

Emphasize the value of strong friendships



A teenager's world often seems to revolve around his or her friends. For young people learning to be independent, peers become more important than parents. In our digital age, some kids claim hundreds of "friends." But in the area of friendships, quality is more important than quantity.

When *Group Magazine* conducted a "State of Youth Ministry" survey last year, a clear thread running through the responses of almost 700 youth pastors was their admiration for kids' strong friendships. In fact, many youth pastors said they envied the devoted relationships that so many of their kids have. "Adults have more 'acquaintances' than real friendships," one respondent noted.

Friendship isn't all smooth sailing for teenagers, however. Cliques and bullying can lead to exclusion, hurt feelings, and even violence. Without enough self-confidence, kids may try to seek approval by joining the wrong crowd or acting out against others. Some kids don't yet have the skills to make and keep friends. So it's important to teach (and model) active listening, affirming other people, selflessness, and servanthood. Conflict-resolution skills are also vital for the inevitable problems that arise among friends and peers.

Read on to learn more about how you can encourage your teenagers to make good friends—and to be a good

The small-group resource *Guy Talk, Girl Talk* offers valuable tips for making friendships that last:

- 1. Be wise in choosing friends.** Friendship can't be rushed. We sometimes latch onto someone who may not be a good fit for us. So take your time and pick a friend who's someone you know you can trust—and who will build you up, not tear you down.
- 2. Be authentic in your friendships.** You can only be as close to your friends as you're willing to allow them. Sometimes it's important to ask if you're the reason you don't have close friends. Are you afraid to let anyone really know you? How can you open up in order to move from shallow to authentic relationships?
- 3. Be willing to be held accountable.** When you trust others to tell you the truth, allow them to speak into your life. Another person is often better able to provide perspective to help us grow and develop. Truth can hurt, but it can also help us grow. Christian friends become closer to each other and to God when they encourage one another toward godly living.

Pulse

These statistics provide some insight into teenage friendships:

- Including friends on social -networking sites, teenagers claim to have an average of 75 friends. (Harris Interactive Poll)
- In a survey of almost 30,000 Christian teenagers, 88% agreed with this statement: "My friends are incredibly loyal to me." (Group Magazine)
- A study of more than 11,000 teenagers found that kids are more likely to have "good" friends (ones who don't fight and who plan to attend college, for example) if they have a warm relationship with their parents. (Ohio State University)
- In a national survey of sixth- through 10th-graders, 13% of kids reported bullying others, 11% reported being the target of bullies, and 6% said they fall in both categories. (safeyouth.org)



Great Questions to Ask Your Kids

Find out more about your teenagers and their friendships by asking them these questions:

1. What qualities are most important to you in a friend? What compromises are you willing and unwilling to make when choosing a friend?
2. How good of a friend are you, and why? What could you do to be a better friend?
3. How have your friendships changed as you've grown up?
4. How do you handle conflicts with friends? Have conflicts ever made your friendships stronger? Explain.



Focus on Prayer

PRAY THAT:

1. God will provide Christian friends for your teenagers and they'll be positive influences on one another.
2. Your teenagers will learn about the importance of trust, commitment, and communication within their friendships.
3. You can model healthy friendships, extending grace, patience, and unselfishness to your own friends.

Verse of the Month

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

The support of friends, especially other Christians, is a God-given gift. Through our fellowship and relationships with believers, we share life's joys and struggles. We also encourage one another in the Christian walk, reminding our friends that Jesus is our best friend and Savior.

Going Deeper

At SimplyYouthMinistry.com, two youth ministry veterans discuss the value of small groups. Here's how your teenagers can benefit from gathering with other Christian young people:

Doug Fields writes: "Strong teenage friendships require a lot of work. They're difficult mostly because we're all screwed-up on the inside. We've all been hurt by others. We all have blind spots, and we often ignore our faults and mistakes—even in the face of all evidence of how important relationships are! Small groups are an attempt to help facilitate biblical fellowship. A few goals of a healthy small group are friendship, connection with others, intimacy, and bearing one another in love. Without a small group, kids can get lost in the crowd, where they'll stay comfortably numb and hide in the safe anonymity provided by the masses."

