



BC COUNCIL *for* FAMILIES

My Tween and Me Parenting for Prevention Fact Sheet

What is *My Tween and Me*?

My Tween and Me is a new program for BC parents of children aged 7 – 12 years.

Addressing the key areas of every school-age child’s life—home and family, school and friends, and community life—*My Tween and Me* explores the factors that can protect children as they move through the tween years and into the teen years.

My Tween and Me supports parents in becoming and remaining key sources of information and influence in the lives of their tween—and teen—children.

***My Tween and Me* is for all BC Families**

BC is made up of families of diverse rural, urban, cultural, ethnic, indigenous, and linguistic backgrounds.

Some families need more support than others, but research shows that no one “type” of family is automatically at risk.

Rather, certain factors can make any family—any child—vulnerable to some types of risk.

Why Focus on Tweens?

Children aged 7 – 12 years lie squarely “between” early childhood and adolescence. In the past, parenting research has tended to focus on the early years, and adolescence.

But recent research shows that the “tween” years are also crucial to kids’ healthy growth—particularly in helping kids develop skills and relationships that will allow them to resist joining in high-risk activities, like drinking and drug use, during their teen years.

***My Tween and Me* is a Unique, New Parenting Program**

My Tween and Me – Intensive is a one-hour, lunch-and-learn introduction for workplaces, PAC meetings, and so on.

My Tween and Me – Comprehensive comprises six, two-hour sessions to be delivered through community centres, local non-profits, and other venues.

My Tween and Me – Intensive can stand alone or provide an excellent introduction to *My Tween and Me – Comprehensive*.

To bring *My Tween and Me* to a nearby location or inquire about becoming a Program Leader, contact Julie Norton, Project Coordinator, at the BC Council for Families, 1-800-663-5638, 604-660-0675, or by email at julien@bccf.bc.ca.

My Tween and Me Parenting Program has been developed by the BC Council for Families, which this year celebrates 30 years of enriching life for all BC's families with resources and educational programs. The Council is grateful for the generous support of Public Health Agency of Canada, Drug Strategies Fund to develop *My Tween and Me*. For more information, visit www.mytweenandme.ca.



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Tween Demographics

The term “tween” refers to children between the ages of 7 and 12.

There are nearly three million children in Canada between the ages of 6 and 12.

Two-thirds of tweens live in one of Canada’s 25 largest metropolitan areas.

About 5 percent of tweens are Aboriginal, and 8 percent live in families speaking languages other than English or French.

The number of tweens living in Vancouver grew 25 percent over the last decade.

Tween Development

Tweens gain an average of 7 pounds in weight and 2.5 inches in height each year.

Tween psychological development is characterized by the need to master and demonstrate new skills, make independent decisions and control their own behaviour, and form good social relationships with peers and adults outside the family.

Tweens tend to build relationships through common interests and activities.

Tween Activities

Up to 67 percent of tweens would like to be involved in a physical activity after school, yet only 53 percent are.

In one study, up to 40 percent of tweens spent time on the computer after school and up to 76 percent watched TV, but only 22 percent had a face-to-face conversation with a parent or adult relative after school.

Twenty percent of Grade 4 students access the Internet at home through their own personal computer. Eighty-nine percent report playing games online.

The number one online game site for girls in Grades 4 to 7 contains games featuring brand-name products and marketing surveys.

Twenty-eight percent of Grade 4 students use instant messaging on an average school day, a number that jumps to 43 percent in Grade 5.

Tweens and Parents

Anxiety about too much to do and guilt about not using time with their family are increasingly parts of parents' everyday experience of family life.

An imbalance between parenting ideals and the reality of burdens on family time (work, scheduled activities) means that many parents live in a state of chronic guilt.

A growing number of parents feel that they don't have the ability to influence their children's lives and choices.

Yet research shows that:

Tweens care deeply about what their parents think. Even though it may not seem like it all of the time, parents are a major influence on tweens.

The best time to engage in preventive strategies with youth regarding the use of psychoactive substances is *before* the age of initiation, typically considered to be 12.

