



Things To Teach Your Daughter Before & During Her Tween Years

Includes Tips For

Having "The Talk"

Puberty

Education

Friend Relationships

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Introduction

“Your kids know more than you think they know.” We’ve all heard this, but it doesn’t change another fact. There are lots of things that we need to teach our daughters.

It’s now easier than ever for our girls (and boys) to find out about pretty much anything. There are playground conversations, tv commercials and the almighty Google. With this comes lots of misinformation and biased perspectives, so it is very important that they get a good foundation from us, their parents.

This guide touches on a few topics your tween should know. I’ve included lots of tips and resources to help you have these conversations, covering things from puberty and emotions, to academics and relationships. Sure, some of this may be uncomfortable, but making sure our girls are well educated and informed is one of the best defenses we can give them.

And while I provide a lot of unbiased educational information, I encourage you to share your family values, too. It’s imperative that your kids know where you stand, because society and plenty of other people will try to sway their opinion.

Here’s to raising smart, confident and beautiful daughters!

Towanda



SECTION 1: *Mind*



Being a smart, confident girl starts in the mind. As we encourage our girls academically, and provide them with skills to process their emotions in a healthy way, they are better equipped to handle the journey of life. This section will cover education, being a good citizen, processing emotions and managing friend relationships.

GIRLS AND SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH (STEM)

The Department of Commerce's Women in STEM:

A Gender Gap to Innovation (August 2011) found that, while women make up 24 percent of the STEM workforce, they earn an average of 33 % more when they work in these high-growth fields.

Plenty of girls like science. They also like technology, engineering and math. The key is to let them know this is normal and that these areas can lead to viable futures.

Here are five tips for encouraging your daughter's love of STEM:

For starters, have a conversation about her views of science and math. Does she feel like these subjects are for boys? Does she think she's not good in these areas, even though she has high scores? Talk about any biases and ensure her that there is no such thing as boy subjects and girl subjects.

Saying STEM careers are in high demand is not enough. Show her the excitement and possibilities of science and math. If you know female engineers, scientists or doctors, give her an opportunity to talk with them. If you don't know any, groups like [Million Women Mentors](#) are a great place to start.

Encourage your girls to watch science-themed shows like How It's Made, HowStuffWorks, or some of the DIY shows on HGTV (this is one of our favorites!).

Schedule play dates or "hanging with friends" at science-themed museums and centers. Many of these places also have special events that your kids can enjoy.

Incorporate science and technology lessons into your everyday life at home. This can be everything from discussing the science of cooking, to explaining how products and various electronics work. You can also go a step further and plan projects that you can do together. If you're looking for project ideas, [science buddies has a great topic selection tool](#). You answer a few questions and it offers project ideas according to your daughters interest.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES FOR STEM

[Women In Stem on Whitehouse.gov](#)

[Top 10 Ways Families Can Encourage Girls Interest in Computing](#)

BONUS: If you have a daughter in higher education, [mentornet](#) is a good way to find a mentor.



READING

If your child is not a fan of reading, or struggles, encourage her with lots of reading time together. Here are other ways to encourage a love of words:

Choose books together. Then, take turn reading. You read a few pages and let her read a few pages. She'll get extra time with you and reading practice, too.

One of your main steps is to set a positive vibe around reading. Don't use reading time as punishment, and while I'm not a fan of overpraise, this is one time when extra encouragement can be necessary.

Let her see you reading. First this shows that reading is not tied to learning only, but can also be for pleasure. Secondly, she won't think of it as punishment if she sees it as something you enjoy.

Start a tween book club. Tweens love spending time with friends and a book club is a great way to make that time productive. Plus, she'll have an incentive to finish the book.

Visit the library and/or bookstores regularly. There are so many books out there; let her see the many worlds available through reading.



ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES FOR READING

[7 Ways to Encourage a Love of Reading](#)
I LOVE the prediction board idea here!

The [DIY Summer Reading camp from PBS](#) is
great for any time of year, You can
choose resources by grade!

