

Irritability:

Preadolescents are often irritable... There is no doubt about it. I think they're irritable because they are so filled with energy. Now, I know some of you are thinking that you're preadolescent has about as much energy as mashed potatoes, but look again: kids this age are always moving or juggling: they're twirling things or picking at things; or picking at things; they're flapping their arms or tapping their feet; they find something to bounce, strum, or toss; they are practicing the latest dance, sound, or martial arts move.

But along with all this energy come moods...Preadolescents' hormones are changing. These changing hormones bring on moods that are real, sometimes physically draining, and always unpredictable. But one thing is sure: the mood disappears as quickly as it came. Here's a word of wisdom: do not argue with an irritable preadolescent. Arguing escalates everything.

The child says... "You don't care, anyway?"

You respond... "Don't you talk to me like that?"

Child says... "Why? Don't I have any rights around here?"

You... "No! You don't deserve any!"

Child... "That's because you always pick on me!"

You... "Well, maybe I wouldn't if you'd try being pleasant every now and then!!"

Pretty soon... WE are acting like the preadolescent!

It would be better if we could step back and say something like, "Well, we can't discuss this right now,:" or "Let's get back to this conversation later," or just keep your peace (you'll need all the peace you can hang onto). Think about yourself when you are irritable and you pick a fight with someone. Nobody wins those fights, and after it's over, we generally feel embarrassed and humiliated because the thing we picked a fight over was so minute.

Kids feel the same way. Even they don't know why they are suddenly irritable. They don't know where that negative tone comes from. If we step

back, the situation is often diffused. Later on, when the mood swings the other way, we can talk over the issue more quietly.

Here are some other ideas:

Be willing to listen - but don't poke or pry. Kids this age value independence and often seem secretive. Keeping to themselves is part of the separateness they are trying to create. Let them know you'd love to help them, but don't push them into a defensive position.

When issues come up, listen carefully and avoid lecturing. When a preadolescent tells you something, that's often all they want to do is tell, not be given a sermon. If a comment seems called for, keep it brief and non-threatening.

When reprimanding, deal only with the precise problem, don't bring in other issues.

"The trash is still here, and I want it out, now". is better than, "You are so lazy! I told you to take that trash out two hours ago and it's still here! You'd live in a pigsty, wouldn't you? Well, you aren't the only one in this house, you know..."

Don't let your preadolescents' moods rule your moods. Tears and sulking and irritability are part of preadolescent behavior, and generally, they don't like it any more than you do. Try to keep your equilibrium - it'll offer a sense of stability to the preadolescent.