

## **When little girls become tempestuous tweens**

**By Lisa Moore**

Some girls are feisty from the get go, from fussy babies to tantruming toddlers. The pre teen or “tween” years though, can be the time which parents find most confounding.

At this time parents can struggle with everything from girls (and boys) becoming increasingly defiant to the ‘sexualisation’ of young girls and navigating increasingly complicated relationships with peers. Between the ages of 8 and 13, children are expected to push the boundaries and this is a part of becoming more independent. You can therefore expect girls at this age to disagree with you, show a bit of ‘attitude’, take risks and want to be more like their friends. Remember, “this too shall pass”. In the meantime, you can support your child by guiding her behaviour with clear rules, warm relationships and an understanding of why teenagers behave the way they do. For example, their brain is still developing: the ability to control our impulses does not fully mature until 25! Pre teens and teens, therefore, are more likely to make decisions based on emotion and have poor foresight. They are also often sensitive, moody and unpredictable. This poor ability to foresee consequences and make informed decisions can be offset by helping to build a pre teen’s confidence so that she can avoid bad situations, bad relationships and be able to say no. Just because they are getting older doesn’t mean your girls don’t need rules and boundaries. Instead of imposing these on them, set agreed limits that teach independence, responsibility and problem solving. This will lead them to develop their own standards for what is appropriate and how others should be treated.

Praise and encouragement, of course, is still important at this age so let her know what she is doing right. Also, although rude and disrespectful behaviour is common at this age that doesn’t mean it should be acceptable. Collaborate with your child on rules about this type of behaviour and then model what you would like to see yourself. In the moment, stay calm and wait for the right time to talk about it. When the situation has cooled and can be talked about, let her know how you feel e.g. “I feel hurt when you speak to me like that.” Fighting between siblings is also common at this time and is a normal part of growing up which teaches us life skills like conflict resolution.

The pre teen years are a time when girls are dealing with peer pressure, possibly bullying or cyberbullying and the need to begin taking risks. An increasingly important role for parents and other adults at this time is to help girls to develop a positive self image. It is difficult for them to ignore the messages from TV, music, movies, the web and clothing stores which sometimes encourage girls to be “sexy” and base their self worth on how they look at a time when they are not physically or emotionally ready. The belief held by young girls that they must dress a certain way

to fit in is part of growing up. They feel pressure to conform because dress is part of their social code. As parents we can tune in to media that is targeting our girls and then talk to them about it.

Talk about the qualities they value in their friends and how important these are versus physical attractiveness.

Have conversations about TV shows, dolls and outfits that you don't like instead of giving a blanket "no" and encourage activities where she excels that take the focus off looks and being cool.

Most importantly, don't lecture! Ask for your girls' opinion and try to listen more than you speak.

At this time it is also important to not avoid sex education but rather find out what the school is teaching so you can follow up at home. This goes beyond "where babies come from" and is about choices, behaviour and relationships. Ask your daughter's opinion about these things, she is probably just as conservative as you are! Overall, be a healthy role model and avoid talking about feeling "fat", "ugly" or going on diets around your daughter.

The pre teen years are a time when we expect girls to get a little feistier but some will show this more than others. Disruptive behaviour is known to pass through generations so if you were a feisty young girl there is a good chance your daughter will be too. You can buffer against this by fostering a warm relationship and setting firm but fair boundaries. Remember to talk to your girls so you can support them through what can be a tough time. You may sometimes get a 'brick wall' but meet them where they are by setting aside special time and being available when they come to you.

Source: <http://childpsychologist.com.au/resources/feisty-young-girls>