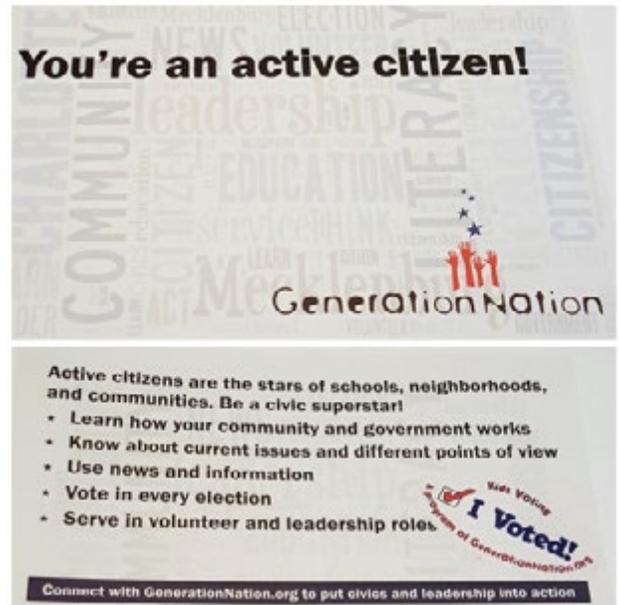
GOOD CITIZEN

I love the precinct where I vote for a number of reasons, including their kids voting area. The last time I voted, my girls received this active citizen card for voting, too. It led to a great conversation on the ride home, and it made them feel good to be a part of the process.

During our talk, I explained that a good citizen is concerned not only with themselves and their local community, but with their friends, family and community-at-large, along with the world.

As you're teaching your daughter about citizenship, here are a few ideas:

- Find ways to volunteer as a family. Volunteermatch.org is a great way to find organizations that need volunteers. From food banks to helping at a local shelter, or volunteering to tutor a younger child, there are many ways to volunteer.
- Donate and share with other people in need. Consider being an angel family during the holidays or simply go shopping for toys to donate. Pick up some extra items that a tween would love, like lip balm and jewelry. When you go grocery shopping, add a few extra items to donate at a local food pantry.
- Show empathy towards others. Teach her to consider how her actions impact others, including being rude and mean. Also, make sure she knows that bullying is never okay and that you expect her to be kind and respectful. [StopBullying](#) has a lot of great resources.



- Let her see you be a part of the political process. When your kids see you voting they are more inclined to exercise their right when they are an adult. Even now, there are ways they can participate on an appropriate level. You can watch political debates together, watch the evening news, and ask them about voting processes at school. Almost every school has some type of student government or mock election.
- Educate her on how government decisions impact her everyday life. Explain that the political process directly effects her by deciding how much money her school receives, which roadways are maintained/created, etc.
- Extend the citizenship conversation to include global citizenship. A connection to the world, not just our local community is very important. Use the internet and books to visit countries around the world and talk about the similarities and differences in their culture, compared to ours.
- Along with traveling to different regions, a great way to experience many cultures is the [Around the World Embassy Tour](#) in Washington, DC. One weekend a year a number of embassies open their doors to visitors. Here you can experience art, dance, fashion, food and more!



RELATIONSHIPS

An important part of teaching your daughter about healthy relationships is by example. You truly are her first teacher. When she sees how she deserves to be treated and how healthy relationships function, she'll have a higher chance of choosing the same.

In elementary and middle school friendships are a big part of her life, so here are a few ways to help her develop healthy friendships:

- Teach appropriate social skills such as sharing, listening, apologizing when wrong, having empathy for others and being a good sport.
- Listen to her talk about friendship dynamics and offer helpful tips for navigating cliques, personalities and bullying. For instance, if someone is being mean or disrespectful, let her know that she is not obligated to stay in that situation. She can, and should, walk away.
- Remind her that friendships take time and can't be forced. It's important to be patient, authentic and let the friendship grow organically. Also, let her know that not everyone will like her and that's okay. She should be respectful, but she doesn't have to be close friends with everyone.

WHAT YOUR DAUGHTER SHOULD LOOK FOR IN A FRIEND (and how to be a good friend)

Trust
Loyalty
Honesty
Has her best interest at heart
Respectful
Positive influence
Support in good times and bad times

WARNING SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY FRIENDSHIP

- Uses manipulation to persuade negative behavior. Uses guilt, peer pressure or threats.
- Says bad things about you to others (gossip)
- Is jealous and tries to sabotage your success. Friendly competition is okay, but it should not lead to sabotage or jealousy.



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COPING SKILLS TO HELP TWEENS DEAL WITH LIFE'S EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTERS

When upset, try breathing in 4s. Four seconds in, four seconds hold and four seconds out. This is very simple and they can instantly feel the importance of remembering to breathe. During this time they can focus on being calm, relaxing and thinking about how they should handle the situation.

When sad or stressed (or just need an outlet), be creative. Whether it's drawing, making jewelry or creating something, this serves as a good outlet for their energy until they can relax and think logically about how to react.

Share feelings and any situations that are uncomfortable or a question of safety. Discuss the importance of sharing feelings with someone trustworthy. None of us are an island, and your daughter needs to understand that sharing her feelings does not make her weak, it makes her healthy.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

[From BFF to 'Friend Divorce:' The 5 Truths We Should Teach Our Girls About Friendship](#)

[Helping Elementary Schoolers Deal with Social Conflict](#)

SECTION 2: *Body*



Oh yes, you knew it was coming. The body chapter, aka puberty and the “sex talk” chapter. Before we go any further, here is the most important thing to make sure your daughter understands. Her body is just that, hers. She should never be ashamed of it, embarrassed by it, compare it to others, or feel like someone else has a right to it without her permission. She can decide who she hugs and who she lets close. When her body starts changing she should feel comfortable coming to you with questions, no judgment.

