorite examples of preparing a woman for a pivotal moment in her life occurs in the book of Esther:

Before a young woman’s turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with

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oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

ESTHER 2:12-13

As we think about this topic, it's good to remember that no two women are exactly the same. Think about your mom friends who have different parenting styles, beauty routines, and lifestyles. Their individual lives are "prescribed" for them, and each of them is different. Indeed, this book allows you to see different options and read a variety of examples about how *you* might guide *your* daughter into womanhood. There is no one right answer.

Mothers are masters of gleaning. By taking in various words of advice, scanning online forums, and then pouring out our own hearts, we come up with what seems right and good.

When I was in fifth grade, I experienced my own "Esther moment." I put on my best dress and entered our family's living room feeling like I was one of the many princesses I had watched float down grand staircases on television and in films.

I understood that this was not a Taco Tuesday or Bible study night. This event was for me alone. My mother had made the house feel special with candles and music. The next hour was filled with yummy food, delicately clear conversation, and even spa-like treatments.

By the end of the evening, I was filled with innocent wonder and excitement regarding my next chapter, my entry into womanhood. My mother had given me the tools I needed to

be prepared for that moment that comes each month, but there was so much more to our time together: My mom opened a door for me that, for previous generations, had been locked tight. We *celebrated* me becoming a woman rather than viewing the transition as some dark secret that was taboo to even mention.

That special evening changed me forever. My mother became someone I could trust with my secrets on an even deeper level. Before that time, I had kept quiet about many of life's questions instead of opening up and sharing my heart. But now I knew that my mother would listen before she spoke and that her arms were always open to me.

Looking back now, I see how much that time taught me about God. How He wants me to share my heart. How He wants me to celebrate who He created me to be, rather than feeling confused or even ashamed about myself. How He wants me to value His wisdom over my own.

As women, we have a deep desire to celebrate each other. Graduations, bridal parties, bachelorette parties, and baby showers bring us together to celebrate big moments and ring in new seasons. In the years since that evening with my mom, I have leaned on my experience of being celebrated into womanhood to help other young girls celebrate their womanhood. I believe that welcoming a tween into womanhood deserves the same level of preparation and excitement as any new season on the horizon.

With that in mind, I invite you to dive into this book and explore how you might celebrate your daughter's entrance into

before your tween daughter becomes a woman

a pivotal season. I suggest that you take a few deep, cleansing breaths first. Prepare your heart for all the questions that might arise. Prepare yourself for the tears of possible pain from your past, and for the tears of joy that come with changing a young woman's future for the better.

May you be filled with pure excitement as you celebrate with your daughter her journey into womanhood.

Rachel Schwartz



“a daughter’s wish”

Come to me when my heart is young

I want you, Mom, to be the one

Who reveals the mysteries

Of what is to come

When my heart is still young.

ROBIN JONES GUNN



CHAPTER 1

hello, beautiful reader

All the signs are there, aren't they? Your daughter is changing, and each day seems to propel her closer to puberty. How did she grow up so quickly?

You want this change to be a positive experience for her. You want her to feel good about herself and her body. But how can you do that? How can you speak wisdom and encouragement into her life when all she wants to do is be alone in her room?

I see you. I know what you're feeling. I applaud you for being intentional about entering into this new season of her life and seeking ways to make it a good experience.

This book will help you to create significant, positive moments with your daughter. You'll find ideas on how to connect with her in ways that will profoundly deepen your relationship and bond the two of you together in the years ahead.

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This is your chance to make a sacred fuss over her.

Don't pull back. It doesn't matter how you ended up in the role of "mom" in her life, whether by birth or another happy blessing. The undeniable fact is that you are the most important voice in her coming-of-age story. Even if your input seems unwanted right now, what she will remember years from now is that you cared enough to make this milestone comfortable and affirming for her.

You can do this. You really can.

Why I Care

When my daughter was maturing, I asked friends for ideas on how they marked their own daughters' journeys into womanhood. A few of them shared personal stories about how things had played out with their own daughters, but only a few had suggestions on how to enter this season in a positive way.

I was determined to celebrate the change. So, knowing how much my little girl loved tea parties, music, and dance, I planned a Welcome to Womanhood party for Rachel. Simple, sweet, cozy, and intimate. Just what she liked. The party was a success, and soon other moms asked me what I'd done. I was invited to discuss the subject at women's events and on radio programs. I even wrote a gift book titled *Gentle Passages: Guiding Your Daughter into Womanhood*.

That book eventually went out of print, but the requests kept coming from moms of preteen girls. They wanted an updated book that gave more direction and advice. Many of the young moms who wrote to me had grown up reading my

Christy Miller novels and were looking for mentoring advice now that their daughters were entering their teen years.

I knew I needed to write a new book. This book. So I brought up the topic on social media. The flood of responses surprised me. I heard from women all over the world. Some of the stories brought me to tears due to the pain of those women's journeys into adolescence. Others made me smile at their creativity. I've drawn from and combined excerpts of those responses in the "Dear Robin . . ." sections at the end of each chapter.

I also discovered something interesting about you, dear mothers everywhere. I learned that as you watch your daughter enter the springtime of her life, you're aware that you are also moving further along into the summer of your days. Certain patterns have been established. Certain relationships haven't changed. Old hurts sometimes bubble to the surface. Complicated feelings rise in you along with the elevated hormones in your daughter.

Why do some things about her suddenly bother you so much? How did the interactions between you become so messy? What happened to the sweet and silly girl who used to make you laugh? Why is she now glaring at you, and why do you want to say things to her that you never imagined would come out of your mouth?

