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Parenting Made Easy System

**NAVIGATING THE CHOPPY WATERS OF
THE TEENAGE YEARS**

DAY 12: FRIENDSHIPS & PEER GROUPS

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In a nutshell – Today, we look at your teenager’s peer groups, and consider the issues that can arise involving the friends that they choose to be with ...

Welcome back!

When your kids were little, life seemed easier as you knew their friends and had control over who they played with. Yet now as teenagers, they suddenly seem to be treating the place like a hotel and are never at home. You aren’t quite sure if you’ve heard of “Matt” before, and you aren’t sure about letting your child stay at his house for the weekend.

It’s perfectly normal to feel rejected, left out and excluded from your teenager’s life quite suddenly now that being with their friends becomes the most important thing in a teenager’s life.

So how do you work out what is and isn’t acceptable socially for your kids, regardless of what everyone else is saying?

I remember my son was put up a year group at school, so suddenly all of his friends were a year older than him. I remember being mortified when Chris’ mother let them all go swimming, while she popped into Sainsbury’s, as it wasn’t something I would have let Will do at the time.

So take a few moments here to think about what is acceptable to you – which places are OK for you, what are the picking up arrangements, supervision and safety issues.

There are no hard and fast rules as they all depend on the maturity and “street savvy-ness” of your individual child. But just spend some time asking yourself “Is it OK for your 14 year

old son to be hanging around the shopping centre late at night and then getting on public transport on his own?" Just get clear about your rules and boundaries so you can pass them on clearly to your child.

This way misunderstandings and arguments can be avoided.

Now it's your turn!

Here are some useful questions you need to ask yourself – make a note of your answers to each one:

- What level of maturity do I feel my child is at?
- How responsible do I think they are?
- How would they react in a crisis?
- How street-wise are they?
- How confident are they?
- Are they able to say "no" to things confidently?
- What age do they look physically? How does that affect what is expected of them?
- How does where you live affect your rules and boundaries and allowing them out unsupervised?
- Who are their friends? What influence do they have on my child?
- Where do you think is acceptable to go? (cinema, sports centre, shopping centre, friend's house, bars, clubs etc.)
- What time do you expect them home?
- What means of transport do they use?
- How do you want them to contact you if they are late or in trouble?
- What will you do if your rules are constantly ignored?

By planning ahead and getting clear on these issues, you and your child both build confidence, and you allow them to grow their experience of life, and build their independence step-by-step.

Friendships are always a tough one for parents, and there is almost always something to worry about! At various times you might be concerned that your child has:

- No friends
- Inappropriate friends
- Much older friends
- Fallen out with friends

However, the one rule of thumb my parents used to have with my friends was to be relaxed, open and friendly with them. They encouraged the idea that home was an “open-house”, where I could always bring my friends home.

If possible, it’s a good idea to have a room in the house where your teenagers can watch the TV, have a coffee and chat undisturbed – preferably not upstairs in their bedroom – so you are available to keep a friendly eye on them but they feel independent nevertheless.

You may also notice an intermediate, mid-teen stage, when your child likes to spend time in their room reading, playing music and being “on their own” away from the family. I know that my two went through this stage. It doesn’t mean they are insecure or haven’t got any friends, but they are starting to feel increasingly independent of the family. This is quite normal during the mid-teens and this also changes over time.

The important thing for teenagers is to have hobbies and interests that keep them engaged and not just “hanging out on street corners”. So encourage them to get involved in extra-curricular activities from judo to football or from swimming to drama club. It’s all about getting involved, having fun and building their confidence, helping them to make friends with like-minded people.

A Quick Recap

- Teenagers mature and grow up at different times, and it's entirely normal to worry about the friendships that your own child makes.
- Try and give your teenager space and some independence, but always be there for them, and to keep a friendly eye on them.
- Give your child plenty of opportunities to get involved, and to make friends with like-minded people.

Next time ...

We look at lots of ways that you can encourage your teenager, and make good behaviour the norm ...

See you then!



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