

Empowering Tweens: Information from the Parent/Child Tween Workshop

Presented by Patricia Gallagher, Kathy Opperman, and Genia Silva from Pillars of Light and Love.

The tween years are a time for challenge and transition. It is an ideal time to prepare your child for the teen years and do what you can to make their future journey a little less bumpy. It is the time to make sure they have the tools to address everyday life issues so that they are better equipped for their teen years.

Your child will handle the teen years more successfully if she or he has a healthy self-esteem. Patricia Gallagher, author of 14 books, including The Gift of Believing in Yourself and How to Raise a Happy Child on A Budget, recommends posting small signs in high visibility locations that say, "I am special. I am lovable. I am capable. I am important." If your child sees and hears that message enough, s/he will internalize it.

The tween years are also a good time to for the child to develop a strong sense of who s/he is and what s/he stands for. Gallagher recommends giving the tween a pebble or stone and demonstrating how that stone is so strong it can't be bent. Tell the tween, "Be strong like the stone. Don't let anyone try to bend you or convince you to do something you know you shouldn't do. During the Tween years, children should pursue activities and determine what it is that they enjoy doing. It's a good time to develop hobbies and talents. Tweens should be taught to spend time each day doing something they love. It helps them deal with stress and develop emotional maturity. Gallagher recommends teaching children the following rule, "Do something nice for yourself each day, and do at least one nice thing for someone else each day."

Parents need to understand that children will make mistakes during the tween years, and that's okay. Mistakes are part of life. Everyone makes them, and they are part of learning. Children should be taught, however, to be accountable for their mistakes, especially if their mistakes hurt someone. They need to be taught to say they're sorry and to do what they can to make a situation better. Gallagher recommends giving children erasers and telling them to imagine that they are erasing their mistakes and making things better.

Likewise, tweens need to learn to communicate his/her feelings and to speak up assertively if someone hurts their feelings. They should be discouraged from holding their hurts, disappointments, and perceived failures inside. Talking to a parent, friend, or trusted adult, will help them process their feelings and develop their emotional wellbeing. According to Kathy Opperman,, director of Pillars of Light and Love, a healthy way to teach tweens to deal with emotions is the A-B-C method. **A** stands for **Awareness**. The first step is to be aware of your feelings and to

acknowledge them. For instance, the tween should realize, “I am frustrated.” or “I am angry.” The second step is ***B for Breathe***. The child should take a deep breath from the belly button, not the chest. S/he should inhale deeply and exhale slowly. This should be done a few times. It will help the child calm down a bit and decrease the likelihood that s/he will over-react in the moment. The third step is ***C for Control*** your reaction. The child should figure out, “What can I do right now in this moment that will help the situation?” Learning to use the A-B-C method in the tween years will prepare the child to cope with the stresses of the teen years and potentially reduce the likelihood that s/he will turn to drugs and alcohol as a coping mechanism in the teen years.

Genia Silva, a life coach at the Empowering U Center, encourages tweens to develop an attitude of gratitude. Each day, they think about what they are thankful for. Even if it has been a bad day, they should try to look for something positive that happened that day. They should be taught to be thankful for the things that they have rather than focus on the things that they don't have. Research shows that people who practice gratitude are happier people. Being grateful will help a teen realize that they don't have to have everything other people have, or they don't need to have certain things in order to fit in. The attitude of gratitude helps them withstand peer pressures.