

**Question: Why is my pre-teen suddenly so self-centered? It seems like she thinks the whole world revolves around her!**

This is an almost universal issue with pre-teens and young teens. Consequently, the frustration parents and youth workers experience is also almost universal! Kids who were, just months ago, generous and outward-focused turn into themselves and become seemingly obsessed with themselves and incapable of noticing others.

*Everything's about me!*

Self-centeredness is a natural fungus on the tree of development. Your pre-teen might still have a shred of others-focus; but it will disappear soon! The almost-crazy amount of change going on in the lives of young teens (11 – 14 year olds), draws every remaining bit of noticing others in on itself. Almost all young teens (and older pre-teens) see themselves at the center of the universe.

For example: if you walk across the back of a crowded lecture room (say, church), you will try to be quiet as to not distract – but you won't assume people paying attention and facing the opposite direction are noticing you. Not so with young teens. In the same situation, they'll assume that everyone in the room is watching them (apparently through the back of their heads!) and evaluating their every move.

This self-centeredness is natural, but that doesn't mean parents should just ignore it. There are many ways to counter this; but I've found that the absolute best antidote is experience – experience that forces their attention off of themselves. Give them experiences serving others in need (through a day helping at a soup-kitchen, or a family mission trip, or other service projects). For a pre-teen, this establishes a pattern of noticing others needs. For a young teen, it can create a small opportunity for noticing that the world is more than them (and that will work like yeast, spreading into their worldview).

*Everything's now!*

A related issue is how “in the moment” pre-teens and young teens seem to live. If you ask their favorite movie of all time, they'll answer the one they saw last week. They don't have a sense of the past (and I'm talking about their own past, not anything grander than that!), and often don't have a sense of the future either.

Think of it this way: as an adult, you're making decisions on the road of life. And you can look in the rear-view mirror and see the long straight-away behind you, including the choices of life. You can also look at the long straight-away ahead of you, and get a sense of what's to come. But preteens and young teens are on a sharp curve in the road of life (the curve of transition and developmental change). The rearview mirror doesn't show much; and the front view is a blind curve.

This can be maddening for parents. Ask speculation questions about the future to help your child begin to see more of the road (he won't naturally do this on his own). Share your own thoughts about the future (as well as the past).

And remember, the curve in the road – with its self-centeredness and “all is now” perspectives – will pass. This is the normal stuff of preteen development – and it’s the plan God designed for your child to go through at this time of life!