

Healthy Friendships

Good Friends are Good News

Parents know that friends have a big impact on children. Often friends influence children more than their parents.

Making and having friends is very important to a child's development, but choosing the wrong friends can have poor results. An important but hard role for parents is guiding their children to safe and positive friendships without seeming to be too controlling or "not understanding" them.

You can help your child develop healthy friendships by following these guidelines.

Get to know as many of your teen's friends as you can.

Knowing his friends will help you keep tabs on his life and may help keep him out of trouble.

If he and his friends hang out at your house, introduce yourself and ask a question or two. If they don't hang out there, find ways to meet them — offer rides to and from events, have them over for dinner, etc.

Stay alert to changes in his social circle, too. (When teens switch, it sometimes means trouble.) And if something doesn't seem right to you, act on it.



If you don't like your teen's friends, figure out why.

- Do you suspect drug or alcohol use?
- Do you think they treat your teen badly?
- Do you have a personality conflict?

No matter what the reason is, remember this: If you suspect that a friend is a bad influence, don't wait.

- Talk to your teen. Make your concerns and expectations clear,
- Keep a closer eye on him, and
- If necessary, help him connect with a wider circle of kids.



Understand why your teen chooses certain friends.

You can learn a lot about what makes your teen tick by knowing what he finds attractive in a friend. Is it personality? Social status? Image? Activities? If you don't know, ask him. Promise your teen you're not prying — you just want to know more about him. And if you feel his relationships aren't healthy or put him at risk for drugs and alcohol, help him branch out and spend time with different kids.

Spend time and energy supporting the healthy friendships.

Supporting friendships means driving your teen and his friends to and from events, letting them hang out at your house, encouraging time together, and so on. There are big benefits to it—you'll show him that you're interested in who he is, and you'll stay better in tune with his life. If you'd like to see your teen expand his circle of friends, encourage him to get involved in an activity he feels passionate about. Chances are he'll meet a new group of friends in the process.



By Tampa 1 Prodigy Artist Jacob

The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

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Meet as many of the parents of your teen's friends as you can.

The parents can tell you a lot about their teen and help you keep close tabs on yours. You might even consider calling or getting together regularly to share information about how your teens behave, what they like to do, and any changes you've noticed lately.

Find out where your teen hangs out most of the time.

Knowing where your teen is will help you find him if there's an emergency. Plus, knowing the environment he's in will tell you which influences (good and bad) he's around. If you're not crazy about the places he hangs out, help him find ones you do like. It could be your house, a friend's house, a clubhouse or after-school program — any place with a trusted adult in charge.



Make sure your teen hangs out where there is adult supervision.

Teens who aren't regularly monitored by their parents are four times more likely to use drugs than those who are.¹ If possible, encourage your teen and her friends to hang out at your house. (Set aside a comfortable spot for them and keep plenty of snacks on hand.) You'll become more connected to your teen and more aware of what he's up to. If hanging out at your house isn't an option, find another parent who's able to have them over, or an activity that has adult supervision.

1 Metzler, Rusby, and Biglan, Community Builders for Success: Monitoring After-School Activities

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Do what you can to discourage unhealthy friendships.

Limit his time with those friends:

- Don't allow sleepovers,
- Don't offer rides, and
- Set firm rules about having friends over when there's no adult home.

If you suspect that his friends are using drugs or alcohol, be sure he knows how you feel about using. (Your opinion really does matter, even if he doesn't say so.) Help him get involved in an activity that will expose him to a new circle of potential friends. Spending time with active, healthy teens who aren't using drugs or alcohol can have an incredibly strong affect on his behavior.

Help is Available...

You are not alone! Many families need help dealing with a child that is making poor decisions. It can be hard if your child has fallen into the wrong crowd or has begun to make choices that will poorly affect his life. But DJJ can get help—for you and your child.

1. Call the DJJ Prevention Help Line.

1-866-757-0634

Please NOTE: The Prevention Helpline is NOT a counseling service number. It is to connect you with help. All calls go to a voice mail system that is checked daily.

2. Join a DJJ Parent Support Group.

Contact: _____

Number: _____

Email: _____

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