

PRINCIPALS' DIGESTS

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Newsletter

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TWEENS: LEAVING CHILDHOOD

As the prefrontal cortex of tweens develops, they're malleable, impulsive and impressionable. They're capable of reasoning intellectually, interpreting emotions, and taking a moral stand, but they lack perspective or life experience. Sorting out social drama can consume large chunks of their time, and they tend to experience emotions in polarities. Any mishap can register as a catastrophe, and they have little understanding that negative feelings are temporary. They're trying to figure out what coping skills work for them and where their strengths and interests align. They're hyper-aware of an invisible audience judging their every move and picking up on their shortcomings and limits. It's a time of insecurity, hormonal changes and contradictions. The only other time a child experiences so much development is between birth and age two!



BEING A YOUNG ADOLESCENT GROWING UP IN TODAY'S RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

Technology is omnipresent. Many tweens are online almost constantly which has many benefits but also poses a number of challenges: staying safe, being kind, dealing with bullying, making sense of violent news clips and pornography, cheating in school, multi-tasking, staying up too late and preserving one's reputation. Looking at brushed-up photos on social media amps up worries about appearance, contributing to negative body images. There's also the problem of online material being up there for good.

Tweens have more mental-health issues. Today's families are more open about divorce, job losses and special needs; also, many parents are hyper-involved which can result in tweens having less autonomy and not feeling they have as much control over

their fates. They often feel a lot of emphasis on achievement and competition. They need space to learn problem-solving skills, make mistakes, resolve conflicts and build a sense of confidence and agency.

Hate material is competing with positive identity work. Racism, antisemitism and homophobia are heightened topics in recent years, even while there's greater interest in gay-straight spectrum issues, political activism and efforts to build emotionally healthy girls and boys. Things may be moving in the right direction. Tweens have always been tuned into justice and fairness, but today's tweens are perhaps even more likely to take on an activist role, such as lobbying for the environment.

The key, as always, is finding the right balance – not an easy thing to do but, again as always, open lines of communication between tweens, parents and school are essential.

Acknowledgement: "How Childhood Has Changed for Tweens" by Phyllis Fagell in *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 2019