Parenting your Preteen: Tips for Success

CHEO CONNECTS 2012

DR. ANNE-LISE HOLAHAN, C. PSYCH.
Why won’t my preteen listen?!?

1. What is a preteen’s brain capable of?

2. What does “normal” cognitive and emotional development look like in a preteen?

3. How can parents be effective and best respond to preteen’s needs?
The preteen brain
Changes from preschool to high school

(Source: Paul Thompson, PhD, UCLA Laboratory of Neuroimaging; PNAS 2004)
Additional changes in the preteen brain

- more activity in brain area responsible for emotional processing than for logical reasoning -
  - Risk-taking and pleasure-seeking is so appealing!

- growth/change in brain area responsible for coordinating our movements and our thoughts -
  - Preteens are only just starting to perfect these skills!
Cognitive and emotional development

WHAT TO EXPECT IN YOUR PRETEEN
What to expect: Cognitive development

- *Developing* problem-solving skills
  - Consider alternative solutions and their consequences

- *Emerging* executive skills
  - Planning, thinking ahead, organizing, attention, time management, emotional control

- Learning to consider someone else’s viewpoint

- Morality: from simple obedience towards conscience

- Understanding and taking responsibility
What to expect: Emotional development

- Seek independence yet need emotional support
- From family-oriented to peer-oriented
- Strong need to be accepted by peers
- Fearful of making mistakes or being embarrassed
- Struggle to keep feelings in check instead of acting on them (e.g. anger)
- Rewarding things feel more rewarding
Guiding your preteen towards success

A PARENT’S GUIDE TO AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING
Your **starting** point...

Nurturing, trusting, supportive, respectful relationship
Parents: where are you?

High demandingness

Authoritarian

Authoritative

Low responsiveness

Neglectful

Permissive

Low demandingness

(based on Baumrind, and on Maccoby and Martin)
Authoritarian parenting

- firm control over child
- coercive discipline techniques (e.g. threats, physical punishment)
- little verbal exchange
- low responsiveness to child’s needs

Effects on preteen –

- low self-esteem
- aggressive (boys)
- dependent (girls)
- weak sense of independence
- poorer communication skills
- poorer moral reasoning
### Permissive parenting

- sets few limits on child
- allows child to make own decisions
- moderately nurturing

### Effects on preteen –

- low self-control
- weak social responsibility
- weak sense of independence
- tends to expect to get what he/she wants
# Neglectful parenting

- few demands on child
- lack of boundaries in home
- indifferent, dismissive of child’s needs
- show little love or affection to child

**Effects on preteen –**

- low self-esteem
- emotionally withdrawn
- more delinquent
- high risk of substance abuse
### Authoritative parenting

- good communication: listen and talk to child
- warm and nurturing
- encourage child to express opinions
- parent as role-model
- firm, age-appropriate expectations and limits
- encourage independence and responsibility
- fair, consistent discipline
How does authoritative parenting work?

| Good communication | • Parent/child feel heard and respected.  
|                    | • Helps child problem solve. |
| Warm and nurturing | • Fosters self-esteem. |
| Encourage child to express opinion | • Child feels valued and heard. |
| Parents as role-models | • Child internalizes the behaviours. |
How does authoritative parenting work?

- **Firm expectations and limits**
  - Child knows what to expect.
  - Provides sense of security.

- **Encourage independence and responsibility**
  - Fosters self-confidence.

- **Fair, consistent discipline**
  - Child learns actions have consequences.
  - Child learns what is / is not acceptable.
Effects of authoritative parenting on preteens

- Happier disposition
- Good self-esteem
- Good emotional regulation
- Higher social skills

- Responsibly independent
- Higher academic achievement
- More alcohol abstinence
- Safer teen driving
Tips for authoritative discipline

- Communicate your plan.
- Be consistent.
- Be respectful.
- Use natural, logical consequences when possible.
- When it’s done, it’s done.
Top 10 Authoritative Parenting tips

1. *Talk* to your child. Stay clear of lectures and criticisms.
2. *Stop* and *actively listen* to your child.
3. *Acknowledge* your child’s opinion, then express yours.
4. Focus on your child’s *feelings*, not just yours, during a conversation.
5. Make *limits* clear and age appropriate.
6. Give your child *choices*.
7. Hold your child *accountable*.
8. *Be positive, confident* about your child’s ability to handle a situation.
9. Spend *time* with your child.
10. Let the message be “*I love you*, no matter what.”
Questions?