



Parenting the tween years

Reflection guide

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Overview

- To understand the developmental issues of children at this stage
- To develop strategies to cope with these challenges
- Communicate expectations
- Learn how to keep the conversation alive
- Responsibility and Independence vs. Identity and morality: exiting babyhood and entering the teens

Key takeaways



Main points:



Learning insights:



What areas do I need to improve on?



My action plan:

The Purpose of parenting

“The purpose of parenting is to protect and prepare our children to survive and thrive in the kind of society in which they live.”

In other words, parenting is about preparing our children for success in the fast-paced, multicultural, high-tech and democratic society we live in.

Responsibility & independence

Children start to want independence at an early age. Parents need to find a balance between letting their children do things for themselves and providing support and guidance. The key is “freedom within limits”.

Stimulate your child’s sense of responsibility and independence with these ideas:

- **Avoid pampering:** Let your child do things for themselves as their age and ability allows. Encourage your child to make decisions. This includes self-care (brushing their teeth, tying shoelaces), family chores (setting the table, cleaning their room), getting themselves up in the morning, etc. In short, not doing for them on a regular basis what they can do for themselves.
- **Don’t overprotect:** The idea here is that as much as we may want to, we can’t protect our kids from the bumps, bruises and even stitches of childhood. If we try to, we may stifle their sense of independence. Adversity can help children develop ‘emotional muscles’ that they will need to survive and thrive in life. For example, you can talk to other parents in your neighbourhood about what’s reasonably safe in your community and allow your child the appropriate freedom.

Children & chores

One way of teaching your children to be responsible is by giving your children chores to do – this also allows them to be productive members of the family. Here are some tips:

1. Start early. The earlier you can get your children in the habit of helping out and contributing, the better.
2. Choose age-appropriate chores for your children and change them as they mature. For example, don’t ask your 6 year old to take out the garbage – maybe they can help with pairing up socks.

3. Get children involved with the process of choosing which chores to do! This will encourage your child and give the feeling of self-importance.
4. Teach one chore at a time.
5. Break the chore down into small tasks. The encouragement of experiencing many small successes along the way is vital to your child's motivation to continue.
6. Demonstrate the chore. Children learn a lot by watching, so demonstrate each step. But be careful not to say how easy it is. It may be easy for us, but that just makes your child feel bad when he has trouble doing what you just said was easy.
7. Explain the purpose of the chores.
8. Encourage effort as well as results. Provide lots of praise! Your words of encouragement will make your child feel good about themselves, their progress and you. Also, when you speak positively, you feel better about your child and about your own parenting, so it's a win-win.
9. Ask politely with firm reminders if necessary.

Communication

One of the most important factors of any relationship is communication and it certainly holds true for the parent-child relationship. As parents, we have the dual responsibility of developing our own communication skills as well as helping our child develop theirs. There are four aspects of communication with your children that you should consider:

Communication roadblocks: any word, tone of voice, or body language that influences a person to end the communication. Examples: being too commanding, giving advice right away, minimizing the situation "everything will be ok", being judgmental "that wasn't a very smart thing to do", sarcasm, being a know-it-all, etc.

Active listening: a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. It means:

- giving your full attention, (get down to child's eye level if possible)
- keeping your own talk to a minimum,
- keeping the focus on your child's problem
- acknowledging what you're hearing: asking clarifying questions, words of encouragement like "I see" or even "uh-huh" and summarizing what you hear them telling you.
- Make solid eye contact

Responding to feelings, not just content: look for the feelings behind the words, and relate them back to your child. When you can identify what your child is feeling and

relate it back to her, you let her know that what she is feeling really does matter. When we respond to a child's feeling and get it right, it's amazing what happens – the child may nod her head and continue to share her feelings! If we don't get it right, the child has an opportunity to correct us. Either way, the communication is enhanced.

Looking at alternatives and consequences: As parents, it's our responsibility to have our children think about the consequences of their decisions before they make them. When you and your child are talking about a problem they may be experiencing, you should ask your child to let you know what decision she is going to make to solve their problem. Let your child know that she doesn't have to make a decision right away, but when she thinks of a solution, for her to share it with you. When this happens, and you recognize that it may not be the best course of action, ask questions like:

- What do you think will happen if you try that?
- What else could you try?
- What do you think you can do to improve things?

A few other points:

- Your children always need to have their feelings accepted and respected, even when you don't see things the same way.
- Showing a positive attitude towards a child is as important as the words you speak.
- When children are hurt or upset, the last thing they want to hear is advice or someone else's point of view.
- Use self-control when you become upset at a situation to avoid saying something hurtful. This will be teaching your child to handle being upset in ways that do not hurt others.

Discipline

Understanding why your child misbehaves:

They are getting something out of it. Understand what the 'payoff' is for their bad behaviour.

Using polite requests, "I" messages and firm reminders. For example, if your child is speaking disrespectfully to you, you can sit him down and say:

- I have a problem with... you using that tone with me.
- I feel... angry when you use it.
- Because... it's disrespectful and I don't talk to you that way.
- I would like for you to... talk to me respectfully.

'Firm Reminder'. Use this if polite requests and "I" messages aren't working.

The problem: Your child has ignored your request to make his bed and is playing a games

- Firm reminder: "James.. bed.. now."
- The problem: Your child is beginning to yell at you.
- Firm reminder: "Karen, lower your voice, now."

