



Making and Becoming a Good Friend

Use “mindfulness” in choosing and being a positive friend

The biggest risk factor in whether kids drink, use drugs, or participate in anti-social behavior is whether their friends do. That’s why it is so important for kids to be “mindful” in choosing good friends who will encourage them to be their best self. It’s also important to be a good friend: to be kind, accepting of others, and a good influence. Even with for kids who have good friends, it is important for parents to monitor their activities—even the online games they play. When kids play violent video games, or games promoting anti-social behavior, it programs their brain for negative behavior. In one study, kids with the highest video game usage had higher alcohol and drug use. When kids help their friends stay away from alcohol, drugs, and anti-social behavior (behavior that would harm self or community), they’re not just being a good friend; they’re making a positive difference in the world.

Have your kids rate themselves and their friends [0-to-3] for each quality below to find out (a) what kind of a friend they are, and (b) what kind of friends they have. Help them identify personal friendship skills that need to be developed and choose a few to work on. If current friends don’t rank high as a positive influence, help them find new ones. If you hear of, or notice, your child being mean to others, put a stop to it immediately. It harms character and puts other kids at risk.

Me		Friend		Quality (rank 0-3)
				Friendly
				Is humble; doesn’t brag
				Includes you in a group
				Accepts you like you are
				Stands up for you if others talk about you
				Is pleased, compliments you when you do well
				Treats you kindly
				Cares about others
				Listens when you have a problem
				Doesn’t gossip
				Generous
				Cares about others’ feelings
				Stays away from gangs
				Encourages you to do your best
				Respects people who are different
				Respects your values
				Stands up for weak/disadvantaged kids
				Patient, easy going, has a sense of humor
				Peacemaker
				Helps you stay out of trouble

Me		Friend		Quality (rank 0-3)
				Snobbish
				Braggs, feels superior
				Leaves you out
				Sometimes makes fun of you
				Talks behind your back
				Is jealous when you do well
				Is sometimes mean to you
				Is mean or cruel to others
				Minimizes your problems
				Gossips
				Stingy
				Self-centered; puts people down
				Gang member
				Asks you to do anti-social things
				Disrespects those who are different
				Calls you a wimp if you say “no”
				Bullies kids, expects you to join in
				Hot-tempered; gets angry easily
				Gets in fights; holds grudges
				Asks you to do illegal things: drinking, drugs, cheating, stealing, promiscuity

Friendship Skills to Develop

Books on making friends:

- Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me—The Top 25 Friendship Problems and How to Solve Them*, Michele Borba
- A Good Friend: How to Make One and How to Be One*, from Boys Town Press
- Say Goodbye to Being Shy*, Richard Brozovich, Ph.D. and Linda Chase
- Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves

HOW TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS

- Respect yourself; value your own unique worth.
- Care about and respect others.
- Act friendly and confident, even when you’re scared.
- Learn and practice conversation skills.
- Go where you can meet new people.
- Look for kids who have your same likes and values.
- Stand near kids you want to meet; notice their actions; look for things to compliment.
- Introduce yourself to someone in the group; mention the good things you noticed.
- Ask if you can join the activity. (“Mind if I join...”)
- After a while, invite them to an activity you host.