

Handout for Session 8: Peer Influences

If your teen becomes involved with friends who are a negative influence, your teen's negative behaviour can become much worse. These friends can encourage negative activities and act as negative role models. Programs that group teens with behaviour problems together in special classrooms, treatment groups, community activities or correctional settings may actually make problems worse rather than better. It is usually best to avoid a direct power struggle forbidding your teen to have contact with friends that you see as a negative influence. Parents can, however, set and enforce limits about where and when their child will spend time with friends. For example, you might only allow contact in your home under your supervision, or you could allow contact during activities such as a team sport, where you know an adult will be monitoring the teens. You can use rewards and privileges to encourage your teen to bring friends to your home where you can monitor their behaviour. The teens will be less likely to be involved in negative behaviour if an adult is supervising them. Here are some things parents can do if they are worried about the influence of friends:

- Make a house rule that you must meet your child's friends before your children spend time away from home with these friends.
- Seek opportunities to connect your child with friends who are a positive influence.
- Increase monitoring of your youth's whereabouts. Have your youth make frequent phone check-ins and connect this to rewards or privileges.
- Become acquainted with the parents of your child's friends. Consider having coffee with this group. This is a nice way to network with other parents before problems develop. You can discuss home rules and expectations other parents might have for your child. If you have regular contact with a network of parents and your teenagers are planning something inappropriate, usually one parent in the group will notice something suspicious and can contact the other parents. This allows you to plan ahead about how to respond to the situation. Put together a list of the phone numbers of their child's friends and share the list with the other parents.

Help your teen to see the disadvantages: of being connected to friends who are a negative influence. Have conversations pointing out the disadvantages: of hanging out with negative friends. This is likely to be more effective if your teen has only recently become friends with a youth who is a negative influence and your teen is starting to experience some negative consequences as a result. You can also ask other people to have this kind of talk with your child, such as an uncle, coach, or a neighbor. Look for someone who is connected to and respected by your youth and give that person a copy of this handout.

Avoid berating, belittling, or insulting your child's friends. Such interactions are likely to create more conflict, as most children are very loyal to their friends. Your teen may feel very connected to and accepted by these friends. If your teen is focused on defending his or her friends, they will be less open to considering the possible negative results of keeping company with these friends. In your conversation it is OK to let your teen know that you understand that they have positive feelings towards their friends.