

ADOLESCENCE AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

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Everyone needs to belong — to feel connected with others and be with others who share attitudes, interests, and circumstances that resemble their own. People choose friends who accept and like them and see them in a favorable light.

Teens want to be with people their own age — their peers. During the [teen years](#), teens spend more time with their peers and without parental supervision. With peers, teens can be both connected and independent, as they break away from their parents' images of them and develop identities of their own.

While many families help teens in feeling proud and confident of their unique traits, backgrounds, and abilities, peers are often more accepting of the feelings, thoughts, and actions associated with the teen's search for self-identity.

The influence of peers — whether positive or negative — is of critical importance in your teen's life. Whether you like it or not, the opinions of your child's peers often carry more weight than yours.

- A healthy part of every child's development is their involvement with their peers
- This is especially true during adolescence as teenagers develop a sense of independence from their parents
- Members of peer groups often dress alike, talk about the same things, like the same music, laugh at the same jokes, and share the same secrets
- These peers provide the young adult with a sounding board to test their ideas and a standard by which to judge their own physical and psychological growth
- This desire to be accepted by peers is perhaps the strongest motivating force during adolescence and it is for this reason parents should always know who their teenagers are "hanging out" with
- The peer group, no matter how inappropriate it seems to adults, really does give something significant to the adolescent
- It becomes the place where the teenager feels accepted, where they can feel good about themselves and enhance their self-image
- During adolescence kids gravitate towards other kids with the same problems and in the same situation as themselves – there is a very strong need to satisfy that thirst for

unity and for acceptance which results in peers having more influence on behaviors than parents

- There are 2 main goals of adolescence that peer relationships help foster
 1. ***Who am I?***
 2. ***Autonomy***
 - Discovering that they are separate and independent from their parents and who they are and how they fit in makes it very clear why peers occupy a lot of the time and energy of adolescence

What can parents do to foster good peer relationships?

1. *Create Strong Bonds with Your Child:*
 - This should start well before adolescence
 - The strength of a child's relationship with their family will directly impact on whether peer pressure will be a productive or destructive influence
 - Instill a strong sense of conscious with ethical and moral values that will last a lifetime
2. *Build Up Their Self-Esteem:*
 - This should also start at a very young age
 - Teenagers with a good self-image will almost always seek out membership in more socially acceptable groups
 - Teenagers who grow up with little to no self-confidence stand a greater chance of getting mixed up with antisocial peer groups
3. *Assist in the Development of Decision Making Abilities:*
 - Children who can make judgments for themselves are less likely to let other decide for them
 - Teach your teenagers to be assertive, to stand up for their beliefs, even if their ideas may be different from yours
 - This will assist in helping them learn how to make wise and independent decisions as adults
4. *Take an Interest in your Teenager's Activities and Friendships:*
 - This helps reduce the distance between generations and lets your teenager know that you are interested in what they are doing and who they are doing it with
 - This will also help in opening the lines of communication
 - Positive discussions with your adolescent provide very strong influences on them and sends them the message that you care enough about them to listen to their ideas and feelings
 - Avoid talking down to your teenager, they want to be treated as a grown-up, so talk with them as you would another adult

5. *Set a Good Example:*

- Adolescents sometimes learn more from what they see than what they hear
- Remember they will follow your lead so if you are doing something that is wrong what is the message that you may be giving to your teenager
- Practice what you are preaching

When Parents Don't Approve

You may not be comfortable about your son or daughter's choice of friends or peer group. This may be because of their image, negative attitudes, or serious behaviors (such as alcohol use, drug use, truancy, sexual behaviors).

Here are some suggestions:

- Get to know the friends of your teen. Learn their names, invite them into your home so you can talk and listen to them, and introduce yourself to their parents.
- Do not attack your child's friends. Remember that criticizing your teen's choice of friends is like a personal attack.
- Help your teen understand the difference between *image* (expressions of youth culture) and *identity* (who he or she is).
- Keep the lines of communication open and find out why these friends are important to your teenager.
- Check whether your concerns about their friends are real and important.
- If you believe your concerns are serious, talk to your teenager about behavior and choices -- not the friends.
- Encourage your teen's independence by supporting decision-making based on principles and not other people.
- Let your teen know of your concerns and feelings.

- Encourage reflective thinking by helping your teen think about his or her actions in advance and discussing immediate and long-term consequences of risky behavior.
- Remember that we all learn valuable lessons from mistakes.

No matter what kind of peer influence your teen faces, he or she must learn how to balance the value of going along with the crowd (connection) against the importance of making principle-based decisions (independence). And you must ensure that your teen knows that he or she is loved and valued as an individual at home.