



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of sixth grade students

Managing Emotions and Independence

Around age 11, youngsters begin to express a need for independence. The preteen continues to be emotionally dependent, but total acceptance and blind faith in their parents are not as likely as they were in earlier childhood.

Preteens are undergoing social conflicts because they are trying to please parents, friends and teachers all at the same time. Some of the emotional turmoil preteens experience may be expressed through increased anger or rebellion directed toward parents and other adults.

Preteen anger usually occurs when children encounter some situation they cannot control or that does not come out as they expected. They are angered and frustrated by events that upset their routine or their plan. Their thinking often is self-focused rather than being considerate of others. This pattern may remind you of your child at age 2 and their first phase of trying to become independent.

Preteens and Independence

Home can be the greatest source of rebellion for preteens. They do not want to overthrow their parents; they simply want to believe they are competent to do many things without their parents help.

Avoid taking expressions of anger or moments of rebellion personally. Usually, preteens will show occasional flashes of anger or frustration even though they are generally positive and responsible. Preteens are trying to sort out the fact that their anger is about something they can't control, not necessarily with you personally.

Preteens need guidance and support. Allow them to make independent choices whenever possible. When a choice is not possible, many alternatives and their consequences should be considered. With independence comes responsibility. Preteens must associate the right to do something with responsible behavior on their part.

Preteens need more love than harshness, more positive than negative feelings, more encouragement to do things on their own than parental control, more guidance than indulgence and more hugs than "I told you so" statements.



Preteens need more love than harshness.



Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Try a new and healthy recipe each week with your family. Research it, shop for it, prepare it and rate it. Would you make it again? How would you change it?

Some preteens are uncomfortable with public displays of affection. Some parents stop giving their preteens hugs and kisses. Growing children still need your love and affection. Appropriate nonpublic hugs and kisses rarely are rejected. Even if you haven't always had this type of relationship with your child, it's never too late to start. Let preteens know you love them and express this support with affection.

Tips on Helping Preteens With Anger

Adults are a common target for anger as they seek to set and enforce limits around everything from household rules to cell phones, screen time, traveling with sports teams, sleepovers, summer camp, makeup and pierced ears. Here are a few tips to use in helping preteens with anger:

- Parents need to ask themselves, "Why do I object to my child doing this?" Is it because what they want to do is potentially unhealthy for the child or because you just don't want to give permission? Are you sometimes afraid that the more independent children become, the more you will lose control? **Total control can lead to open rebellion.**
- "Because I said so" just won't work with a preteen. **Consider conditions that you could agree to on an issue of contention and discuss them with your child.** Whether it's a certain age for these "rites of passage" (such as being able to have a cell phone) or a skill level or a proof of ability, letting your child know when they can look forward to a particular privilege is fair.
- This age group is likely to express frustration verbally with sarcastic remarks and sulkiness. They also may fight, kick, hit and slam doors. Whereas parents would like angry children to think and speak rationally, some adults don't always seem to display such control either. **Learn to handle your own bouts of anger in a controlled manner,** avoid put-downs and model how to cool down and communicate when you are calmer.
- **Thinking a person never should get angry is unrealistic,** whether that person is 11 or 42. The goal should be to teach preteens to express anger in appropriate ways, not to eliminate it. You might say, "It's OK to be angry, but it's not OK to slam doors." Or, after a cooling-down period, engage your child in a discussion of what happened, why and what could be done next time to handle the situation more effectively.



- **Activities that can help vent frustration or anger include physical exercise:** biking, walking, dancing and room cleaning; creative endeavors such as painting and playing an instrument; and mental exercises, including writing or drawing about how the child feels.

Parenting From a Distance?

If you work or live away from your children, you have the added challenge of figuring out how to build meaningful connections. Generally speaking, being available when your child needs to talk is best, but that is not always possible. Setting aside a time each day or week for conversation is a useful key to staying involved in the lives of your children. **Make the commitment to really be emotionally present for those conversations.**

Shorter and more frequent communications, whether by text, email or phone, may be better than waiting for longer periods of time and trying to catch up with a lot of news, scheduled events or emotions.



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