BEST PRACTICES FOR TALKING SEX WITH YOUR TWEEN

Remember your tone during these conversations will have a huge impact on two things, how she views sex and her comfort level in coming to you with questions.

Start with the scientific explanation of sex (Penis inserted into vagina, how babies are made, etc.). Don't forget about oral sex. You don't want her thinking oral sex is not sex.

Discuss the emotional aspects. After she has the physical information, you want her to understand the emotional changes she may experience. This is also where you can explain any spiritual views of your family regarding sex, timing, etc.

Talk about risks. There is a lot of misinformation surrounding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy. Arm her with correct information.

This does not have to be a formal discussion. Talking about it in pieces can make it less uncomfortable. For instance, when you see something on TV, or if you're just chatting while driving in the car, offer nuggets of information and perspective.

However, if you want to make it an event, make it positive. Plan a mommy-daughter date and mix in the heavy conversation along with a day of doing something that you both enjoy. You want her to leave the day feeling good about herself and your talk.

Don't make it a "once and done" conversation. Keep the line of communication open, and answer her questions honestly. Don't make your daughter feel guilty or embarrassed for asking about a topic, even if it makes you uncomfortable. Also, let your child know if she has questions and is uncomfortable asking you, especially if they are body questions, she can talk to her doctor. You can also encourage her to talk to another adult that you trust, like an aunt or older, responsible sibling.

WHEN TO HAVE THE SEX TALK

by age

Age

- | | |
|-------|---|
| 2 | Teach proper names for private body parts and explain that it is inappropriate to touch them in public. |
| 3-5 | Answer questions. Reiterate private area conversations. Explain no one should touch them there. |
| 6-9 | Provide a basic, scientific explanation of sex. |
| 8-10 | Explain puberty and body changes. Explain family values. |
| 9-12 | Answer questions and correct any misinformation your child may receive from peers and others. |
| 11-13 | Discuss risks of having sex (STDs, not ready emotionally, pregnancy, spiritual views) |

Now, for some levity. This video is HILARIOUS! [Parents Explain The Birds and the Bees](#)

This article from [oprah.com](#) has a lot of [good pointers for discussing sex with your tween](#).

PUBERTY

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, breast development and menstruation are top concerns for girls about puberty. Their site, healthychildren.org, offers great tips for these conversations.

When it comes to talking about breast development, here are a couple of things to highlight:

- Girls develop breasts at different ages. There is no right or wrong age. Her breasts will arrive when the time is right for her.
- She may notice small, tender lumps under one or both nipples. These will grow over the next few years. Also, it is normal for one breast to develop before the other.

Here are a few things to highlight about menstruation:

- Menstruation is a normal female process. She may have vaginal discharge before her first period and this is normal.
- A menstrual cycle is typically once a month, but at the beginning it may not be as easy to track. Marking it on a calendar is a good idea.
- Hygiene is always important, but it is even more important during menstruation. She has a number of feminine hygiene products for her use to make this easier.

Other puberty changes to discuss:

- Pubic hair - typically starts after breast development, but not always.
- Armpit hair - typically after pubic hair, but not always.
- Acne - triggered by hormonal changes.
- Body odor changes - Now may be a good time to introduce a natural deodorant, if needed.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES FOR BODY TOPICS

[What girls need to know about growing up](#)

[Dot girl first period kit](#)

[Kotex has a great site to help with the menstruation discussion](#) It goes over the basics of menstruation, cycle phases, hygiene, body changes and more!

Judy Blume's *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret*, was one of my favorite books about the anticipation of puberty. Consider introducing it to her, :-).

DIY "First Period" Kit

Cute bag (small makeup bag would work well)
2 sanitary napkins (preferably pads for tweens/teens)
2 panty liners (the first period may be light)
4 diaper disposal bags (These little bags will be great for pad disposal or to store soiled underwear until she gets home)
1 pair of underwear
1 travel pack of tissue (always good to have a backup in case none in bathroom)





Things Your Daughter Should Know About Her Body

How you feel is way more important than how you look. Build your character and morals, they are your foundation.

Hygiene. You only get one body and it is very important to know yours and to take care of it.

Clean. Don't forget those hard to reach areas.

After using the bathroom, ALWAYS wipe from front to back.

Pay attention as your body changes and don't be embarrassed. Ask questions if you don't understand something or it seems abnormal.

Nine hours of sleep is very important. Set good habits now.

