



# RETAINING TWEENS



The word “tween” refers to pre-adolescent youth in the “in-between” stage of their development and puberty. Typically, tweens are between 10 and 12 years of age. This time of a young person’s life is marked by rapid and dramatic change in social, physiological and emotional development. Realizing this, Clubs are recognizing tweens as a distinct group, with distinct programming needs.

Clubs have members from elementary school (kindergarten – fifth grade), middle school (sixth – eighth grade) and junior high school (seventh – ninth grade). Each Club must decide which group will make up its “tween” population. It is also important that Clubs refer to tweens in ways that resonate with their members. For example, if tween members are in junior high school, the Club might call them “juniors.” Use the term for tweens that best fits your members.

## Space

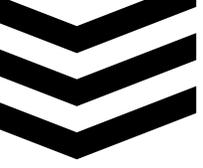
Tweens need their own distinct space and time (either actual physical space/time or space/time that is perceived as their own). Providing separate space and time for tweens, whether physical or perceived, can allow Clubs to have programming that is unique for tweens, while reinforcing that they are no longer part of the younger members group in the Club. As tweens age, they begin to pull away from the play associated with younger age members. Setting aside a part of the Club at particular times for tweens can be helpful. For example, giving them their own part of the gamesroom, providing special privileges or other identifiers can effectively demonstrate that they are not the younger members and show tweens that they have their own, specific identity as a group. A unique space will show tweens that their social needs are different as they begin to choose their own interests and activities.

## Program

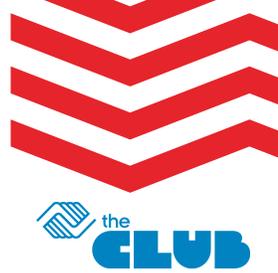
Programs need to be adapted to reflect the particular needs of tweens. At this age, members begin to experiment with independence, trying out new things and becoming involved in self-directed activities (such as sports, musical instruments, etc.). To foster this new sense of independence and help tweens develop their leadership skills, members should be given a role in planning and delivering Club programs for both their own age group, and for the Club’s younger members. Developing a “Tween Council” or giving this responsibility to the Torch Club will allow members to feel that they are selecting activities that are fun for them. It will also enhance their sense of belonging to the Club. Staff interactions and guidance can help ensure that the program is balanced with fun and learning. Leadership opportunities will also provide tweens with a sense of competence and responsibility.

Delivery of programs and messages need to relate to tweens. Tweens are particularly technology savvy. Many of them learned to use a smartphone before they learned to read. Clubs need to offer technology-focused, project-based programming such as Digital Literacy, Climate SuperStars and iCivics. Use appropriate social media and communication channels to attract and retain tweens. Clubs may want to explore age-appropriate social networks for this group. Setting up a Club community might be a way to connect with tweens in an age-appropriate environment. Finally, tween programming must be strictly differentiated from teen programming. There must also be a plan in place for recruiting and retaining members through high school.





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## Transitions

Tweens are a distinct category of Club members who need to be recognized more deliberately. Clubs need to treat the transition period from younger members to tweens with a certain degree of importance. Making special efforts to recognize their movement into the older age category validates their entry and provides them with appropriate recognition for their new role in the Club. Due to differences in individual development and the fact that their class cohort may not turn 13 at the same time, this transition should be based on individual readiness to move up. Staff with youth input will know when it is time for tweens to move to teen programming. It is also important for this age to “move” with the peers they identify with. Remember, consistent recognition is key to encouraging positive behavior.

In addition, the transition can be part of the Clubs retention strategy. Moving tweens to a new group can reenergize them to stay involved with the Club. This distinctive tween programming will give younger members reasons to remain at the Club. This transition not only requires different programming, but different roles for tweens. Clubs need to provide these youth with a sense of independence, giving them the perception that their standing is different from younger members. Additional privileges and responsibilities can create perceived space for tweens. Just as importantly, distinct teen programming gives tweens something to look forward to and reasons to stay involved with the Club.

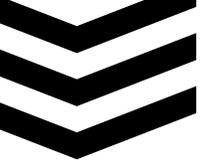
## Marketing

When you market to parents and elders, they will encourage tweens to choose the Club as a fun after-school option. Once young people in these grades have chosen to be members of the Club, marketing the uniqueness of belonging to this group can have several benefits:

- Retaining younger members, as they will want to be part of the group as they get older.
- Encouraging members in the group to stay engaged on a regular basis in the Club, increasing ADA.
- Encouraging the current members to invite their friends to participate.

While these marketing efforts have ancillary effects on others in and out of the Club, it is important to gear these efforts toward tweens and ask for their input about the activities and how they are advertised. The group then maintains ownership of the activities, which is important to tweens. Clubs can:





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- Have an active Torch Club.
- Send Torch Club recruitment emails to all tween Club participants from summer programming and previous Club school year memberships.
- Offer free one-day passes to youth who attend the Club with a current tween member.
- Plan tween socials on the first Saturday night of the month, free to all community/Club tween.
- Send postcards from Club staff to eligible tweens inviting them to the Club.
- “Where have you been, we’ve missed you” phone calls from staff members - directly calling the tweens who haven’t visited the Club in more than two weeks.
- Ongoing recruitment; monthly tween-only field trips.
- If there is a community park where all the tweens gather after school, have a staff member visit the park and encourage kids to come to the Club.
- Offer tween-only nights.

Because of the independence that tweens begin to experience and the additional out-of-school activities available to them, Clubs need to reach out to tweens differently than they reach out to younger members. Marketing for tweens needs to include peer group members so that tweens feel connected to their friends at the Club. Using incentives to encourage current tweens to invite their friends can tap into the social network that these young people create for themselves. Offering special, tween-only activities that are open to members in the evenings and on weekends, can become recruiting tools and create that sense of perceived space and uniqueness tweens need. Remember, today’s tweens are tomorrow’s teens.