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Growing Healthier Teens: Unique Program Targets Parents of Tweens

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Vancouver – A new parenting program focused on tweens aims to help reduce risky behaviour during the teen years.

Based partly on the work of UBC expert Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, *My Tween and Me Parenting Program* targets parents of tweens, because the years from 7 to 12 may be when parents can have the biggest impact on the choices their children make as *teens*.

“Parenting isn’t rocket science—it’s much more complex,” says project coordinator Julie Norton. Norton has been tasked by the BC Council *for* Families—the agency funded to develop this unique program—with shepherding *My Tween and Me* from its Vancouver launch in March 2007 to BC-wide implementation by 2009.

“As our society becomes more culturally and technologically complex,” Norton says, “parents are finding it harder to simply raise their children as they were raised and trust that everything will work out fine.”

Less complex is that the main factor in making things work out well is healthy parent-child relationships, and the tween years now appear to be more significant in this regard than previously thought.

Most parents strive for good relationships, says Norton, often by filling their tweens’ lives with scheduled activities and worldly opportunities. But research shows that what parents are running themselves ragged to give their children, isn’t what their kids most want—or need.

For her 2006 study, “What Do Kids Do When They Are Not in School? The Experiences of Children in Canada during Out-of-School Time,” Schonert-Reichl and colleagues surveyed 1,800 Lower Mainland tweens, parents, and teachers. What they found might surprise many parents.

“It’s a myth that, as kids get older, they don’t want to spend as much time with their parents,” says Norton. Schonert-Reichl’s research shows that tweens value their parents’ time and interest far more highly than the latest technology or coolest clothes. And other research supports that this remains true even during the teen years.

Moreover, parents who invest time with and interest in their tweenagers—whether it’s going cycling, checking out library books, or becoming rock hounds together—are more likely to raise kids who take fewer unnecessary risks when they become teenagers.

But isn’t adolescence all about risk-taking? Yes, says Norton, but there’s a difference between normal risk-taking and high-risk behaviour.

Staying out an hour past curfew is behaviour that calls for consequences, but qualifies as normal risk-taking. Getting blind drunk, having casual sex, gambling to the point of addiction—these are high-risk behaviours, they’re not healthy, and they’re frighteningly common.

Many programs have targeted adolescent risk behaviour, with limited success. The federal government threw its support behind *My Tween and Me* because it’s different from previous programs in several ways.

First, instead of speaking to teens at school, *My Tween and Me* directly targets parents of younger children. “Our goal is to build parents’ confidence in their ability to positively influence their children’s lives. It’s surprising how many parents lack this,” says Norton.

Second, *My Tween and Me* is parent-driven. “Rather than offering our program where we think it’s needed, we’re putting the word out that we’re ready to go in at least five Lower Mainland locations,” says Norton. “We’re asking parents to contact us and tell us where the program is needed, so that we can go to them.”

Third, *My Tween and Me* comes in two formats to increase accessibility: *MTM — Intensive* is a one-hour, lunch-and-learn program for workplaces, PAC meetings, and so on. It can stand alone or serve as an introduction to *MTM — Comprehensive*, comprising six two-hour sessions for locations such as community centres and continuing education programs.

Fourth, *My Tween and Me* has been designed to be easily adapted by diverse cultural, geographic, and demographic communities. “We want each program to be led by someone from within each community, whether it’s on the North Shore, the West End, or the Downtown East Side, whether the parents are white, South Asian, Chinese ...”

Finally, it includes a data-gathering component that will help the BCCF to demonstrate and build on its effectiveness by refining it over time.

For more information, to inquire about becoming a Leader, or to set a date and location for *MTM — Intensive* or *Comprehensive*, visit www.mytweenandme.ca or contact Julie Norton, Project Coordinator, at the BC Council for Families, 1-800-663-5638, 604-660-0675, or by email at julien@bccf.bc.ca.

