



## When You Disapprove of Your Child's Friend

Hanging out with friends is an important part of growing up, a chance to build lifelong social skills – and to have a lot of fun. But what if your child's friend is someone you really don't like? Maybe you think this friend is a bad influence on your child. Or perhaps you find the friend irritating beyond belief! How can you express your concerns and provide necessary parental guidance while still respecting your child's right to have opinions (and friends) that don't always match your own views?

- **Examine your own reasons for being concerned**

Does the friend bring out the worst in your child? Does he or she just need some clear guidelines on how to behave at your house? Are you worried that the child is from a family with very different values than yours? Or are your concerns about superficial rather than substantive things -- for example, the way the child dresses or some little mannerism that reminds you of your annoying Uncle Henry?

- **Ask how your child feels about the friend**

Ask -- and be willing to really listen -- to why your child chooses to spend time with this person. Perhaps your child sees real value in this friend that you just haven't had a chance to see. On the other hand, your child may be uneasy with the friendship but may not know how to get out of it. Or, especially during adolescence, your child may be experimenting with different kinds of friends as a way of seeking his or her own identity. Sometimes this is a harmless part of adolescent development. However, keep in mind that a sudden change of friends sometimes is a sign of depression or other emotional problems during the teen years, especially if there also is a drop in grades or a loss of interest in other activities.

- **Tell your child about your concern – calmly and clearly**

Be as specific as possible about the behaviors that bother you. Keep in mind that an attitude of concern for your child's wellbeing is more effective than anger or accusation. In fact, especially with adolescents, an authoritarian approach (e.g. "don't ever see that person again!") may strengthen your child's resolve to stay in the friendship.

- **Define ground rules, expectations and a plan of action**

This may mean that you clarify rules about how your child and the friend will behave and identify consequences in case those rules are violated. You may decide that a meeting with the other child's parents would be a good step toward figuring out how to make the friendship more acceptable. (They may even think your child is the bad influence!) Or you and your child might come to the conclusion that the friendship is not in anyone's best interest and therefore spend some time practicing how to ease out of it.

Whatever action you decide to take, you will have shown respect for your child's point of view and a willingness to communicate your own feelings in a caring and straightforward manner. That is an important lesson in itself.