

Parenting Your School-Age Child



What's Happening

Children ages 6 to 12 go through big changes. As they spend more time at school and away from home, they are working to develop an identity of their own. Their bodies are growing stronger and changing quickly, a process that will continue through puberty and the teen years. They are learning to control their feelings, use reason, and solve problems. Yet children in this age group still need rules and structure and, most of all, their parents' love and support.

What You Might Be Seeing

Normal school-age children:

- Mature unevenly. Their bodies may be growing, but they are still capable of having temper tantrums and need reminders to take baths and brush their teeth.
- See things in black and white. They are concerned about fairness and rules.
- Are capable of doing chores and homework more independently but may need you to remind and teach them (*not* do it for them).
- Get distracted easily and may lack organizational skills.
- Develop deeper relationships with peers and care deeply about "fitting in."

What You Can Do

- **Model the behavior you want to see.** Your children are watching and learning from you. Meet your responsibilities, follow house rules, and communicate with respect.
- **Make a few important rules and enforce them every time.** Remember, children want freedom, so give them choices in smaller matters (e.g., clothing, room decorations).
- **Talk to children about what you expect.** Post rules and routines where everyone can see them. Fewer "grey areas" means less to argue about.

- **Support their growing bodies.** Children this age still need nutritious meals (especially breakfast) and 10 hours of sleep each night.
- **Limit time spent watching TV, playing video games, or using the computer.** Monitor Internet use for safety, and encourage your children to participate in hobbies and sports.
- **Be involved with your children's school.** Talk to their teachers and attend parents' night and school conferences. Show that school is important to you by providing a quiet space for homework, volunteering in your child's school, and celebrating your child's hard work.
- **Offer support and understanding when your child has problems with peers.** Explore ways to resolve conflicts, but do not interfere. If your child is being bullied at school, alert school staff and work with them to keep your child safe.
- **Don't wait for your children to learn about sex, alcohol, and drugs from peers.** Educate yourself and talk to your children about your values. Help them practice ways to resist peer pressure.

Remember:

Talk to your children, and listen to what they have to say. School-age children may sometimes act like they don't care what their parents say, but they still want your love, attention, and guidance!

This tip sheet was created with information from experts in national organizations that work to prevent child maltreatment and promote well-being. At <https://www.childwelfare.gov/preventing/promoting/parenting> you can download this tip sheet and get more parenting tips, or call 800.394.3366.