

One of the most difficult times for us as a parent is when you identify that your teenager's friends appear to be pulling them down a path that they do not need to be on. You see your teenager beginning to change before your very eyes, and when connecting the dots you begin to suspect it's the influence of those friends who your child is hanging around.

Teens are profoundly impacted by friendships. Who they hang around with can be wonderful and propel them forward in a positive, life-giving way. But what do you do when your teenager's friends appear to be dragging them down? What do you do when it appears your teen is connected with certain red flag relationships that are spiraling in a negative direction?

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What if My Teen has a Bad Friend?



Bad Friendships

Your teen is going to pick his friends, the good and the bad. You may find that your teen simply chooses a friend that has a negative influence on their life. Supposed “friends” can lead your teen into sin, or worse, lead your teen astray in regard to their faith.

The book of Proverbs encourages us to guard against dangerous relationships: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.” Prov. 22:24-25

Warning

As much as you may want to forcibly intervene and insist your teen cut off friendships that negatively influence them, a head-on approach will most likely propel your teenager deeper into these friendships. Worse than that, this approach could very well develop deep-seated resentment against you. Your teen may pull away, and refuse to listen to you and side with their friend(s).

What is more important than you making your teen change their friendships is to give them tools to identify for themselves the need for a friendship change. Come alongside your teenager and initiate a general conversation about friends. Ask your teen if they think certain influences are helping or hurting. This type of conversation may be more beneficial than trying to tell your teen to distance themselves from certain people.

Recommendations

Be careful not to attack the friend or the friends in question when discussing with your teen what needs to change. Focus on the negative changes you are seeing in your teenager. Instead of saying, “Your friend Johnny is a loser and going nowhere,” consider saying, “Hey, the change in your grades and the way that we communicate is concerning to me so we’re going to have to make a change in your free time options.” This keeps the focus on them and on your love for them. This does not mean you cannot criticize the other teen’s behavior. It is reasonable and quite fair to tell your child that you object to the kinds of things his friend is doing. However, don’t make it a personal attack.

A loving way to intervene is to generate a conversation where you ask your teen about their current friendships, and if there are any that they feel are dragging them down. Without lecturing your teen, see if you can ask them what they think are some bad consequences of maintaining a bad friendship. You can influence your teen to make better decisions without being the one to tell them how to do it.

There are times when your child could be the one that’s actually instigating the source of change of the whole group of people and being that person of influence. It’s really painful to consider, and that’s the last thing that we want to see, but we must consider the possibility.

That allows us to walk into the situation with our eyes open so we can make the best decision moving forward. If you can remember to walk

forward seeking a solution rather than looking for someone to blame, you’re going to be heading in the right direction.

Most friendships are not developed overnight and they will not be over that quickly either. Seek God’s help; ask for patience to walk through this season with your teenager in a way that loves but does not insist in getting its way.

Restrictions

There are times when it is necessary to intervene as a parent when your child is in a poisonous friendship, especially if the friendship may have long-term negative consequences; doing so takes much wisdom and discernment. There are a number of ways you can indirectly influence your child and help him or her to stay out of trouble.

There are times when you simply may need to draw a boundary line of safety for your teen that they aren’t able to do on their own. This may involve making some difficult decisions for your teenager...and they may not like it. For example, you may have to restrict your teen from hanging out with their friend except when in a controlled environment that you can monitor, such as in your home or a group setting.

Ultimately, always encourage your teen that he or she has freedom of choice when it comes to making friends, as long as they stay within the acceptable zone that you discuss with them.