

- Adolescence

## Coping with the inbetweeners

**AUTHOR TANITH CAREY TELLS LISA SALMON WHAT KIDS AGED FROM 8-12 MAY BE THINKING IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS, AND WHAT PARENTS SHOULD DO**

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THE no longer little, but not yet a teen, kids in the tween years are changing fast.



So-called because it's in-between the two more recognised developmental stages of young children and teenagers, the tween period is between eight and 12 years, and many parents could do with some help getting through it.

Parenting author Tanith Carey knows only too well what it's like dealing with the tween stage – she's been through it with her two daughters, and has now written the book *What's My Tween Thinking?* about it with psychologist Dr Angharad Rudkin.

"It's a phase when hormones start to kick in, children are forming their first serious friendships – and having their first major fallouts – and start wanting their own screens, which are a doorway to an adult world they're not yet ready for," observes Tanith.

"Yet while parents mentally prepare themselves for the terrible twos and the tumultuous teen years, often they're not prepared for the vitally important period in between.

"The good news is these years won't feel as confusing once you know the developmental reasons behind your tween's changing behaviour and see the world through their eyes."

Here, Tanith outlines some of the common challenges parents may face with their tweens, and how to deal with them...

**'I'M NOT HOLDING YOUR HAND MUM'**

Your tween pulls their hand away from yours for the first time on a walk to the shops.

What your tween is thinking

'I'm testing how it feels to be more independent. Now my peers are more important in my life, I'm desperate to fit in. Even when my friends aren't around, I still imagine what they'd say if they saw me holding my mum's hand and how they'd call me babyish.'

### What you might be thinking

You may feel sad that the child who could once never get enough of you is moving into a phase where they no longer seem to need you as much.

### How you could respond

“Don’t take it personally,” advises Tanith. “This is more about your child’s development and their emerging need to find their own tribe. In fact, pulling away is a positive sign that they trust you to keep loving them anyway.”

She warns that although tweens may not want to hold your hand as much in public, they may still need some physi-

cal connection of conflict at home, so parents should offer different options, like stroking their backs for reassurance or asking if they’d like a cuddle.

### ‘I AM DOING MY HOMEWORK’

Your child is taking ages to start their homework.

### What your tween’s thinking

‘My lesson feels like ages ago, and my mind’s gone blank. Plus, at home, there’s so much I’d rather be doing and without a teacher and my classmates around me to keep me focused, it’s hard to concentrate.’

### What you might be thinking

After a long day, you probably just want your child to get their homework over with so you can get on with the rest of the evening. If they say they don’t know where to start or seem to be avoiding it for fear of getting it wrong, you might be getting panicky or tempted to do it for them.

### How you could respond

Tanith suggests that initially, parents should just take a deep breath. “Getting frustrated with them will make them more anxious, and it’ll become more difficult for them to access the logical thinking parts of their brains they need now,” she says, advising

### NO WORK: Is homework

turning into a nightly battle? that if they’re finding it hard to get going, parents should help them name how they feel. “Once they know you’ve heard them, they’re more likely to start,” she explains. She points out that when a task is daunting, the most difficult part is getting under way. “So make it feel more manageable by suggesting they try it for five minutes – the likelihood is that they’ll carry on.”

If homework is turning into a nightly conflict and your tween struggles to do it within the time given by the teacher, mention it to the school, advises

Tanith.

“It’s best to identify any learning challenges quickly,” she says.

### ‘WHY CAN’T I GO ON TIKTOK WHEN ALL MY FRIENDS ARE ON IT?’

Your child is angry you won’t let them sign up to TikTok because they’re not yet 13.

### What your tween’s thinking

“OK so it’s not really all my friends, just a couple. But I’ll tell my parents it’s everyone to make them worry I’ll be left out. They keep saying social media is dangerous, but I’d never be so silly to fall for weird grown-ups because I’d know. And anyway, dad lets me play video games for grownups because he likes them too. So what’s the difference?”

### What you might be thinking

You’re likely to be worried your tween is too naive to handle what can happen online, scared of what they might see, and concerned about what messages you’re giving them by allowing them to lie

about their age.

How you could respond

Tanith suggests parents explain to their tween that their brain is still developing, and social media is designed to be super-stimulating. “Tell them it’s too early for them to be distracted from the real-world things they love, like playdates, being outside, and arts and crafts, which are all important for them to feel good.

“As a middle way, consider letting them try one platform, like a closed group of friends on WhatsApp, for a limited time on a shared family device, but always in the common areas of your home, and never in bedrooms,” she stresses.

Pulling away is a positive sign that they trust you to keep loving them anyway Tanith Carey

What’s My Tween Thinking? Practical Child Psychology for Modern Parents by Tanith Carey and Dr Angharad Rudkin is published by DK books, £16.99