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Five Things Your Tween Wants You to Know

567 tweens participated in my 2020 anonymous survey, and chose to answer the optional question, what is one thing you wished all adults knew about life as a tween?

If your child was asked that question, how do you think they would answer? They might tell you that a 10 year old shouldn't go to bed at the same time as a sibling who is 7, or that kids who don't like broccoli should never be made to eat it. This is the important stuff that characterises much of our tween's headspace!

However, I wonder if we were to probe a little deeper, would there be one thing that your child wishes they could tell you, but can't quite manage to communicate? Do you think there is anything that they find difficult to talk about or perhaps even intentionally hide because of fear or shame?

Below I'll share the five of my top survey response that I hope give you insights into your tween's inner world.

Message 1: Life is Harder than You Realise

Tweens believed life was harder for them than their parents acknowledged, and they felt their challenges were minimised. Comments like these caught my attention: "It's not how they think it is. Everything is hard" and "I wish they knew how hard it is to get used to changes and that when we don't know what's happening more things are put on our plate". My concern is that if tweens don't feel understood now, where does that position us as they get older?

Suggested response: The tween years are a time of rapid developmental which can be overwhelming for our kids. What might seem small in their world, is big in theirs, so bring some patience to the table when talking about social and emotional challenges. Now is the time to validate your tween's feelings so they know you are by their side. I highly recommend regular one on one time as it indicates your willingness to invest into them.

Message 2: I am No Longer a Kid

Tweens voiced a strong desire to be taken more seriously by the world around them, and not to be overlooked or dismissed because of their age. I noticed that they felt like they had significant ideas to share, while only being recognised as children. That's quite a downgrade! My concern is if tweens don't have a meaningful place to contribute now, how will they build the confidence to make a more significant contribution as they get older?

Suggested response: A tween's developing self-esteem is hinged on their sense of competence and ability to handle life more independently. Now is a great time to invest into teaching your child practical skills, and giving them more meaningful responsibility at home. It is also a great time to ask your tween to help make family decisions as a way of validating their growing intelligence. Interestingly, tweens said they turned to people who were accessible, listened to them and were able to help them navigate life's challenges.

Message 3: You are Missing Stuff

Although it broke my heart, I was not surprised to hear tweens emphasise that their parents were missing stuff. When I walk through a primary school playground, I am often shocked at the ‘teenage-like’ themes I hear. I know that parents have no idea of the real content of these conversations and the pressures kids are under to engage in them. Comments like ‘you think we are okay, but we aren’t’ and ‘there’s a lot more bad things out there than they think’ expressed a real cry for support. My concern is, if we don’t keep our eyes open, we may not see those things that are most important.

Suggested response: When your tween comes home with questions that are difficult to answer, be prepared to give them a thoughtful and comprehensive response. You may intentionally delay your response to allow yourself some preparation time, but never sidestep it. Remember, if you are not the source someone else will be; and that your language opens the way for theirs. You can initiate some of these conversations with quality resources that represent your family values.

Message 4: We Might Always Disagree about Screens

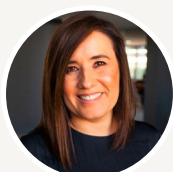
Technology was a central theme of tweens’ frustration. PS: Feelings are often mutual! Emphasis was placed on parents’ alleged lack of understanding of how central technology was to tweens’ social status and life. As adults, we know there are some very real and legitimate reasons why we say no to screen time. For this reason, I’d like to suggest that we might always have different views about technology. My concern is, if we don’t take the lead, tween’s natural desire to charge ahead may lead them into dangerous waters.

Suggested response: When it comes to technology crystal clear agreements are absolutely essential. Technology has to be set up in order to last the rockiest of the teenage years. While gaming and group messaging is very common amongst tweens, it is easy to say “yes” to tech without appropriate accountability. Please now that what is easy to say yes to now can quickly become your worst nightmare if you are not in charge. For more specific thoughts on this please see my blog – [How to Set Up Social Media Well](#).

Message 5: It’s Time to Start Knocking

When tweens begin to need more privacy, most parents respect and welcome it as a sign of growing up. However, when they begin to desire space from adult supervision, it poses a new range of dilemmas. While our tweens are pushing for all the trimmings that come with growing up, such as catching a bus on their own or shopping alone with friends, their limited life experience leaves them vulnerable. My concern is that if we are not willing to enter into age-appropriate negotiations as they grow, they may begin to hide unsafe behaviour.

Suggested response: Tweens are usually looking to be given more grown-up privileges and responsibilities as an acknowledgement that they are no longer children. Things like riding their bike to the shop by themselves, staying up later than their younger siblings or walking around a shopping centre without any adult can be relatively safe ways to help them spread their wings. Even small shifts can require a change in mindset from parents, so they can feel like big decisions to parents of tweens.



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Michelle Mitchell is an award-winning speaker, and bestselling parenting author. She has been termed ‘the teenage expert’ by the media and is sought after for her compassionate and grounded advice for parenting tweens and teens. Michelle uses her experience to write and speak in schools, community events and through media.