

Peer Pressure: I'm Worried My Child's Friends Are a Bad Influence

GET TO KNOW THEM: Encourage your child's friends to hang out at your home so you can learn more about them. Listen carefully to discover the nature of their friendship with your child. Is there an unhealthy power dynamic? Or are the kids just not who you wish your child was drawn to?

ENCOURAGE A CONSTRUCTIVE PEER GROUP: Help your child find other kids who share their interests. Kids on sports teams or in orchestras, theater, or academic clubs are often more focused on their next event than on getting involved in risky behavior.

BE THE DETECTIVE: Talk with your kids about their friends. If your child's friends are engaged in risky behavior, does your child feel pressure to follow them? Or does your child seem secure in their ability to make healthy choices.

BE SPECIFIC: Tell your child exactly what behavior you won't tolerate, such as drinking, drug use, swearing, talking back, or not telling you where they're going—without blaming your child's friends.

WHY?

You'll have a hard time prevailing if you alienate your child by criticizing their friends. Your child liked them enough to choose them as friends and may get defensive or start hiding things if you pit yourself against their peer group.

Your child may be at a stage when friends rule their world. Brain science suggests this is completely normal. But if you show your child that you care by listening and being there for them, your concern will mean something to them. You may not get your child to change social groups, but they will hear your concerns and become more aware of their friends' behavior.

KEEP CLOSE TABS: Know where your child is, what they're doing, and who they're with when they're not at school or at home. Research shows teens whose parents monitor them are less likely to engage in risky behavior. If your child protests, let them know you care and that knowing where they are is a non-negotiable.

DON'T LOSE YOUR HEAD: Conversations with your child about their friends can get heated fast! Keep your emotions in check and you'll have a better chance of communicating productively.

START A TALK, NOT A LECTURE: "Tell me about what Jack is like as a friend. What do you like about him? What kinds of things does he like to do?"

DON'T DECLARE WAR. DON'T SAY: Ever since you started hanging out with Jack and his friends, you've been impossible! You'd better shape up or you can't see them anymore!"

