# **7 Ways to Fix Rude Tween Behavior**

**Tips to deal with your child's attitude as she grows into a teenager**

When my daughter, Anna, got home from school the other day, I told her, "We've got to get you new shoes. Take a quick break, and then let's jump in the car. " In response, my usually mellow and mild-mannered 12-year-old threw down her backpack and snapped, "Oh. My. God. I JUST got home and you're not EVEN gonna let me rest for five minutes? FINE! LET'S GO! "

"We don't have to leave this instant," I said. "Let me get you some iced tea."

"NO! I have to get in the car. COME ON!"

"Hey, calm down. You can rest a minute..."

"YOU rest! I've got to go somewhere NOW!" And she slammed out the door.

"What's wrong with her?" my 8-year-old asked.

"I think the hormones have arrived, " I said.

When your tween starts talking back, or yelling at you or rolling her eyes every time you start to open your mouth, you're bound to feel shock, then maybe anger followed closely by hurt. "In the beginning you try to chalk it up to a reason, just as you did when she was younger: Is she hungry? Overtired? " says Christina Bess, the mom of a 9- and a 12-year-old in Maplewood, NJ. "And then you realize the reason is, she's a tween."

"The first time I heard her say something under her breath, I was surprised," says Gamin Summers of her "extra-sweet" 9-year-old daughter. "She'll mutter, 'You clean *your* room' at me. I know it's normal, but when you put everything into raising them right and they come back at you with disrespect, it stings and it makes you second-guess your parenting skills," adds the mom of five, including two tweens, from Flagstaff, AZ.

This may be especially true if it seems that your kids have gone from happy to snappy before their time. After all, this is the kind of behavior you expect from 13- and 14-year-olds—not kids who haven't even hit the double digits. But the onset of sassiness is *not* your fault. With adolescence looming, kids naturally feel compelled to start going their own way. "They're not intentionally being disobedient," says Mary-Ann Lowry, a parenting coach and educator from Thousand Oaks, CA. "They're on a path toward 'individuation,' when they really try to figure out who they are separate from you."

It's worth noting, too, that regardless of when tween 'tude sets in, boys and girls tend to act out differently. "Girls get dramatic and overreact, while boys alternate between withdrawing and being defiant," says Lowry.

**Some tips to help you both make it safely to the other side**

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#### **Maintain Your Parental Status**

This is not the time to try to be your child's friend. Despite appearances to the contrary, "he's looking to you to help him get through this confusing stage," says Linda Sonna, Ph.D., author of *The Everything Tween Book*. "Ultimately, he'll take his cues for how to behave from the way that you deal with a given situation."

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#### **Draw Clear Lines in the Sand**

You'll need to come up with some new rules as your tween exercises his growing independence. Start by figuring out what's most important to you, like right and wrong, honesty and grades, and let go of stuff that doesn't matter in the long run-keeping his room neat or wearing clean socks.

Then "make sure your kid knows where the nuclear switch is," says Jhoanna Wade, a mom of three, including a now 13-year-old, in New York City. "I'll ignore eye-rolling or heavy sighs, but my daughter knows that it's crossing the line to raise her voice or walk off in the middle of a conversation."

Communicate as clearly and as calmly as you can as soon as any un-acceptable behavior begins. Try not to wait until it's out of control and your kid is screaming that he/she hates you.

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#### **Choose a Tween-Appropriate Punishment for Infractions**

When your children were toddlers or preschoolers—or maybe even as recently as a year ago—you could pretty much get them to do what you wanted with positive reinforcement (praising them for being good, showering them with stickers) and the occasional time-out. With tweens, however, most parents find they have to bring out the big guns;

"I find that taking away a favorite activity, like their Xbox or cell phone, is the best punishment when my kids talk back or mumble something rude under their breath," says San Diego mom Dana Hess, who has a 10- and a 14-year-old. Whatever you do decide, they warn, follow through. "Once you don't do what you say, they'll take total advantage, and you'll lose your upper hand again."

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#### **Reciprocate Respect**

It's essential that you remind your children that you're a person, too. "I've told my daughter that it hurts when she screams at me or says she hates me," says Susan North-Tanaka, a mom of three in Long Beach, CA. "I tell her, 'I don't hate you, but it really hurts me to hear you say that to me.'?"

At the same time, remember that respect is a two-way street-especially when you start to get caught up in an emotionally charged argument. "I do sometimes apologize, " says Wade. "If I start to speak to my daughter before she finishes her sentence, for example, I'll say I'm sorry. I realize she's looking to be treated with respect, too, and I have to hold my own feet to the fire."

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#### **Let Her Stew**

When a "discussion" between you and your tween leads to screaming or hysterics, step back and wait for things to calm down. Encouraging your children to take a break from a situation is a good way to defuse high emotions all around.

I'll stay calm and say, 'It seems like I can't talk to you right now, so go collect yourself and let's talk later,' " says Wade. "Sometimes she'll be crying so hard, she'll say, 'I can't calm down!' but a few minutes alone in her room always works. She's always in a better frame of mind when she comes out."

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#### **Set Aside Some Face Time**

Take your tweens out for breakfast or invite them along to walk the dog, just you. Don't push an agenda, but do let your children lead the conversation, even if they just want to chatter on about that DS game they are jonesing for. You never know where the conversation might lead—and even if it goes nowhere, you'll get points for listening.

Along the same vein, be ready to talk when your tweens need to. Sometimes Anna will wander in while I'm working on the computer to lament some schism with a friend at school, say. I'll make a pointed effort to stop what I'm doing and pay complete attention to what she's telling me. Even 20 minutes of focused conversation, I've found, does a lot of good, showing her that I do care about what she's going through and that I take it seriously.

Ultimately, experts point out, your tweens will continue to come to you if they know you're likely to listen to them without jumping in to judge unimportant details.

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#### **Fan the Home Fires**

As much as your children want (and need) to begin separating from Mom and Dad, they are still children and want (and need) to have a safety net. So provide one. When you feel extracurricular activities are pulling your kids too far out of the family fold, designate Tuesdays as "Family Night, " meaning no friends, no activities, no computers, no texting and no [video games](http://i.viglink.com/?key=6d9b4a4ce0027f60792c4f658da97546&insertId=e2633d9a7ad44eff&type=CD&exp=-100%3ACILITE%3A7&libId=jv3xp3t801011fq0000DAf22o3ork&loc=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.parenting.com%2Farticle%2F7-ways-to-fix-rude-tween-behavior&v=1&iid=e2633d9a7ad44eff&out=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.parenting.com%2Fshop%2Ftoys-activities%2Fgames-puzzles%2Fvideo-games-a1797070353.html&ref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.parenting.com%2F&title=7%20Ways%20to%20Fix%20Rude%20Tween%20Behavior%20%7C%20Parenting&txt=%3Cspan%3Evideo%20%3C%2Fspan%3E%3Cspan%3Egames%3C%2Fspan%3E). The entire family hangs out and cooks together and plays games, with no outside influence. It reminds them that they're part of a family where they're okay just as themselves. They don't have to be anything else.

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