

Why the tween years are a 'golden opportunity' to set up the way you parent teenagers

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The teenage years can be among the trickiest times for a parent. You have been used to being your child's voice of reason. Then, all of a sudden, your authority is challenged by their peers, social media and huge developmental changes.

But the good news is children aged ten to 12 are still [more influenced](#) by their parents than their friends.

This makes it the ideal time for parents to establish parenting practices that will set the tone for when their [child](#) crosses over into adolescence.

Our research

In a [recent study](#), colleagues and I looked at the perspectives, needs and behaviors of 2,600 Victorian parents.

This was part of a study, run every three years, which aims to build a better understanding of parenting today.

A key finding was parents of teenagers reported they were less confident about their parenting than parents of younger children.

Parents of teenagers also reported greater levels of concern about their children's behavior, including how to manage their child's use of technology. Parents of teens were less likely to use positive discipline methods they had previously used such as praise and rewards for good behavior.

They also said they felt as though there was less support for parenting [teenage children](#) (as opposed to younger ones). This may leave parents feeling under-prepared to guide their child through the many developmental changes that take place during adolescence.

The teenage years

Physical and emotional changes during the teenage years are [widely understood](#). But young people also typically go through [significant](#)

[changes](#) in the years before their 13th birthday, which some call the "tweens." And this can challenge a parents' relationship with their kids.

On top of the start of puberty, tweens can face additional expectations within the home, have to navigate the move to [high school](#), and deal with increasing use of technology and social media.

Between ten and 12, a child starts to develop new behaviors, attitudes and preferences, which can challenge the way a parent has previously parented. Increasing interest in bodily changes and sexuality starts to emerge. As can the demands for more freedoms to interact with the world without parents being present.

Parents are more likely to see a pre-teen misbehaving as a deliberate act rather than just a developmental issue. Consequently, parents may be more likely to react negatively to their pre-teen, rather than trying to understand why they are behaving like this.

The tween opportunity

Bearing in mind, children will still listen to their parents over their friends from ten to 12, the tween years present a golden opportunity to set up good parenting practices for the teenage years.

In the pre-teen years, parents can make small adjustments to their parenting style to retain what works, but also acknowledge their child's new maturity.

Positive attention, praise and rewards for good behavior will still work, but need to be age-appropriate. This might mean having a friend over as a reward rather than a sticker on a star chart.

Rules and boundaries are also still important, but perhaps you can set

them more in partnership with the child, to build trust and to set up patterns for positive communication down the track.

Maintaining strong, open and two-way communication with your tween is vital. Your ability to model cool negotiation and constructive conflict management will be pivotal in helping your tween and future young adult do the same.

Taking a breath or counting to five in your head before reacting to something you don't like (something your child has said or done) gives you the space to think through a more constructive response. It also allows your child time to pause and consider the impact of their behavior or words.

Staying connected and building mutual trust will help you both to navigate the murky waters of your child's need for privacy and your need for assurance of their safety. Ensure you carve out time in your day to just sit and talk. You could ask your child about the most exciting part of their day. Or get their opinion on what to have for dinner this week.

These positive conversations are like money in the bank—investments that can be drawn upon later when more serious conversations are needed about trickier things like going out with friends or sexuality.

More support earlier on

The pre-teen period is often overlooked when it comes to parenting. Yet, it is a golden opportunity to better support parents when their children are going through significant developmental changes.

If [parents](#) are supported to adapt their parenting and communication style they can build a [strong relationship](#) with their tween and grow alongside their children. This will then help them navigate the

fascinating, unique and important [teenage years](#) ahead.

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