

CAN WE PICK OUR KIDS' FRIENDS?

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I read a newspaper article the other day about some teenage boys who were shooting tin cans off a back yard fence using a bee-bee gun. While one of the boys was putting the cans back on the fence, another boy asked him to move. Unfortunately, he moved in the opposite direction than they expected and was shot and later died. Alcohol was found to be involved. The father of one of the boys was reported to have said, "You can't pick your kids' friends." That statement got me thinking! Can we pick our kids' friends? I don't think there is a simple answer, but what I would say is that we can certainly train our kids to make wise choices regarding friendships.

When our kids are small we do have total control over whom they play with (unless they are not in our care). We can set behavioral expectations for our own homes and ensure that when other kids come to play they understand those rules and abide by them. If not, we can always send them home.

When our children reach the pre-teen years they spend a good deal of time out of our care. We do not always know who their school friends are and if we observe their behavior deteriorating, we need to investigate the cause. One possibility could be the friends they are mixing with. We need to tell our child about the negative change we see and the concerns we have. We can explain that their friends have different standards than we do and that it would be best if they found other more positive friends.

As our kids get into their teens, they become increasingly independent of our direct input and it is much more difficult to monitor their friendships. However, if we have established positive parent/child communication lines, then hopefully, they will have gained enough skills and common sense to gravitate towards those kids who are successful and active. Good communication also encourages our kids to tell us when they feel afraid, bullied or pressured by others. We need to be their 'safe haven'.

We need to teach our kids what a good friend looks like and how to maintain that friendship. Good friends care, protect and stick up for each other through good times and bad. They are encouraging and want to keep each other out of trouble and danger. We need to open our homes to our kids' friends so we can discern whether those friendships need to be nurtured or discouraged. When their friends are in your house you always know where your kids are and that's good!

As, in the story mentioned above, our kids need to know that alcohol does not mix with any kind of activity that requires precision or quick response such as

driving or using a gun. We can use such examples to explain that serious accidents can occur when we are incapable of or do not consider consequences.

The best way to teach your children to pick good friends is to be a good role model in your own friendships. When they see the value of good friendship, they will look for the same qualities in others. And, if you are your child's hero, they will want to pick friends that remind them of you.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.