For Immediate Release
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BC COUNCIL *for* FAMILIES

Media Release:

Targeting Tweens: New Parenting Program Takes Off at Playdome with Fun Game-Show Launch

A unique parenting program that aims to reduce risky teen activities by working with parents of tweens will be launched during March break. The launch will include an interactive game show at BC Place March-break event Playdome, in Vancouver on March 20, 2007 from 10AM to 1:30PM.

“My Tween and Me Parenting Program is based on recent research showing that the tween years [ages 7 to 12] are far more developmentally significant than previously thought,” says project coordinator Julie Norton.

In fact, the tween years may be the best time for parents to reduce the likelihood that their children will participate in risky behaviours, such as substance use, early sexual activity, or gambling, as they move into their teen years.

Norton, who has overseen development of *My Tween and Me* for the BC Council for Families for a year, says they wanted the launch to be attention-grabbing.

Modelled after popular TV game shows, *My Tween and Me Game Show* will recruit parents and tweens from Playdome visitors and pose questions designed to see how well parents and kids know (or don’t know) each other.

“The ‘reveal’ will show how differently parents and tweens think,” says Norton. “And that—along with having lots of fun and winning some cool prizes—is the point.”

Emerging research, such as a 2006 survey of 1,800 Lower Mainland tweens by UBC expert Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, shows a significant gap between what *children* say they want, and what their parents *think* they want—and need.

“Parenting isn’t rocket science—it’s much more complex,” says Norton. “But one simple fact stands out: what kids want and need most is their parents’ time and interest.”

“My Tween and Me is a positive, preventive approach to parenting during the years when children still think their parents are heroes,” says Norton. “Our goal is to help parents take advantage of that time to reduce risk factors and build protective factors,” says Norton. “Reducing risk isn’t everything, but it’s a lot.”

My Tween and Me is unique among parenting programs in several ways:

- It targets parents of tweens.
- It’s parent-driven—it will be offered where parents say they need it.
- It’s available in both a one-hour lunch-and-learn, and a six-session course.
- It’s adaptable to diverse cultural, geographic, and demographic parent communities.
- It includes a data-gathering component.

For more information on *My Tween and Me Parenting Program* or the Playdome *My Tween and Me Game Show*, contact Lynne Melcombe of touchpoint communication at 778.773.2828, touchpoint@telus.net until **March 20, 2007**.

After March 20, 2007, contact Julie Norton at the BC Council *for Families*, 604.660.0675 or julien@bccf.bc.ca.

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BC COUNCIL *for* FAMILIES

Media Release: Targeting Tweens: Helping Teens Make Healthy Choices by Taking Aim at Parents of Tweens

A unique parenting program that aims to improve teen health by supporting teens to resist unhealthy, high-risk choices will be launched at Playdome on March 20, 2007 from 10AM to 1:30PM.

Funded by the Drug Strategies Fund of the Public Health Agency of Canada, the long-term goal of *My Tween and Me* is to support parents to make the most of the tween years in order to reduce the risk that their children will engage in substance use and other unhealthy behaviours during their teens.

“My Tween and Me Parenting Program is based on recent research showing that the tween years [ages 7 to 12] are far more developmentally significant than previously thought,” says project coordinator Julie Norton.

A 2006 survey of 1,800 Lower Mainland tweens by UBC expert Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl shows a gap between what children want and what parents think they need.

Bridging that gap during the tween years will not lessen the likelihood that kids will take risks during their teens, because that’s part of a normal, healthy adolescence.

But it may make a significant difference in the *frequency and degree* of risks they take—staying out an hour past curfew as opposed to getting blind drunk, gambling away their clothing, and having casual sex in their date’s car, who is driving while impaired.

My Tween and Me is unique in its approach to improving teen health. Previous programs aimed at reducing teen substance use (and other unhealthy behaviours) have inevitably intervened directly with youth through the school system, with limited success.

My Tween and Me takes a completely different approach, targeting parents of younger children because research shows that: a) tweens care deeply what their parents think; and b)

the most effective time to prevent teen substance use is before the age of initiation—often as early as 12.

