



Tips for Parents: The Tween Years

If your child is between the ages of 10 and 12, they're a preteen, or a "tween." They're beginning to enter puberty and show interest in some aspects of teen culture. But they also may still play with toys and hold on to comforts from their earlier years, such as bedtime rituals. Like the teen years, the tween years require an understanding of your child's changing emotional and physical needs.

The "P" Word

Puberty begins during the tween years—usually a bit earlier for girls than boys. Both boys and girls begin to grow more body hair; especially in their armpits and genital areas. Oil glands kick in producing oiler skin and hair, and sometimes acne. Boys may start to develop facial hair and their voices may start to deepen. Girls begin to develop breasts and most start their periods between the ages of 11 and 14.

If you haven't already, talk with your child about the changes their body will be going through. Reassure them that the changes they're seeing are normal, and let them know that you're available to answer any questions they might have.

This is also the time to have a more in depth conversation about sexuality. Make sure your child understands reproduction, sexual intercourse and other sexual behaviors, sexually transmitted diseases, and birth control. A couple of resources you may find helpful are:

- [Sexual Development and Reproduction](#)
- [Parents' Sex Ed Center](#)
- [Sex, Etc](#) –a Sex Ed site for tweens and teens. We recommend parents review the content of this site before recommending it to their child.

Giving your tween the facts about these issues is not the same as giving them permission to engage in sexual behaviors at this early age. Give them the information, and also include your feelings, expectations, and rules. Be sure to give them a chance to share their feelings and ask questions.

Changing Emotions

Tweens are at a transitional stage in their lives. They may accuse you of treating them like a baby, and the next minute, want to cuddle up and read a book with you. This back and forth, inconsistent behavior is typical of the tween years, and you should try to remain patient and flexible as your child sends you mixed messages about how they want to be treated.

Their hormones are also kicking in, and they may experience mood swings, sadness, or irritability. This is also normal, and it can be difficult both for the child experiencing it and for family members having to live with it. Try to minimize it as much as possible by encouraging good nutrition, plenty of sleep (tweens and teens need 9-11 hours of sleep), and exercise. If your child becomes depressed for more than two weeks (symptoms of depression include sadness, lack of interest in activities they usually enjoy, weight loss or weight gain, or a sudden change in sleep patterns), consult your physician.

More Responsibility

Your tween will likely ask for more independence, and may push you to allow them to do things older teens are doing. Make the rules clear, and be consistent in enforcing them. As your child displays more responsibility by doing chores without being reminded, doing well in school, and following rules, you should consider gradually and appropriately increasing their responsibility and independence. Continue

to supervise them and protect them from obvious dangers, but also give them the opportunity to make smaller mistakes they can learn from.

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