

“Friendship with Friends”

As a parent, you want your child to make good friends that will be a positive influence on them and share the same values. At the same time, your child needs to learn what it means to be a good friend. What are some things you need to be mindful of?

Choosing a Good Friend and Being a Good Friend: (Adapted from O’Donnell, 2014)

1. Teach that Everyone has Value in the Eyes of God.

Social groupings are just a part of life. Some people call them cliques, others call them pods, but whatever you call them, it's important to teach your child that everyone is valued in the eyes of God. Make sure your child understands that they don't have to belong to a certain clique to be happy. Encourage them to make friends with others who share their interests, who are positive, and who share their values. Teach your child that character is more important in the selection of friends than the clothes they wear. Exposing your child to diversity will enrich their life and teach them an important lesson of how God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

2. Encourage Healthy, Positive Friendships.

Take the time to point out what makes a good friend, as well as how to be a good friend to someone else. Be sure your child understands that gossiping about a friend isn't very friendly, and that maintaining friendships require a little work.



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Point out what you like about their friends. You could say, "I like how your friends call you when you're sick to see how you're doing" or "I like it when your friends offer to help you clean your room after a sleepover." Help your child foster friendships by occasionally including their friends in family activities or inviting them over for family game night. Also, be sure your child understands that there's no substitute for one-on-one time together, and that texting and emailing friends isn't the same as spending time with them in person.

3. Help Your Child Be a Good Friend.

Kids don't always understand that their behaviors and the way they present themselves may be turning potential friends away. Discuss how their attitude may be sending the wrong message. Ask your child if they are approachable to others. Do they smile and greet others first when they see them? What does their body language tell other people? Do they look peers in the eye or keep their gaze towards the floor? Do they show respect for other people's opinions and talents, or resent them for being different or for having abilities or talents they don't?

4. Don't Push Popularity.

You may have wanted to be in the "in" crowd when you were young but didn't quite make it. Having a popular child should never be your goal as a parent. Be careful that you don't push him/her to join a certain group of friends or take part in certain activities because you think they will be happier that way. Allow your child to discover



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activities that agree with their personal gifts and interests, and to choose friends who provide a positive influence. If you push them to prioritize their friends by popularity, you will regret it.

5. Expect Drama.

Children can be moody, angry, and difficult at times during the “tween” years of rapid transitions. All of these emotions can interfere with friendships. Expect some friendships to be volatile from time to time. When they are, be there to help your child deal with the emotions that will come. Remember to use family worship time to pray about any relationship challenges with your child and role-play to help them develop problem solving skills. You may even want to help them understand the problem from their friend's point of view.

6. Be a Good Listener.

Listen to your child everyday as they talk about their friends. Attentive listening will provide you with a lot of information about their friends, their behavior, and any challenges that are occurring. And, remember to encourage them to talk to God. He’s the best listener of all.

7. When Things Go Bad:

Help your child if you think they are involved in a toxic friendship. A real friend will give them confidence and boost their self-esteem. If a friend turns out to be a “frenemy,” to your child, help them focus on other friendships as much as possible. If the friendship ends, keep them active



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so that they do not dwell on the lost friendship. It’s a hard lesson to learn but it is the reality of life. Explain to your child that sometimes friendships don't last, but that there are always good friendships waiting to be discovered. It is better for your child to learn these lessons when you are beside them offering support, encouragement, unconditional love, and prayers.

8. When Friends Fail:

As a parent, you want your child to enjoy healthy friendships, but you also want them to have a mind of their own. Teach your child that sometimes friends can disagree, or have different interests, beliefs, or tastes in clothing, music, and hobbies. Encourage your child to seek God’s will for their life and give them the confidence to say "no" to a friend who is trying to lead them down the wrong path. Assure them that even if their earthly friends fail or disappoint them, you are there. But, most important, God is with them and will never forsake them. He is their “Forever Friend”!



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Things to Keep in Mind Regarding Peer Pressure

1. Utilize Family Worship as a Teaching Tool.

Children love role play. Why not use relationship scenarios and have your child act out their response? Someone else in the family can play the peer role and your child can play themselves. Discuss and critique your child’s response as a family. This game may become a reality tomorrow. Here are just a few role-play options:

- Play the part of a peer and try and convince them to cheat on a school project
- Try to convince them that it’s ok to steal a candy bar from a classmate’s lunch

2. Good Communication.

Keep the lines of communication open with your child. Do not dismiss what they may tell you as insignificant or unimportant. It is important to them and should also be to you. They may at times tell you things they have heard or seen that may surprise you. Don’t act shocked or angry because that will cause them to stop sharing such information with you. Instead, invite them to share more information, their opinions and feelings, their concerns and fears, their joys and what brings them satisfaction. Affirm them and thank

them for their willingness to share with you and assure them that they are always welcome to come to you to talk. Remind them that while you may always agree with them, you love them unconditionally.



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3. Be Involved.

Make it your business to know what is going on in your child’s life and who they are spending time with. If you are picking up signals that there may be undue pressure from peers, set up an appointment and talk with your child’s teacher.

4. Compliant Child or a Self-Assured One?

Would you rather have a very compliant child or a self-assured child? What parent is not happy and pleased to have a quiet, obedient child? No parent wants to spend his or her days in a constant battle with their children. As a result, parents sometimes spend a lot of time trying to bend their children’s will at times leading them to break the child’s spirit. A compliant child may be a joy to parent, but he or she may also be more easily willing to conform to the group and give in to peer pressure. A more self-confident child, though more challenging to parent, may also be strong enough to stand on his or her own two feet in the face of pressure or opposition from peers and others. What we need is to encourage the “strong-willed” child to use that strength of character to make the best decisions while with their parents or when away from them.

5. Do not wait!

You don't want to wait until it's too late to talk with your child about positive vs. negative peer pressure. It's important to prepare them for things they may encounter now or in the future.



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Remember, you are the parent. And, the more you can instill in your child the value of choosing friends wisely, the greater this will positively impact them in the teenage years that are right around the corner.

References

O’ Donnell, J. (2014) “Help Your Tween Make Friends and Keep Them”
Adapted from: <http://tweenparenting.about.com/od/socialdevelopment/a/TweenFriends.htm>

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