



## KNOWING YOUR CHILD'S FRIENDS

In his outstanding book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis discusses at great length the good and evil that friendship can promote. He points out that this wonderful gift called friendship, which can bring such delight and joy into our lives, can also turn us away from God. Friendship can both encourage Christians to stand up to persecution and be the binding camaraderie that keeps wicked men fighting through their last stand. Yes, even Hitler had friends.

Parents need to be *completely aware* of the friends who have gravitated toward our children, and vice versa, and take a proactive involvement in these friendships. Their potential—for good or ill—is stupendous. This is yet another extension of the biblical principle, “Know the condition of your flocks” (Proverbs 27:23).

### Key Characteristics of the “Right” Friends

1. **A Love for God**—it doesn't matter if your child's friends are rich or poor, or of any color or race, but if they have a heart for God, they can be recommended. We need to look actively for other Christian children to play with our children.
2. **Good Relations with Their Own Parents**—good relations between parent and child are a must, ensuring communication through even the most difficult times.
3. **Kindhearted, Not Mean-Spirited**—people who can hurt your children the most are often their own age mates. Be on guard if your child gravitates toward someone you can see is mean-spirited.
4. **Fun-Loving**—encourage your child to have a great time when at play, and find friends who will complement this contagious attitude.
5. **A Desire to Excel**—children who are inclined to improve their talents and skills instead of vegetating in front of the TV, can have a fantastic influence on your children, helping them discover their unknown talents and giving them the confidence to excel.

### Directing Your Older Child toward the Right Friends

If certain friends are really a bad influence, you might forbid your child from seeing them. But this often produces rebellion and should only be invoked as a last resort. Two other methods should always be attempted first.

**1. “Posture of Disapproval”** – That is, if you notice a friendship emerging that you feel is not a good influence, you should subtly make your child aware of your lack of enthusiasm. No arguments. No threats. You might say (with no emotion) something like, “You know, I'm a bit concerned about (name).” When your child asks for details, remain calm and vague: “I'm not sure I'd want him for a close friend.” Leave it there. Too much complaining will often encourage your child to begin defending the friend, thus increasing his loyalty to him (or her).

**2. Practical Approval** – With preteens, parents can encourage good friendships and avoid bad ones with simple decisions. When children who are a good influence want to come over, you are happy and able to pick them up (whatever sacrifice it takes) and drive them home. For those children who are a bad influence who want the same thing, you are not so accommodating. There will be moments when you must talk to your child openly about the negative influence of a certain friend. A sensitive, non-threatening conversation will explain why you are so concerned. Again, your child may not agree with your reasoning, but she/he will be assured that you have her/his best interests at heart.

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