

# Know Your Children's Friends

The need to belong and to fit in with a group is a tremendous force in the lives of young people. And this force grows through childhood, just as the need for independence grows. Peer pressure, in fact, is more important than any other influence except parents in affecting whether youth drink.

## **So, What Can a Parent Do?**

First, parents can teach their children the meaning of real friendship and how to make true friends.

Second, parents can encourage kids to think for themselves...to be self-reliant and independent...and to recognize the times when they should do what their friends do and the times when they should stand alone and do what they think is right. These will be good lessons for life that will apply to many issues.

If your son is feeling pressured by friends, ask him, "If your friends want you to do something you don't feel right about, are they really your friends?" Teaching children how to evaluate the consequences of their decisions is an important skill. As their parent, you're the best teacher.

## **How and when to talk**

It's not practical — and not advisable — for parents to choose their children's friends. Trying to do so can even backfire, particularly during adolescence.

What parents can do, beginning in elementary school, is to encourage their children to talk about their friends, how their friends make them feel, and how their friends influence their behavior.

Get to know your children's friends and what they like to do together. Include their closer friends in activities. If you like them, you can encourage the friendship by suggesting a future invitation. Accepting your kids' friends makes your children feel good about their social decisions, too.

## **Friendship**

During the preteen years, you can help your son or daughter prepare for situations in which they may be encouraged to drink by actually rehearsing specific ways for them to say "no." For example:

- "No, thanks, it's not cool to drink or get drunk."
- "It's not worth being grounded if my parents find out...and they find out everything!"
- "I think people who get drunk are really immature."

You can also help your teenager by continuing to share the facts — specifically, that most kids don't drink, despite what your son or daughter may have heard from friends. That way your child won't feel different for not drinking.

With your teen's help, make and enforce rules that have to do with drinking and friends...such as not allowing teens to attend parties in homes where the adults are absent and alcohol beverages may be available.

Especially during the teen years, get to know the parents of your child's friends so you can determine if they share your attitudes about teen drinking...and if they closely supervise teens around their home.

*This article was derived from the Family Talk guide for parents, developed by an advisory panel of authorities in the fields of education, family therapy, and alcohol treatment, and through conversations with parents and teens. The full guide may be read online or downloaded by clicking on Document Library on [www.familytalkonline.com](http://www.familytalkonline.com).*

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