The goal of *My Tween and Me* is to help parents learn how to use the tween years effectively, by reducing risk factors and building protective factors in their children’s lives, which will help them make physically and mentally healthy choices as teens.

“Parenting isn’t rocket science,” says Norton. “It’s much more complex.” *My Tween and Me* recognizes the complexity and boils it down to one simple fact: investing time and interest in tweens’ lives will reduce the physical and mental health risks they will inevitably face as members of our complex society during their teen years.

For more information on *My Tween and Me Parenting Program*, contact Lynne Melcombe of touchpoint communication at 778.773.2828, touchpoint@telus.net or attend *My Tween and Me Game Show* at Playdome, March 20 from 10 AM to 1 PM and speak directly with program developer Julie Norton.

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BC COUNCIL *for* FAMILIES

Media Release: **Taking Aim at High-Risk Teens: Playdome Game Show Launches Unique Parenting Program**

A unique parenting program that aims to reduce risky teen activities by working with parents of tweens will be launched with an interactive game show at BC Place March-break event Playdome, in Vancouver on March 20, 2007 from 10AM to 1:30PM.

"My Tween and Me Parenting Program is based on recent research showing that the tween years [ages 7 to 12] are far more developmentally significant than previously thought," says project coordinator Julie Norton.

It turns out that the tween years are the best time for parents to ensure that their children avoid risky behaviours as they move into their teen years, such as substance use, early sexual activity, gambling, street racing, and so on.

Norton, who has spent the past year overseeing development of *My Tween and Me* for the BC Council *for* Families, says their plan is to launch this ground-breaking program in a fun and attention-getting way.

Modelled after the popular 1960s TV show, *The Newlywed Game*, *My Tween and Me Game Show* will recruit parents and tweens from Playdome passers-by. Effervescent host Cora [www.thegoshow.net] will pose questions designed to see how well parents and kids do or don't know each other.

"The 'reveal' will show how differently parents and tweens see their lives together," says Norton. "And that—along with giving participants a chance to laugh together and win some cool prizes—is the point."

Emerging research, such as a 2006 survey of 1,800 Lower Mainland tweens by UBC parenting expert Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, shows a significant gap between what *children* say they want, and what their parents *think* they want—and need.

“What kids want and need most is their parents’ time and interest,” says Norton. “As they move into their teens, they still want that. The notion that teenagers don’t want to spend time with their parents, and don’t care about their approval, is a myth.”

My Tween and Me Parenting Program is unique among parent-education programs in several ways:

- Instead of addressing teens at school, it targets parents of tweens in order to enhance their ability to influence their children’s choices during their teens.
- Instead of being offered where program developers think it’s needed, it will be offered in response to parent demand as the word gets out.
- To increase accessibility, it’s been developed in two formats: a one-hour, workplace-based, lunch-and-learn, and a six-session course for community centres and such.
- It’s been designed to be easily adapted to the needs of families in the diverse cultural, geographic, and demographic communities that make up BC.
- It includes a data-gathering component that will help developers to demonstrate and build on its effectiveness, and refine it over time.

“*My Tween and Me Parenting Program* is a positive approach to reducing high-risk teen behaviour,” says Norton. “*My Tween and Me Game Show* is fun way for us to get the word out about it.”

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“Parenting isn't rocket science—it's much more complex,” says Norton. But one simple fact stands out: what kids want and need most is their parents' time and interest.”

By that, she doesn't mean an endless schedule of expensive activities, which can be a poor substitute for shooting hoops or collecting rocks. And, she stresses, nothing is a guarantee. "There is no research that says that if parents go bicycling with their child daily, they won't do drugs or street-race when they're teenagers."

What research does suggest is that if parent education can help parents regain confidence in their ability to influence their tween children's choices—a feeling that many parents today lack—that influence may continue into their children's adolescence and reduce the likelihood of their teens engaging in high-risk behaviours.

"*My Tween and Me* is a positive, preventive approach to parenting during the years when children still think their parents are heroes," says Norton. "Our goal is to help parents take advantage of that time to reduce risk factors and build protective factors. Reducing risk isn't everything, but it's a lot."

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