SECTION 3: *Spirit*



SPIRITUALITY

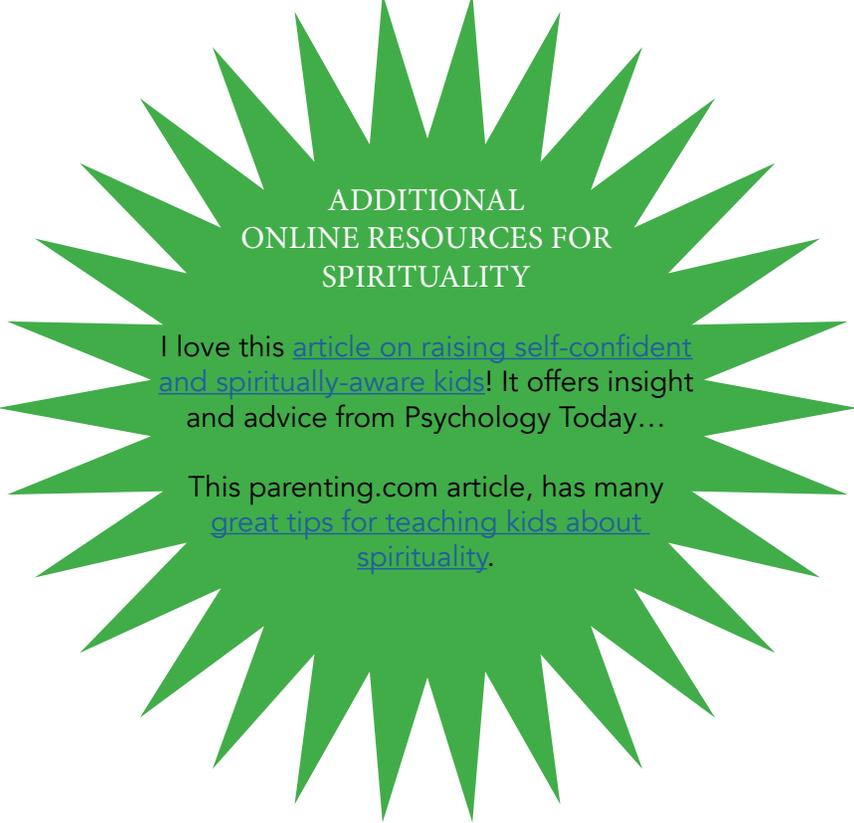
No matter how hard we try, it is nearly impossible to control everything our children see and hear. From classmates, friends, tv, the world wide web, and society in general, they will be exposed to many thoughts, perspectives and temptations. This is one reason children need a spiritual base. It can offer them peace in difficult situations and give them a filter to guide their decision-making process.

Here are a few ways to help your child(ren) develop a spiritual connection with God:

Make spirituality a regular part of life. Pray and talk about God in every day conversation.

Share your values and spiritual views. Let your kids know where you stand when it comes to values and morals, in an age-appropriate way that they can understand. Explain why you feel that way and encourage them to ask questions. Also, it is very important to not criticize their questions. Children are inquisitive by nature and you want them to feel comfortable coming to you for answers. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" and try to be open-minded. They may develop opinions different from yours, but most importantly, you want to encourage them to have a personal relationship with God.

Give them your key book. Whether that's the Holy Bible, Torah, Quran, etc., give them their own copy of your spiritual guide. Even better, read it with them and encourage them to study on their own. Start with a version that is age appropriate and upgrade as they grow.



ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUALITY

I love this [article on raising self-confident and spiritually-aware kids!](#) It offers insight and advice from Psychology Today...

This parenting.com article, has many [great tips for teaching kids about spirituality.](#)

Help your child(ren) connect their meaning and value to spiritual beliefs instead of material things This connection reminds them that they are part of something bigger, encouraging them to be good citizens, empathetic of others and motivated to take care of their communities and the earth.

Get them involved in a kids' group that will allow them to learn in a fun and interesting way. Whether it's Sunday School, Kids Church or another group that caters to kids, it's good for children to learn with other kids. And they will probably learn something to teach you, :-).

Lead by example. Let your kids see you reading your spiritual book, praying and having informal conversations with God. Go on a nature walk and let them see and hear you marvel at the beauty of God's work. Talk about some of your ups and downs, and how your faith helped you. Teach them simple prayers and say them together regularly.

Encourage quiet time. Whether its through meditation or just sitting in quiet for a few minutes, teach them that silence is golden. Also, let them know that this quiet time of reflection can help them hear their inner voice, which can guide them throughout life.



Thanks for Reading!

We hope you've found this guide valuable.

For more information like this, sign up for [Mom of Girls email updates](#) if you haven't already!

Our goal is to provide information that helps you raise a smart, confident and beautiful daughter. We will not sell your information or bombard you with excessive emails.

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We look forward to staying in touch!

