

Families with Teens

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Extension
SERVICE

Information Series for Parents and Caregivers of Teens

Teens and Friends: Parents Still Have Influence

Copyright © 2005, Regents of the University of Minnesota. All rights reserved.

The importance of friends to teenagers is well known. Teens often describe their best friends as the ones who “understand exactly how I feel and will stick by me no matter what.” Because teens are maturing, they are able to understand how complicated personalities can be allowing for more tolerance and acceptance when friends don’t agree on everything.

Parents have a role in helping their teen develop healthy social friendships. The first is to remain close to your adolescent. Probably the most important thing a parent can do is to keep a strong bond with their teen through the teen years. A close relationship with parents is the best insurance the young person will choose friends parents like. It also helps the teen resist negative peer pressure. Even if they say otherwise, these young adults want and need the security that parents are there for them.

Know your adolescent’s friends. If you welcome them into your home and show a genuine interest, teens are less likely to see their parents and friends as opposing forces.

Don’t jump to hasty conclusions based on dress, appearance, language or interests. Sometimes adolescents go to extremes to prove they are independent and not like their parents. They often “try on” different social identities by experimenting with a variety in their appearance. Or they may use slang or terms new to their parents and try out new things. Negative comments from parents can cause the teen and their friends to retreat.

Make room for peer activities. Young people need time with their friends. Offer your home as a place for gatherings. Don’t feel hurt if your teen doesn’t want to accompany you for every visit or family event. Consider having your teen invite a friend along occasionally. For younger teens, offer to drive them to events.

If your child is hanging out with friend you are concerned about, monitor activities more closely. If there is a particular friend that you are concerned about,

don't greet the friend with open arms. Your lack of response will cue in your teen. Don't say anything negative either, as your child will likely become defensive and your relationship may be strained.

There are four situations when parents may have cause for worry. If your adolescent has no friends, he may need some help on how to be a friend. If the problem persists, counseling may be needed. If your adolescent is secretive about her social life, the teen may be running with kids they know you won't approve. Or they are convinced you won't like the friends. Have a talk to figure out why.

Two other circumstances include having friends much older and losing interest in friends. If all your teen's friends are much older, the teen could be involved in harmful activities such as drinking and other drug use. Take the risk and be assertive and firm about their behavior and what is acceptable and what is not. You may wish to seek professional help. Losing interest in friends and wanting to be alone for more than a two week period may indicate depression. Again, you may need outside help.

Friends are so important to teens. Because of that importance, parents should play a role in supporting their teen's healthy friendships.

Prepared by Colleen Gengler, Family Relations Specialist, 2000. Reviewed 2005.

Source: *Positive Parenting of Teens*. University of Minnesota Extension Service. 1999.

This topic in the Information Series for Parents and Caregivers of Teens may be duplicated for educational purposes only. If all or portions of the material are used in newsletters or publications, please credit the author and source (include author's name and title, title of article), copyright 2005, University of Minnesota Extension Service. For additional information, go to www.parenting.umn.edu. Please send a copy of your publication to: Colleen Gengler, U of M Extension Service Regional Center-Worthington, 1567 McMillan Street, Suite 6, Worthington, MN 56187-2801, cgengler@umn.edu.

For more information on families with teens, check out these resources by clicking on the link:

Teen Talk: School Issues – A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08129

Teen Talk: Youth Choices – A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08130

Teen Talk: A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #07938

<http://www.parentingteens.che.umn.edu/TeenTalk.htm>

Thriving With Your Teen, #07752,

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7643.html>

The Growing Season: A Parent's Guide to Positive Parenting of Teens,
#07607 – video/booklet package

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7607.html>

#07776 booklet only

<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7776.html>

To order items directly go to: www.extension.umn.edu/shopping. Use the order # listed above.