


# INDEPENDENCE

Preteens are children between the ages of 10 and 12. Many important changes occur in children during this time. Every child is different. As you try some of the suggestions below, keep your individual child's personality in mind.



*It's a gradual process of letting go and monitoring the results, always with the option of pulling back a bit if the child shows she isn't really ready.*

Preteen is a life stage that can be confusing and hard for both preteens and parents, especially since preteens often desire to be more independent, but they are not yet ready for complete independence. Parents sometimes struggle to find the balance between encouraging independence and still being in control of what their child does.



THE PSYCHOLOGY  
FOUNDATION  
OF CANADA

LA FONDATION  
DE PSYCHOLOGIE  
DU CANADA

## How you can help – and stay connected to your child



*“My son wanted to go to a movie alone with his friends. I felt they were too young. I talked it over with another parent and we decided that I would drive them there and she would be there when they got out. My son was happy because he got to see the movie with his friends.”*

1. **Talk about safety.** Safety comes first. Before you allow your child more independence and freedom in their activities (e.g., on the computer, with friends, travelling to and from school, etc.), explain to them how to stay safe and how to get help if trouble occurs. Go over any rules that they will need to follow (e.g., ask permission before making plans, walk to school with a friend, etc.) so that you are comfortable as well.
2. **Go step by step.** It takes a lot of trial and error to find the right level of independence for your child at each stage of their development. Start small. For example start with a small amount of freedom like coming home alone after school and completing a short list of chores, like feeding the dog and emptying the dishwasher to see whether your child handles it well. See how they do, and adjust the plan if needed.
3. **Make decisions together.** When your child asks for more freedom with an activity (e.g., going to a friend’s house), ask for their input. What will they do? How will they get home? What can they do if something goes wrong? Accept their ideas when you can, but let them know you make the final decisions.
4. **Listen and be flexible, but still be in charge.** Sometimes, your child will find reasons to question your decisions on their activities. They may even criticize you and think you are unfair based on what their friends are allowed to do. Let them know that every family and child is different, but in your home, you expect them to follow your rules. Listen to what they have to say, and be flexible on the rules where you feel you can. It will mean a lot to your child to know you can be reasonable and that you respect and value what they have to say.
5. **Speak with other parents.** It may help to talk to other parents about how they manage challenges with independence in their preteen. It is a good way to learn new tips and ideas and can also help you feel more supported, knowing that all parents have similar issues to face. Remember, it is a good thing that your child is now learning to take on more responsibilities. They will be more prepared to successfully handle life’s challenges as they get older.

### **Need more support?**

Visit [psychologyfoundation.org/pdf/publications/youAndYourPreteen\\_eng.pdf](http://psychologyfoundation.org/pdf/publications/youAndYourPreteen_eng.pdf)

Or contact your family doctor, local public health organization, or school guidance counsellor.

### **Need More Information?**

Visit [psychologyfoundation.org](http://psychologyfoundation.org) to learn about other programs and events offered by The Psychology Foundation of Canada

