



Spotlight for Parents

6 Ways to Help Your Teen Make and Keep Great Friends

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Friendship – that close connection with another person which allows us to feel valued and cared for – is vital at any stage of life. As valuable as these connections are, however, they do not always come easily or naturally, particularly for adolescents. We've all known the charismatic, outgoing teenager who is friends with everyone and approaches social situations with ease and grace. We've also known the awkward, insecure teenager who struggles to connect with people. While some of it has to do with personality and development, it is just as important to remember that making friends is a skill that can be learned. As with any new skill, becoming proficient at friendship requires some self-awareness, some guidance, and practice. Here are some tips for helping your teen improve their friendship skills:

1. **Invite your teen to do some reflecting.** Ask them, "What qualities do you have that would make people want to be your friend?" And more importantly, "How do people know that about you? How do you let people see what you value, what's important to you, and who you really are?" Rather than just looking around for someone with common interests, helping teens become clear about who they are and what they value allows them to attract friends who will be a good fit for them. Friendships during the teen years can be so important and fulfilling. Having someone to lean on, share secrets with, and let loose with makes life better at any age. If your teen is struggling with friendships, remember that it is not a lost cause. Make sure your connection with them is strong, and guide them toward the skills they need to make the kinds of friends that will serve them well.
2. **Remind your teen that not every acquaintance will become a BFF.** Teens who struggle with making friends tend to latch onto the first person who shows them meaningful attention. They may share too much personal information too soon, and they may become jealous and insecure when their new best friend has other friends. Help your teen work through the difference between a friend you sit next to in class and chit-chat with, and a friend who really understands and values you.
3. **Teach your teen how to engage in conversation.** Small talk is a learned skill. It doesn't come easily for everyone. It is particularly difficult for teens who are more introverted. Practice having light, casual conversations about easy topics such as music, activities outside of school, or homework.
4. **Help your teen understand that conflict is a natural part of relationships.** Even the best of friends are going to have fights, but not every argument means the end of a friendship. Particularly when it comes to social media, where misunderstandings are common and conflict can quickly get out of control, teach your teen the value of saying, "I think we're both really upset. Let's talk about this in person tomorrow."
5. **Be aware of your own judgments and opinions.** If you don't like your teen's new friend and you believe your reasons are valid, be thoughtful about how you bring it up. Opening a conversation with, "Tell me what you like about hanging out with her" may be much better received. If you feel the need to express how you feel about a friend, be sure to be specific about the behaviors you don't like. For example, "I've noticed she cancels plans with you at the last minute a lot" opens up a much healthier conversation. Your teen values your opinion much more than they will ever let you know, so if you notice them being treated badly by a friend, by all means speak up. Just make sure you do it in a way that is likely to be heard.
6. **Help your teen foster other relationships.** The need for connection and belonging extends beyond friendships with peers. Make sure your teen feels connected to you and other adults in their life.

- **Why You Should Never Say I Will Never Use This** - <http://mentalfloss.com/article/70709/neil-degrasse-tyson-why-you-should-never-say-i-will-never-use>
- **Science Experiments You Can Do With Your Kids** - <http://mentalfloss.com/article/53612/15-science-experiments-you-can-do-your-kids>
- **Talking About Failure: What Parents Can Do to Motivate Kids in School** - <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/45022/talking-about-failure-what-parents-can-do-to-motivate-kids-in-school?fbclid=IwAR2sMLFSbT3-JRUcy-OQ4QV7AKsgMvIAzGjUq38jZDmrDd0RjPnpR4EIKE0>
- **Strategies for Helping Kids Motivate Themselves** - <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/strategies-helping-students-motivate-themselves-larry-ferlazzo?fbclid=IwAR3fGsEJfAGPOhcvxvwPPiLo9N0qB6Th-Ea0YfPzTGrju8HEkpcRIJ6R-4>
- **8 Things I know for Sure About Most Middle School Kids** - <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/middle-school-kids/?fbclid=IwAR3u0Ub4JyOXZP3kXqrMULICagH-V9VHwRryL67N839louLF1rlykOFD6eQ>
- **In High School Kids are Not All Right** - https://www.edutopia.org/article/high-school-kids-are-not-all-right?fbclid=IwAR3eNuo_k5HASNyIutb_sP3g-NDkBzHzJS76GBzJVUZ9OK3127dz_l8QOzM

12 WAYS of Hands-On Parents

The best way to monitor your child is to be a "hands-on" parent. Here's what hands-on parents do:

- 1 Monitor what their kids watch on TV.
- 2 Monitor what they do on the Internet.
- 3 Put restrictions on the music they buy and listen to.
- 4 Know where their kids are after school and on weekends.
- 5 Expect to be and are told the truth by their children about where they really are going.
- 6 Are "very aware" of their child's academic performance.
- 7 Impose a curfew.
- 8 Make clear they would be "extremely upset" if their child used pot or cigarettes.
- 9 Eat dinner with their children several times per week.
- 10 Turn off the TV during dinner.
- 11 Assign their child regular chores.
- 12 Have an adult present when their child returns from school.

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