

The Care and Keeping of tween volunteers

Think back to your own tween/teen years and try to remember the encouraging and discouraging things that may have had a lasting impression on you.

What adults say and do can have an enormous effect on teens.

Four ways we sometimes discourage

Focusing on mistakes and weaknesses

Spending too much time pointing out faults and no strengths can lead to both you and the teens feeling that there is more wrong with them than right; a frustrated tween will feel that improvement is impossible. This is especially important when enforcing policies and behavior issues.

Expecting the worst or too little

If you don't believe in your tween patrons' abilities, they probably won't believe in them either. If you expect the worst from your tweens, there is a good chance they will do exactly what you fear.

Expecting too much

Be careful of expecting more from your tweens than they are able to give as they may stop trying. Tweens need to be involved in setting realistic goals that they can reach, setting these goals too high will cause them and you to feel as if they can't do anything right – or on the opposite end, may cause them to try and become perfectionists.

Overprotecting and pampering

Tweens are looking for opportunities to take reasonable risks to prove to themselves, parents, and you that they are capable of doing things for themselves. Allowing tweens to become involved in library programming or services related to them is one way to allow them to take some reasonable risks

Four ways we can encourage

Build on strengths

If you want a tween to do better, find something you like about him or her. When we focus on tweens' strengths rather than weaknesses, they feel encouraged to build more strengths. You can do this by acknowledging what they do well, encourage the next step, and concentrate on improvement not necessarily the result (which can be tricky when a tween is helping you with a program).

Show confidence

Tweens develop self-esteem and courage by learning how to handle problems and develop skills. You can give them responsibilities through volunteer opportunities – always keep in mind their age and ability levels. You can ask for their opinion or advice.

Value teens "as-is"

Like most people, tweens want to be accepted for who they are, not just for what they have accomplished. When tweens put on a great program or finish a huge project it's important that we appreciate them and not just the work that they did. An easier way to do this is to show an interest in teen activities.

Offer independence

"Dependence breeds hostility". Tweens are beginning to break away from their parents and become more independent teens, the same goes for librarians – they will respond to opportunities that allow them to take reasonable risks and develop a sense of independence by letting them create programming or recommend books for the collection.