Both of you are changing. At the same time.

Physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually—it's a tsunami of change. Premenopausal meets preadolescence is no joke.

That's why I've included some chapters in this book specifically for you, focused on what you need as you head into this

next season as a woman and a mother. I knew it wasn't enough to write a book that simply tossed a bunch of creative projects at you. The idea wasn't to give you lots of new pictures to post on social media. I wanted to help you prepare for the next season in ways that are life-giving for you, as well as for your daughter. When you are at your best, when your heart is full and at peace, you will have an abundance of everything you need to give to your daughter.

A Sacred Celebration

Giving out of abundance is much different from going through the motions of “the talk” just so you can check this foreboding task off the list and be able to say that you did what was expected of you.

You are initiating one of many valuable conversations with your daughter. You are building a bridge that the two of you can use many times in the years ahead to journey back and forth into each other's lives. Gaining access to her heart and opening yours to her starts now.

You are not having “the talk.” You are starting a conversation.

I hope you understand that *Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman* is not designed to be handed to a young girl. This book is for *you*—the mom or stepmom, the dad, the mentor, the sister, the aunt, or the grandmother—to equip you to be proactive in a young girl's life and to instill in her coming-of-age transition a sense of the sacred as well as the celebration.

Have you ever noticed that it's nearly impossible to separate a daughter from her mother? No matter what your relationship is like, no matter how many issues or miles or other people come between the two of you in the years ahead, an invisible thread will always connect you. If you have the mom role in a young girl's life, it's critical for you to be present and tuned in so she knows that you want to bond with her.

Your daughter might be an early blossoming girl, or she might be a late bloomer. Watch for the signs. Are her emotions becoming more elevated—more quickly and intensely expressed? Is the pigmented area around her nipples beginning to enlarge? Is she experiencing a growth spurt or sprouting sparse pubic hair? Does she need to start using deodorant and do a better job of washing her face?

We've all heard that girls are physically maturing earlier with each generation. That's why I chose to initiate the important conversations with my daughter as soon as some of these physical indicators appeared. She was almost ten years old, and I didn't want to stall or wait too long. I didn't want to somehow miss the golden opportunity to be the first one in her young life to address these unavoidable topics. More than that, I wanted to plan a special celebration that would speak to her in her love language.

My daughter, Rachel, whose note appeared at the beginning of the book, is now married with children of her own. Our close relationship is one of my most treasured gifts. We've both had to work on our communication, and we've both had plenty of do-overs. Grace upon grace has brought us to where we are today, and I'm so grateful. I asked Rachel for her input on this

book, and what she suggested was golden. She added touches of beauty, just as she does in all areas of her life.

Rachel and I both look back and see that her Welcome to Womanhood party helped establish a structure and pattern for our relationship that was far more valuable than either of us realized at the time. That was the day when we laid the foundation for the friendship we both cherish today.

I believe that you can have the same bridge-building experience.

All Moms Are Included

I want you to know that even if your own childhood was bumpy, this book can help equip you now. If your relationship with your daughter isn't all you dreamed it would be, this book can help change its trajectory. And if you already have a good relationship with your daughter, you can still improve it by making this transition time in her life a lovely and *honoring* experience.

Before Your Tween Daughter Becomes a Woman will undoubtedly find its way into the hands of many moms, step-moms, grandmas, aunts, sisters, mentors, counselors, and even some dads. Please know that I am including all of you when the term *mom* appears on these pages. And think of the “daughter” referred to throughout the book as any young girl who has been entrusted to you. Your role as the mother figure in her life, regardless of how you came into that position, gives you the opportunity to serve as one of the clearest, truest, most loving voices in her life. She needs to be able to trust you rather than look anywhere else for the wisdom she needs and longs to hear.

Other sources can offer input and provide details about how her body will soon change. Some already have. Many voices—the internet, books, teachers, and even her peers—will provide information. But will any of them speak the powerful words of affirmation that she desperately needs? Will any of them celebrate her? Will any of them elevate and honor her? Likely not. *That* privilege lies with you.

You are the one who can best bring a sense of the sacred to this natural passage from childhood to womanhood.

And I'm excited to show you how.

Dear Robin . . .

When you asked what our experience was like when we were about to enter puberty, I started crying at the memory. My first period came when I was at school, and it showed on my jeans. Some of the girls made fun of me, but one of them said she'd go with me to the nurse's office. I didn't know what was happening, but the nurse said it was normal and that I shouldn't be afraid.

The nurse gave me some pads and a booklet. She told me to talk to my mother when I got home. The problem was that I lived with my dad, and when I told him, he didn't know what to do. He gave me some money and drove me to the store. While he waited in the car, I walked down the aisle and tried to figure out which box I needed. I was shaking when I went through the checkout line and thought everyone was staring at me.

My daughter is only five, but I am determined to

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make things easier for her. I would love for you to help me understand how it can be a positive experience—or even, as you said, a chance to create a celebration for her. Thank you for helping us young moms do it differently for our girls.

Start Now

What are some ways you might put the ideas from this chapter into action? What portions of the chapter stood out to you?

Here are some possible points of action:

- Make a note of any subtle changes you see in your daughter’s body, and watch for more.
- Talk to her father about what’s to come and get him on board with how you want this transition to be a positive experience.
- If you’re a stepmother, sister, aunt, grandmother, or other influential woman, evaluate if you should talk to the other mom/women in the life of your tween girl so that you can all be united. She will appreciate the combined affirmation.

Notes
