



# Moderating with Tweens and Teens

*Tips for maximizing the effectiveness of online research initiatives with the next generation of respondents.*



While many marketers' attention is still firmly on Millennials, it's hard to ignore Generation Z as they grow into adulthood. In fact, Gen Z (roughly those born between 1997 and 2012) make up a third of the world's population and almost 40% of US consumers! More and more of our clients are interested in understanding this cohort and their attitudes.



For Zeldis, that has meant more exciting opportunities to speak with kids, including those as young as 12 and 13. Over the past few years, we've conducted in-depth interviews and online focus groups with teens and tweens on a wide variety of topics, from lifestyle and media use to healthcare and financial services.

Aside from the recruiting and logistics requirements for this age group (such as parent/guardian permission for respondents under 18), connecting with tweens and teens requires some special moderating skills. Here are some tips to help your slightly-less-young moderators get the most out of your time with younger participants.

## Give them the lay of the land

Tweens and teens may be intimidated by a research setting, even an informal one. They also want to please you and don't want to let you down. Put them at ease by letting them know exactly what's going to happen up front – even more than you would with adult participants. Give yourself extra time to introduce yourself, explain why you're conducting the research, and what types of topics you're going to ask about. If they know what's coming, they'll relax.



## Allow extra time to warm up

Start with fun, easy topics, such as entertainment and hobbies. Don't get too deep right away – don't worry, you'll get there! Engaging opening questions include:

- Tell me about your pets? (Who doesn't love to talk about their dog or cat?)
- What is your favorite TV show and why?
- What is your favorite movie?
- Who is your favorite music artist? Why?
- If you have a day off from school/work, how would you spend it?
- If you had \$20 right now, what would you spend it on?



## Let them get to you know you

As moderators, we're taught to keep ourselves out of the conversation. And when it comes to opinions that might bias the research, that makes sense. But bringing in a little of your own personality can help tweens and teens realize you're a person too, not just an authority figure. If you have kids or family members their age, mention that.



## Lighten the mood

A little self-deprecating humor can go a long way. If a teen references a social media influencer, TV show, or musician you haven't heard of, poke fun at yourself and admit it! This puts the tweens and teens in the "power position" for a few minutes and makes them feel good about themselves. They'll be more willing to open up to you later.



## Treat them as equals

Use the same tone of voice you use with adult respondents. Don't scold or lecture them. If they become distracted or start to look at their phones, gently call them back to the discussion. Use praise and as much positive reinforcement as possible to encourage the behaviors you are looking for.



## Don't forget mom and dad

In research with minors (under age 18), it's best practice to allow parents/guardians to observe if they prefer. However, we've found that kids are more relaxed and free without mom and dad around. To encourage that, a quick touch-base with parents/guardians prior to the start of the research can put them at ease and make them feel more comfortable stepping away. Give them the same research precis you plan to give the kids: topics to cover, how the research will be used. Most parents will turn over the reins. If some do prefer to stay, make sure address your questions to the tween/teen, not mom and dad, and show positive encouragement when they respond on their own.



## Choose small groups vs. 1-on-1

Despite your best efforts, sometimes you end up with young participants who are shy or afraid to express themselves. Small groups can help draw them out, as more outgoing participants can serve as a model.

