

## SIGNS OF A PROBLEM

If your tween is doing any of the following for **two weeks or more**:

- Worry or anxiety
- Sadness or loss of interest in hobbies
- Defiance or aggression
- Low self-esteem
- Sudden changes in eating patterns

### Other warning signs:

- Fighting
- Cruelty to animals
- Talking about death or suicide
- Refusal to go to school may indicate a problem with bullying



## HOW TO HELP AND GET HELP

- Talk with your child about your concerns
- Talk to your tween's teacher, the school counselor, your child's doctor or nurse practitioner, and/or a local mental health agency
- Call 211 to find local mental health services

### What if My Child Mentions Suicide?

- Take it seriously and talk with your child
- Ask if your child has a plan
- If your child has a plan, talk to a health professional IMMEDIATELY!
- You can reach a health professional by:
  - Suicide Hotline
    - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
  - 24/7 Mental Health Hotline
    - 1-800-854-7771
  - Go to the nearest Emergency Room



## PARENT AND CHILD RESOURCES

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)  
[www.brightfutures.org](http://www.brightfutures.org)  
[www.fv-impact.org](http://www.fv-impact.org)  
[www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org)  
[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)  
<http://www.safekids.com/kids-rules-for-online-safety/>

*Helping Your Child Through Early Adolescence* by the U.S. Department of Education.

*How to Take the Grrrr Out of Anger (Laugh & Learn)* by Elizabeth Verdick

*Getting to Calm: Cool-Headed Strategies for Parenting Tweens + Teens* by Laura S. Kastner

*How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber



*The Leader in Pediatric Education for Nurse Practitioners*  
Developmental-Behavioral and Mental Health  
Special Interest Group (DBMH SIG)

# Raising A Healthy Tween-Ager



## MOST PARENTS WOULD AGREE THAT RAISING A MIDDLE SCHOOL CHILD CAN BE CHALLENGING

Children undergo dramatic physical, emotional, and mental changes between early childhood and the teenage years. These rapid changes make it difficult for them to be a “tween.” They also put the tween at higher risk for developing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and thoughts about suicide. These behaviors affect relationships with their parents and frequently cause problems. These problems may decrease the tween’s self-esteem and increase agitation and depression. Many parents are left wondering what they can do...

Research shows that these problems may be prevented or reduced by teaching parents about normal “tween-age” development, warning signs of a problem, and how to get help early.



PLEASE SEE PARENT AND CHILD  
RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION...

## NORMAL DEVELOPMENT

### Physical

Girls begin puberty between 8 -13 years old and boys between 10-15 years old. The age of puberty can vary greatly, and can cause stress for your tween if it is earlier or later. Tweens can be extremely self-conscious about changes in their physical development, including body hair, body odor, acne, size of their breasts, and change in their voice.

Your child will experience rapid physical growth, but it may not occur evenly. For example, the left side may grow faster than the right. This uneven growth often makes tweens clumsy and influences activities, abilities, and views of him/herself.

### Mental

This is a phase of rapid brain growth and restructuring. These changes in the brain allow the tween to develop self-identity. In trying to learn about who they are, tweens often behave differently than what the parent is used to. For example, they may speak, dress, or show emotions differently. It is common for tweens to act one way with their parents and another way with their friends. This is a normal part of creating self-identity. During this phase, they often worry about their self-image, the world, and their relationships.

### Emotional

As brains and bodies grow, so do hormones. This affects emotions and how they are expressed. Emotions are often exaggerated and “mood swings” are common. This may be confusing to parents and can lead to arguments and mis-understandings.

## WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Talk with your child about puberty and the changes that will happen to his or her body, mind, and feelings.
- Reassure your child that differences in growth rates are normal.
- Try not to joke about your child’s clumsiness, awkwardness, or emotions.
- Provide love and attention by using daily kind words, tone, and gestures.
- Make family mealtimes a priority.
- Encourage your child to try new activities, hobbies, or sports to help develop new skills.
- Recognize, praise, and reward good effort and behaviors.
- Create opportunities to talk with your tween with kindness and respect.
- Allow independence, little by little...
- Provide structure and guidance; set limits, and be clear about your expectations.
- When setting limits, discuss with your child that their health and safety come first.
- Talk with your child about internet safety, sexuality, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- Be your tween’s role model.
- Remember that this is only a phase. Breathe and take care of yourself. Your tween will copy your behaviors.

