

When Your Teen Lacks Self-Confidence

YOU OVERHEAR your teen's friend treat her badly, yet when you inquire about the friendship, she retaliates against *you*. You are her cheerleader, advocate, and role model, yet she rarely listens to you, even after she admits her dismay.

Often, as parents, we witness our teenager being treated badly, choosing the wrong friends, or trying so desperately to fit in—at any cost—and it breaks our heart. Their defensiveness and the urge to self-protect make it extremely difficult for them to admit that they are being treated badly.

Often children and teenagers with ADHD lack the self-confidence and skills to branch out and make new friends, but keep in mind, they would if they could.

Work with, not against, your teen.

Banning a friendship usually backfires and leads to a big divide in the parent-child relationship.

Setting boundaries can be tough, but by talking to your teen about friendship—without judging or imposing restrictions—you increase the chances that she will come to you when future problems surface.

Five Tips to Help Your Teen Discuss and Evaluate Friendships

1. Help identify strengths, character, and that “special something” that makes your teen shine.

Each of us excels in an environment that allows us to feel good about ourselves. This is usually where our interests are high, so we can pursue our passion and develop a stronger sense of self. Imagine how fortunate your child will feel when she feels good about herself and uses those strengths to understand others based on their patterns and what they say and do. Help her think, “I am good at data and I can use data to find creative approaches to problem solving.”

Confidence comes from knowing you have past experiences when things have worked out. All of us have felt the urge to throw in the towel or to allow people to treat us poorly because we did not know where else to turn. It may take time and lots of little conversations and patience, but helping your teen locate a place where she uses her strengths can help her build confidence.



Criticism and daunting life experiences due to executive function weakness can make children and teens with ADHD feel less than confident. Having a place where strengths are encouraged can also help your child find her kindred spirits, the people to whom she connects with similar interests, and give her social support to break away from toxic friends. Without these social supports, it's hard for some children to separate from people who treat them badly.

2. Have short conversations, listen more, don't lecture, and hold back lectures, criticism, and feelings.

Your child or teen will open up more if he feels heard and understood. By holding back judgment, you become your teen's partner and create a safe harbor and judgement-free zone. You are your child's original teacher. Work toward having fun and reducing strain so your connection becomes more important than anything else.

3. Don't forbid friends.

Saying no to a friendship can backfire, making that friendship seem even more attractive. In addition, outward disapproval will most likely make your teen retreat and put a strain on the parent-child relationship. Your teen prefers not to choose, but if forced, your relationship

will most likely suffer and what communication you did have will become less.

Unless the friendship is a dangerous one, take a less direct approach. Talk openly and often. Keep the lines of communication open. Help him develop lifelong positive beliefs about how he should be treated. For example, rather than outwardly forbidding the friendship, ask, “What do you enjoy doing with your friend?” “What do you like about him or her?” “What does he do to show you that he cares about you as a friend?” Helping teenagers examine who is treating them well is often about helping them consider how enjoyable they find the friendship.

4. Discuss treatment: good and bad.

Rather than telling your child they are mistreated, talk about relationships and friendships through general, short conversations. Ask questions like, “What does it mean to be a good friend?” “Who do you feel is a good friend?” “Are they trustworthy?” “Is it enjoyable to be with him?” “How are they treating you?” “Do you know of other friendships that seem enjoyable?” “If you could change one thing about this friendship, what would you change?”

5. Coach socialization.

Coaching is about exploring and being curious. Be curious about something your child has said about socialization. For example, consider asking, “So, buddy, I keep thinking about the conversation we had the other day when you said you dread social stuff. Is it because it’s hard for you?”

EVERY CHILD—REGARDLESS OF THEIR AGE—needs at least one caring adult in their life. Believing that someone has their back, that they have someone to lean on and that this person will help them figure out whatever may surface, helps children and teens to build lifelong resilience. **A**



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