

# BUILDING A STRONG RELATIONSHIP

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.



*Listen, Listen, Listen.  
We spend a lot of time  
telling our children things  
– what we want them to  
do, what we want them to  
stop doing, how to do  
things. But listening is just  
as important, if not  
more so.*

When children are very young, it is easy to stay close because they rely on you and spend so much time with you. As they get older, children spend more time away from us, so it can become harder to find moments of connection that keep your relationship strong. Of course, you are still the parent and you continue to have a lot of influence over your child, but you may need to find new and different ways to connect. When you have a good relationship with your child, she feels understood and supported, and is more likely to respect you and follow your family culture.



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

1. **Look for ways to connect and communicate.** Regularly find ways to connect with your child. For example, eat meals together as often as you can, have conversations in the car while driving back and forth, and attend your child's sports or dance competitions. The more you can positively connect with your child through his daily routines, the stronger your relationship will become.
2. **Talk to your children about their interests.** Parents spend a lot of time talking to their children about rules, regulations, and what they want their children to think and do. It is important to make a real effort to have conversations about your child's ideas and interests as well. Listen, listen, listen. When you ask your child about their ideas, they really appreciate it, and you will better understand how your child is growing and changing.
3. **Continue to have clear standards for your child's behaviour.** Your child still needs you to establish clear and consistent rules for what she is and isn't allowed to do. Rules at home are important for teaching, but they also allow your child to feel safe and supported at a time when many things in her life are changing. When your child feels safe with you leading the way, your relationship naturally becomes stronger over time.
4. **Set a good example with your own behaviour.** Remember that your children pay very close attention to everything you do and say. If you demand respect from them and don't respect them in return, you can damage your relationship. They think, "Why should I listen to my parents if they don't even do what they say is right?" So, model the behaviour that you wish to see in your child – respect them, praise them when they do something well, try not to be overly critical, and apologize when you've made a mistake – and you will be building a strong foundation for a good relationship.
5. **Have fun!** This stage of growing up can be a time when you and your child feel anxious about the near future. Don't forget to have fun together, laugh together and enjoy each other's company. Plan things you both like to do together (e.g., cooking, going for a walk, playing sports, watching a TV program, visiting a museum, shopping, listening to music, or movie night).



*"Lela and I have been arguing a lot lately. One night I asked her if she wanted to go for a walk with me. She was grumpy at first but as we walked, we both relaxed. We blew dandelion seeds and made wishes. I saw the wonderful child she is without all the preteen confusion that can make our lives miserable. I'm so happy we had that walk."*

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