

Illustration by
Billy Nuñez, age 16

FRIENDS ARE IMPORTANT: TIPS FOR PARENTS

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

As your child is making new friends and spending more time with them, you can:

- Get to know these friends and their parents.
- Communicate expectations about friendships in a clear and open way.
- Help your child connect to school and the larger community.

Friendships are important, but your guidance and monitoring of activities are needed for your child to be safe and successful.

Friendships take on new meaning and importance as your child grows. Young people make and break friendships, explore the world around them, and begin to figure out who they want to be.

Friends will become more important to your child during this time. Friends help teach:

- Communication skills
- Self-confidence
- A sense of self

FRIENDS ARE SPECIAL

Friendships are some of your child's most important relationships. Close friendships involve intense feelings, learning how to trust, learning to criticize with honesty, and feeling secure outside of the family.

Friends help define personality and independence. Friendships teach young people how to deal with their own complex feelings and those of others.

With more friends and a wider range of interests and activities, your child may begin to spend less time at home.

**By knowing your child's close friends,
you will learn a lot about your child.**

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDS

- Talk with them on the phone.
- Meet them at neighborhood or school events.
- Find out what they and your child do together.

Let your child know that friends are welcome in your home.

- Review "house rules" with your child prior to the visit.
- Let your child, the friend, and the friend's family know that an adult will be there.
- Know what's going on by seeing, hearing, and talking with them about what they are doing. Be informed, but keep a low profile.

Follow guidelines for when your child is invited to a friend's home.

- Find out about the friend's "house rules" and who else will be at home, like parents, another adult, brothers, or sisters.
- Ask about what they plan to do during the visit.
- Talk with your child about things that are important to you: no guns, violent TV and video games, alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Take this time to review behaviors that are healthy and those that are dangerous.
- Be sure to have the telephone number of where your child can be reached. If you want to call, go ahead and pick up the phone.
- If there is a change of plans, you need to be told.



GET TO KNOW OTHER PARENTS

- Talk with them on the phone.
- Meet them at neighborhood or school events.
- Greet them when dropping your child off at their home.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

School-aged children need and want more independence. Good communication, with clear expectations, helps parents and children trust that what is going on is safe.

To communicate clearly and openly with your child,

- Make clear and consistent rules.
- Speak in a firm and loving voice.
- Agree on rules, like curfew time, and enforce the agreed-upon consequences when a rule is broken.
- Know where and with whom your child is spending time.

When plans change—and they will—let your child know that you need to be contacted for approval of any changes.

Staying in Touch

- If your child has a cell phone or pager, talk about its proper use.
- For emergencies, your child needs to know, and have written down, your home, work, and cell phone numbers.
- Have a back up plan. If you cannot be reached, your child also needs the contact information for an adult relative, neighbor, or family friend who can be called.

PROMOTE A SENSE OF BELONGING

Young people often do best when they belong to a group.

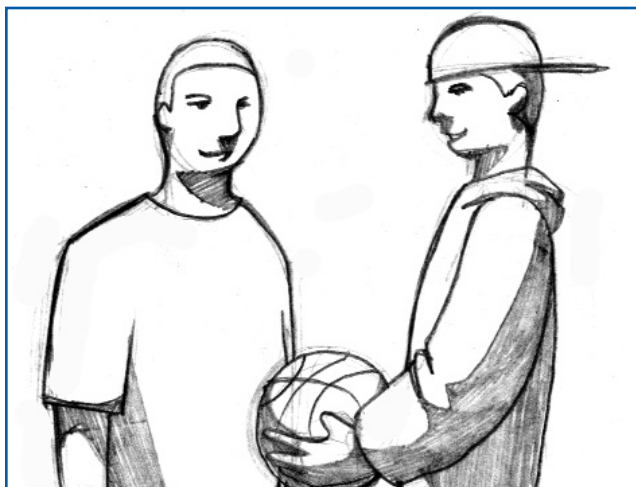
- Help your child use afternoons, weekends, and summers to find activities that will help develop this sense of belonging.
- Many young people are involved with a sports team, after-school music or arts programs, or Boys & Girls Clubs. Others join the youth group of a religious association.
- Support your child during this time of pursuing personal interests and exploring new opportunities. Know that your child's interests are likely to change frequently!

Sports—Besides playing, your child might help coach, be a student manager, become an official, or be a timekeeper. Talk about good sportsmanship.

- Being a good winner and a good loser.
- Keeping a positive attitude.
- Showing respect for players, coaches, officials, and the crowd. Discuss how important it is to set a good example while watching a game or event.

Clubs—Check with the school and local community groups to find out what is offered. You may be surprised to find out how many different programs are available.

- Get involved as a chaperone or adult member.
- Help your child think about the different activities that are available and to make good choices. But allow space for independent exploration. There is a fine balance here. If you become too pushy, your child may pull back and not want to talk with you.



As your child explores different options, safety is always a concern.

Find out:

- Where will the activity be? Indoors or outdoors? Far from or close to your home?
- How will the activity be supervised? By parents, an older brother or sister, or another adult?
- Is this a structured program or school-sponsored activity?

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteering is a good way for your child to make friends. In turn, the whole community benefits from their talent and energy.

Help your child find ways to give back.

By helping others in the community, young people build self-confidence and learn how to work with others. They can:

- Help younger children learn to read.
- Assist their peers as tutors.
- Help paint a mural or build a playground.

One of the most powerful ways to have an effect on who your child is friends with is when you become involved.

Find community projects that you and your child can work on together. Volunteering may even lead to a paying job!

Connected Kids are Safe, Strong, and Secure

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 66,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

This project was supported by Grant No. 2001-JN-FX-0011 awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.

HE50392

Graphic design and illustrations by Artists For Humanity, a non profit arts and entrepreneurship program for Boston teens.

American Academy of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™