

One-page summary: Preteens (10-12 years)

What's normal at this age

- Puberty begins; earlier puberty than peers is linked with more emotional and behavior problems in boys and girls (small effects).
- Friends matter more, and the ability to resist peer influence does not grow much between 10 and 14.
- Arguments get more heated through early adolescence even as they get less frequent.
- Lies get more sophisticated as thinking skills grow (studied from 8 to 16).
- Sleep need does not fall: still 9-12 hours a day up to age 12.

What works, and why

- Warmth plus clear limits and a growing say: linked with fewer behavior problems and fewer anxiety and depression symptoms.
- Knowing your child's life because they tell you, not because you track them.
- A real say in family decisions that grows as your child grows.
- A family media plan with consistent rules, made together.
- Solving problems together (tested with 7- to 14-year-olds).
- Brief, related consequences, with a clear way to earn trust back.

What backfires

- Harsh control and guilt, shaming or the silent treatment: the strongest links with behavior problems.
- Checking up without a relationship: feeling controlled goes with poorer adjustment.
- Tightening the rules as your child grows, or giving them no say: linked with an extreme turn toward peers.
- Screens in the bedroom at night: later bedtimes and shorter sleep.

Things you can say

"Tell me about it. I'll listen before I say anything."

"Which of these rules do you think you're ready to handle on your own?"

"Phones charge in the kitchen at 9. That's the plan we made together."

"You lost my trust on this one. Here's how you can earn it back."

"I'd rather hear bad news from you than find out later. Nothing you tell me will make me stop loving you."

"I'm not going to argue about this now. Let's talk at dinner, when we're both calm."