

# Parent *pages*

A Growing  
Christian  
makes the  
Best Parent!

Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

Vol. 5 No. 5 • January 2006

## Can we choose good friends for our kids?

**R**aise your hand if your child has ever said to you: “But, it was Billy’s idea!” Now, raise your hand if you have found yourself replying: “Well, if Billy told you to jump in a lake, would you do that too?” I realize that this is not a scientific procedure for gathering information, but I surmise that more than half of us have found ourselves involved in a conversation similar to the above.

Generations ago, marriages were arranged. It never occurred to parents of that time period that their children could be trusted to make such an important decision as a life partner. Nearly everyday at school, our children choose a partner. They choose someone to play with, have fun with, learn with, and perhaps, get into trouble with. Sometimes this friend becomes a friend for life and sometimes this friend affects your child’s life.

### The good with the bad

The Bible has many references to friends—interestingly enough, more warnings about bad friends than examples of good friends. Ruth was certainly a faithful friend to Naomi. And King David is a fascinating study on friendship. He had a nearly perfect friend in Jonathon: loyal (1 Sam. 23:18), a defender (1 Sam. 19:1-6), and without jealousy (1 Sam. 18:1-4). Jonathon is this kind of friend we want our child to be and the kind of friend we want our child to have.

David’s son, Absalom, did not keep good friends. It was advice from a friend that created a permanent rift between father and son and eventually led to Absalom’s death (2 Sam. 16:16-23). Hushai and Ahithophel are the kind of friends we parents worry about. We can’t arrange



friends for our children like we plan their schedules or their menus, but how do we steer our children toward a Jonathan or a Ruth and away from the bad influences of the Ahithophels of the playground?

### Witness to everybody

When my daughter was about 10 years old, a girl with a somewhat checkered past moved into the neighborhood. I spoke with this young lady and quickly realized that she had many challenges in her life as well as a history of poor choices. I struggled with whether or not to allow my daughter to play with this neighbor. I realized that this child’s play and language were not of the same values as our family but I also knew that this girl needed to know God’s love. By telling my daughter to avoid her, I would be telling my

daughter that this person was not worthy of witness. With trepidation, I encouraged her to play with her new neighbor.

My challenge was to help my daughter understand how friends influence each other. Whenever two or more people are together, one is influencing the other and that influence can be good or bad. Our children need to understand that they can be influenced, and that they have the power of influence over others. They need to learn to discern good influence from bad and to hold themselves accountable for their actions when with friends. Help your child understand that being a good influence on friends is how he or she can follow God’s directive to be salt and light to the world (Matt. 5:13-16).

When we watch commercials on television, we are not aware of how they

influence us. In truth, they are designed to do just that. Likewise, our children are not easily aware of how their friends influence them or how they influence their friends. As parents we need to point this out to them through specific examples. Praise your child for following or leading on a good decision. And hold your child accountable for poor decisions made by a group. The latter is especially important. If a child is not held responsible for the decision he or she made to follow with a group, then the child will not learn discernment. There will be no reason, as a ready-made excuse will always be available when consequence rears its ugly head.

It's important for our children to realize they can influence friends. In fact, it is a good social skill to realize what trouble lurks in a situation where a child cannot influence. In other words, it is not healthy for your child to have friends that do not accept or solicit your child's opinion on things. This is a situation of unnatural control and is a friendship that should be avoided. Help your child understand that his or her opinion is important and that a good friend will recognize that. Simply put, a good friend will play what you want to play, sometimes.

## Practice what you preach

The most effective way to teach a child is to model. That is why your 2-year-old is sure to pick up that word you didn't mean to use when you hit your thumb with the hammer. But how does a parent model good social skills? You do want your children to get to know their friends and not just follow them blindly. Model this by getting to know the families of your child's friends.

Become familiar with their values and parenting practices. Find out if their treasure lies here on earth or in heaven. I knew I was doing something right the day my 15-year-old daughter rolled her eyes and announced, "All my friends agree that our parents are way too involved in our lives." As parents we didn't follow them around, but we knew where they were



and who they were with. We also kept in touch with each other.

To learn what kind of friend your child has chosen, watch the relationship the friend has with his or her parents. If you see behaviors that impress you or worry you, address this with your child. Avoid being judgmental; instead, ask your child how he felt about the situation. A Dr. Phil "How's that workin' for ya?" kind of question is a good way to encourage your

child to examine a situation instead of teaching your child to simply accept your opinion. In this way, you are modeling discernment.

As our children grow up they also grow away from us in certain ways. God's plan for parenting is one of love and protection. He models perfect love and helps us love and care for our children. As they grow away from us, they are still with God.

## Questions for discussion

1. Have you developed a relationship with the parents of your child's friends? What is the best way to go about this?
2. Do you keep track of middle school-age children in a different way than elementary, early childhood, or high school age? If so, how?
3. How well does your child know his or her friends? How well do your child's friends know him or her?
4. Does your child have a friend that is a negative influence? What can you do to help your child be a positive influence to that child?
5. What does [Matt. 5:13-16](#) teach us about friendships?

## Recommended reading:

- "Funtastic Family Nights," Kurt Bicket, CPH

*Use this book to create more opportunities to spend time with your children and their friends.*

**"Parent Pages" is published by LCMS District and Congregational Services—School Ministry**

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; [www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org)

Kim Marxhausen, Lincoln, Neb., Writer • Frank Kohn, Editor and Layout

Vol. 5, No. 5 • January 2006