

11-13 years

Your preteen's body is changing, but his grooming habits are lagging behind. Here's how to get your child to clean up his act.

HYGIENE hurdle

Several weeks into the school year, 11-year-old Lauren Fulginiti's teacher gave her fifth-grade class an assignment: "She told the kids they needed to start using deodorant," recalled Lauren's mom, Dee, of Penn Valley, Pennsylvania. "I was surprised, but I didn't blame her. The class was in a tiny windowless room—she said it really smelled!"

Most parents think they're familiar with the physical changes puberty will bring: Girls begin to menstruate; boys' voices crack; both will sprout underarm and pubic hair. But what many don't realize is that the preteen years are when your sweet, baby-powder-smelling child begins to sweat like a linebacker, flash a fuzzy yellow smile, and sport limp, greasy hair.

Months before puberty begins, hormone production is greatly increased. Sweat glands make more sweat. Seba-

ceous glands in the skin secrete oil, trapping bacteria. Yet preteens can be totally oblivious to the hygienic implications caused by their changing bodies, says Jessica B. Gillooly, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychology at Glendale Community College, in Glendale, California.

"I have to chase my 11-year-old daughter to the bus stop, waving her toothbrush," says Pam Grabell, a mother of three girls in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. "If I let her, she'd go six months without brushing her teeth."

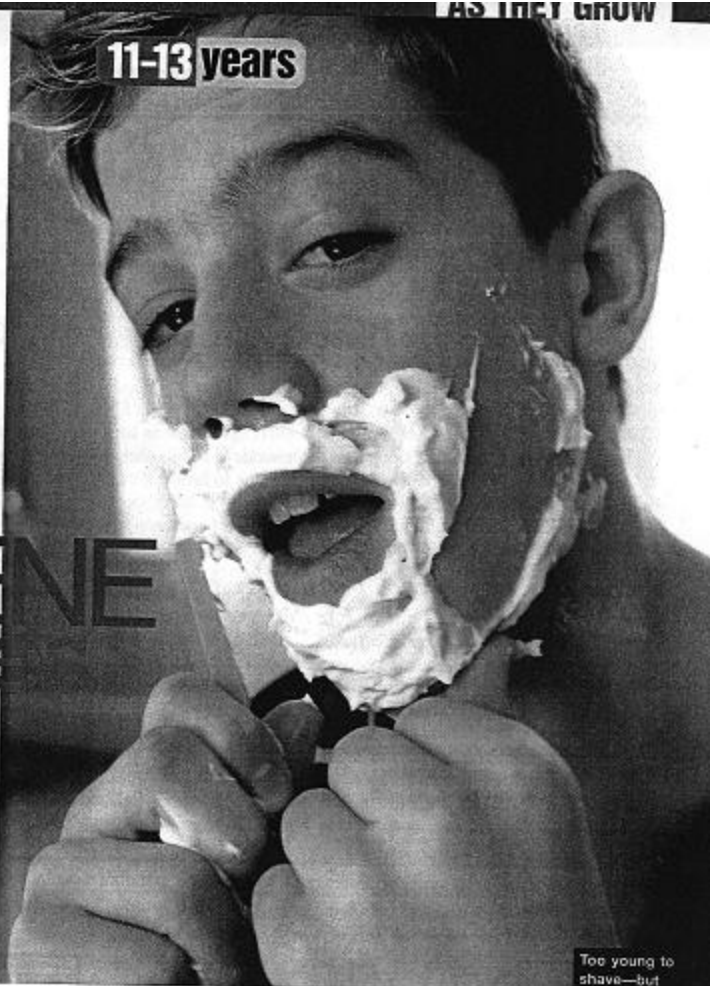
Instead of resorting to bus-stop embarrassments, parents should act preemptively. "As you begin to see some of the physical changes of pu-

berly, talk with your child," says Amy Beth Taublieb, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and author of *The A to Z Handbook of Child and Adolescent Issues* (Allyn & Bacon, 2000). For example, instead of saying, "You smell—take a shower," explain that underarm hair holds sweat and odors from exertion during the day and that showering will eliminate them.

How to Wean to Clean

But even when adolescents know what's expected, some may be reluctant to follow through. "Part of them wants to be an adult, but another part is scared to death," says Dr. Taublieb.

Too young to shave—but too old not to bathe regularly!