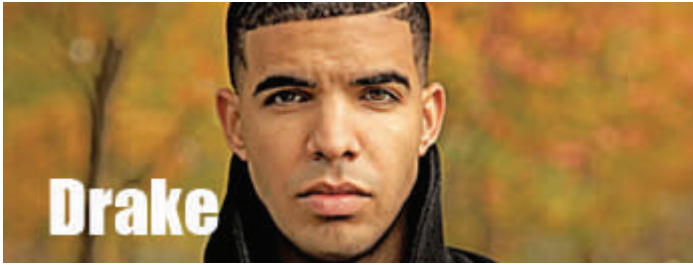
Todd Syzmack says small groups help kids grow deeper, share life together, and become more real, honest, and open. He offers these four benefits of small groups: 1.) They build community. 2.) They provide an outlet and help kids process the tough stuff. 3.) They deepen kids' trust for each other. 4.) They help prevent kids from falling through the cracks.

"One of the most important things for teenagers is their desire to belong," Syzmack writes. "They don't just want to be another face in the crowd; they can do that just by walking down hallways of their high school each day. Kids want to be known and cared for. When a group of five to eight young people come together, it creates an opportunity for them to listen and talk to each other."

"Small groups create a sense of intimacy that no other programs provide," Syzmack adds. "The walls of security that kids build around themselves come down in a small-group setting. This usually happens when one person shares about the junk or struggles in his or her life. In an instant, other kids hear one of their peers become transparent and real. Often, those teenagers are going through the same thing and can relate."



MUSICSPOTLIGHT



Mainstream Artist

Background: Drake, a 23-year-old Canadian, was Jimmy Brooks on the TV show *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. His first album debuted at No. 1 in June. Thanks to his earlier collaborations and demo, Drake already has a Grammy nomination and two Junos (the Canadian equivalent).

Albums: *Thank Me Later* (2010), *So Far Gone* (EP) (2009)

What Parents Should Know: Drake grew up in a rich suburban neighborhood, so instead of singing about drugs, gangs, and poverty, he addresses love, relationships, and the weight of success. Although Drake's songs aren't steeped in misogyny, he uses foul language and refers to weed and alcohol.

What Drake Says: He wants to be like an honest friend to his listeners. "But some people are scared to do that...some of their images are built off façade. ... But we've all seen what happens when you slip up, and that's a stressful life."

Discussion Questions: Describe a time when something you wanted hidden was revealed. Why did you try to hide it, and how did it feel to come clean? Does the truth always come out? Read aloud Joshua 7. What were the effects of Achan's secret actions? How can you avoid similar trouble?



Christian Artist

Background: Andrew Peterson, who started playing music in 1996, got his break when he was asked to open for Caedmon's Call. He has released several acclaimed albums and also writes young-adult fiction. Peterson's latest album, *Counting Stars*, releases at the end of July.

Albums: *Resurrection Letters: Volume Two* (2008), *Love and Thunder* (2003), *Carried Along* (2000)

What Parents Should Know: Few musicians paint word pictures like Peterson can. He goes right for the heart and shows a love for the fantastical and mysterious aspects of faith.

What Peterson Says: "My biggest spiritual struggle is forgetting who I am in Christ. I'm bad about believing praise.... There's nothing wrong with compliments, but the problem is that when you believe it when you do well, you will also believe it when you don't do well."

Discussion Questions: How's your self-esteem? Why is it so easy to tear down others and ourselves? Have you ever thought about how you look in God's eyes? If so, explain. Read aloud Psalm 30. How might these verses affect your self-esteem? What happens when we base our self-esteem on God's view of us, not the world's?

Movie: *The Other Guys* (releases August 6)

Genre: Action-Comedy

Rating: Not yet rated

Synopsis: After an embarrassing shooting incident, a New York detective (Mark Wahlberg) is teamed with a forensic accountant (Will Ferrell). They admire another team of cops (Samuel L. Jackson and Dwayne Johnson) and try to be like them, with comedic results.

Discussion Questions: Think of a time you've compared yourself to others: How did that make you feel about yourself? How do comparisons affect our view of God and his sovereignty? Read aloud 2 Corinthians 10:10-17. What are the dangers of comparing ourselves with others? Do these verses mean we shouldn't strive to be like other people or look up to anyone? Why or why not? How can we strive to be better and keep improving ourselves without making comparisons?

FILMWATCH