There will be cases where polite requests and "I" messages aren't going to do the trick and you have to get tougher with your kids. In these cases, use a "firm reminder" – the idea is basically to tell them in as few words as possible what you want them to do. One way to remember this rule is the acronym "KISS" – Keep it Short and Simple. By using a firm tone of voice and keeping it short and simple you get through to them before they have a chance to tune you out. For example:

The problem: Your child has ignored your request to make his bed and is playing a video game.

- Firm reminder: "James.. bed.. now."
- The problem: Your child is beginning to yell at you.
- Firm reminder: "Karen, lower your voice, now."

Logical consequences vs. punishment:

Often, as parents, we tend to react to our kids' misbehaviour and dole out a punishment that we think is appropriate. For example, we might tell our child to go upstairs and sit in their room when they've made a mess in the living room. This approach works sometimes to get the results you want and often it doesn't.

An alternative discipline method is called "logical consequences" and the difference is that the consequence of a misbehaviour is logically linked to the misbehaviour itself. In our previous example, rather than sending our child away, we could ask them to clean up after themselves. This has a direct connection with their misbehaviour, rather than sitting in their room which has no connection. Once we connect the consequences, kids are more likely to see the justice in *our* actions and they also learn to be responsible for the consequences of *their* actions.

The FLAC method for discipline

Feelings:

Acknowledge their feelings. Example: "I can hear how much you'd like to stay up late and watch that TV show tonight..."

Limits:

Don't say "Because I said so", say "because this is what's necessary for the situation". Example: "... but you need *to* get nine hours of sleep so you'll be rested for school tomorrow, stay healthy and keep growing".

Alternative:

Give your child the power of choice. Example: "How about if I record the TV show for you and you can watch it tomorrow after dinner and homework?"

Consequences:

If the child continues to misbehave, a logical consequence is called for. Example: "I really understand that you want to stay up late tonight and watch your TV show but I don't want you to go to bed late and be tired for school tomorrow. So, you can either go to bed right now and I'll record it for you or you can keep arguing with me and miss it altogether. It's your choice."

Consistency & following through:

Consistency is the “backbone” to discipline because it shows the child you’re serious:

- Be consistent in your expectations of your children
- Be consistent with the consequences of their behaviour, both positive and negative
- Have an agreement with your spouse to parent consistently

Encourage positive behaviour

Tell them what you like... “I like that you are helping out with chores around the house.”

Say how you feel... “I feel good knowing that you responded to my request and that I can count on your help.”

Tell them why... “because as a family, we all have to do our part and help each other.”

Offer to do something for your child – keep it simple. Keep it logical and more like a celebration and win/win than a reward... “Since you’ve been so helpful to me, is there anything I can do to help you?”

Web resources

- Invest in Kids – www.investinkids.ca
- Kinder Start - www.kinderstart.com
- Child Development Info - www.childdevelopmentinfo.com
- Child & Family Canada - www.cfc-efc.ca
- BC Council for Families - www.bccf.bc.ca
- Canadian Institute of Child Health - www.cich.ca

Exercises:

Tween parents' self evaluation

1. What is the most enjoyable aspect of parenting your 'tween child?

2. What is the most frustrating aspect of parenting at this stage of your child's development?

3. How would you describe your current role as a tween parent?

4. What aspect(s) of your child's life requires your current attention?

Exercise: Identify your communication roadblocks

From the communication roadblocks listed on the right, identify the three you think you use most often. List them below and then write what your intention is when you use them. Finally, think of what type of negative message you are sending your child that turns off the communication:

Communication roadblocks:

- Commanding: “What you should do is..”
- Giving Advice: “What don’t you..”
- Placating: “Everything will be ok..”
- Interrogating: “What did you say to her to...?”
- Distracting: “Let’s not worry about it”
- Psychologizing: “Why do you think you did that?”
- Being judgmental: “That wasn’t a smart thing to do
- Sarcasm: “This must be the end of the world!”
- Moralizing: “You really should..”

Roadblock	My good intention	My negative message
Block 1		
Block 2		
Block 3		

Next, look for opportunities this week when talking to your child to catch yourself before you use these communication blocks. Write those down and if you were successful in avoiding the block, write what you said instead:

Situation	Communication block	What you said instead

Exercise: Improve your active listening skills

The goal of this exercise is to really engage your child in a brief conversation. Try asking a simple question like “What did you do at school today?” Make sure you try to do this at a convenient time for both of you. Be sure to convey your interest and enthusiasm! After your talk, write down your answers to the following questions:

What did you like about how the talk went?

Was your child resistant to talking? If so, how did you overcome your child's resistance?

What would you do differently next time?

Exercise: Responding to feelings, not just content

Engage your child in a brief conversation. Look for opportunities to identify what your child is feeling and reflect it back to him or her. Use tentative language, e.g. “I guess you were...” or “It sounds like you felt...”. This way it is easier for your child to correct you if needed. Write down some of the feeling words and phrases you used and how your child seemed to respond to what you said:

Feeling word	What you said	What your child responds
Frustrated	You sound like you're pretty angry. I guess this is quite frustrating for you.	Tim agreed that he was having a difficult time dealing with his friend.

Exercise: Alternatives & consequences

In this exercise, we are going to try using the 'palms up' approach. Find a time to talk with your child about a problem that he owns. Listen actively and respond to her feelings. Then at one point, look at your child gently and turn your palms up while saying something like "I don't know what you want to do here, but I'd like to help you think about your choices. What do you think you might do?" Turning your palms up towards your child is a symbolic gesture meaning that the decision power sits with the child. This allows you to influence your child's decision process without 'taking it over'. After your conversation, evaluate how it went:

What did you like about how the conversation went?

How did your child respond to the 'palms up' message?

What will you do differently next time?