BY ELLEN SCOLNIC

AS THEY GROW

11-13 years

There can be an element of denial: "If I don't deal with this, maybe the whole thing will just go away."

Preteens are also notoriously rebellious. "You don't want to fall into that trap of 'The more Mom nags me, the less likely I am to do it,'" says Dr. Taublieb. "Instead, appeal to his budding egocentrism so he views good hygiene as being good for himself."

Dental care: The hormonal changes of adolescence can change the way teeth and gums react to plaque, putting preteens at greater risk of bad breath, tooth decay, and periodontal disease. Gingivitis peaks during puberty too. Of course, at this age, gingivitis is an abstract threat. To get preteens to care for their teeth, hit them where they live: Point out that yellow teeth are ugly and bad breath is unappealing, and remind them of how unpleasant it is to have a cavity filled. Reinforce good habits by praising a dazzling smile or fresh breath.

Menstruation: On average, American girls begin to menstruate around age 12. Try to be open and unembarrassed about discussing sanitary products and

the mechanics of her body, says Dr. Gillooly, who is also the author of *Before She Gets Her Period: Talking With Your Daughter About Menstruation* (Perspective Publishing, 1998).

Purchase an assortment of sanitary supplies—minipads, tampons, pads with wings—with your daughter. Explain that these should be changed several times a day, and teach her how to dispose of used sanitary products.

Shampooing and showering: How frequently your child needs to shower varies according to his level of activity and his physical maturity. If your son plays basketball every day, he should probably take a shower every night.

Many preteens—even girls who show limitless interest in barrettes, clips, and other accessories—need to be reminded to keep their hair clean. The increased sweat and oil gland production of puberty can make a preteen's formerly shiny locks look dirty and in need of a good shampoo. Parents can help by letting kids choose favorite soaps and shampoos.

Using deodorant: The age at which a child should begin using deodorant

depends on how physically developed and how active the child is. Sometimes it's the teen who takes the initiative. "Boys who play sports see that older guys have deodorant in their gym bags," says Rita Forbush, the mother of two teenage boys in Stony Brook, New York. "My younger son has definitely learned good hygiene from his older brother."

More often, though, it's the parent who senses the need. "Samantha got in the car with me one day, and I smelled body odor," recalls her mom, Joyce Eisenberg, of Merion, Pennsylvania. Eisenberg bought the 11-year-old deodorant and told her it should become part of her morning routine.

Eventually, the desire to be attractive to the opposite sex motivates most preteens to come clean. "We couldn't drag Kyle near a shower when he was younger," says Jim Handler, of Denver, of his son, now 14. "Then he started going to all these teen parties. Suddenly, he began bathing and combing his hair. Now he's always pausing in front of mirrors to check out his reflection." □

Help From Madison Avenue

Rugrats toothbrushes and Barney soap are great for little kids, but until recently few toiletries were marketed specifically for 11- to 13-year-old consumers. Now a host of products with zingy graphics, neon colors, and superfruity flavors and fragrances are helping make hygiene more fun for preteens. —Linnea Leaver



Bath & Body Works Art Stuff Glitter Shower Gel (\$5.50) Packaged in artsy bottles, this squirtable gel is infused with glitter and scented in Blazin' Blueberry, Electric Apple, Melon Mania, Berry-Go-Round, and Fruitle Cutie.



Avon Shower Soap-on-a-Rope (\$6.50) These cologne-inspired soaps are great for preteens going from boys to men. Macho scents include Black Suede and Starring for Men.



Jane Goodskin This hip new line of facial-care products targets preteens' oily and acne-prone skin. Cloudburst Cleanser Foaming Face Wash (\$6.99) is one of our favorites.



Bath & Body Works Art Stuff Foamtastic Shampoo (\$5.50) They'll love that it suds up like a mousse and has the same fantastic fruit-flavored names as the glitter shower gel.



Johnson & Johnson ACT Kids Anticavity Fluoride Rinse (\$3.75) Now that they're old enough to gargle, this alcohol-free Bubble Gum Blow Out rinse is especially helpful for tackling the white spots left by braces.



Johnson & Johnson Reach Powerbrush (\$8.99) This battery-powered toothbrush massages the gums while removing plaque.



Johnson & Johnson Wild String Dental Floss (\$2.79) The funky, tasty Cherry Berry floss glides easily between the teeth and will help children ease into an important hygiene routine.