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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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Know! Your Friends

13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

14 "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:13-16

Friendships are vital to a person's well-being, especially during the teenage years when key developmental changes are taking place. Friendships can help children grow morally and emotionally. They learn how to communicate, cooperate and solve problems in relationships, which will benefit them throughout life. Research shows that friendships can also help youth avoid delinquency, isolation and other negative characteristics that are many times associated with the teenage years.

There are several important factors here however. First, when we say "friends," we're not talking about the hundreds of "connections" our children have online or something that can occur with the mere acceptance of a "friend request." We are talking about real-life relationships that require both time and effort. Second, we are talking healthy, positive relationships. Too often, children desire to be friends with a peer based on superficial reasons like popularity or wealth (he/she has a giant house, expensive clothes and all the cool gadgets). Friendships based solely on these factors are not likely to last, and may end painfully. The third factor to keep in mind is that the influence and impact of young friendships are powerful – for better or worse. It should not be about the number of friends our children have, but the quality of the friendships. Children must be able to recognize quality friendships, how they look and how they should feel.

While there is no official check-list in determining quality relationships, here are some common traits among tried and true friendships.

(Parent to child) When you can say the other person...

- Is fun to be around, makes you smile and laughs with you
- Is adaptable and doesn't always have to have his/her way
- Is kind and has respect for you
- Is trustworthy with your secrets big and small
- Is honest with you, even when it is not what you want to hear
- Is loyal and dependable
- Listens attentively and cares about what you have to say
- Accepts you for who you are, even when you're not at your best



Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



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- Is happy for you when you reach your goal and is a shoulder to cry on when you don't
- Is supportive of you and has your best interest in mind
- Does not ask you to compromise your morals or values
- Does not put you in harm's way or encourage you to engage in risky behaviors
- Does not put you down (to your face or behind your back) or purposely hurt your feelings

...then you have a real friend."

Remind your son or daughter that maintaining a friendship means being a good friend in return.

During the tween/teen years, our children are likely to prefer spending time with their friends over us. Instead of taking it personally, use it as an opportunity to get to know your children's friends and see firsthand how they interact together. Allow your children to include friends in a family outing or invite them to dinner. Afterwards, make it a point to chat with your son or daughter about what you saw, whether it was positive or negative. Believe it or not, our parental influence remains strong and our opinion still matters. Be sure to keep the conversation going by talking regularly with your children about healthy relationships, reminding them that real friends are uplifting and encouraging, and make them feel good about themselves. At this point it is up to our children to pick their friends, but it is up to us to continue to empower them to choose those friends wisely.

Sources: ReachOut.com: [What makes a good friend?](#) Millie Ferrer and Anne Fugate - Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) University of Florida: [The Importance of Friendship for School-Age Children.](#)

Other Verses to Consider:

Colossians 3:2

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