

Getting to Know Your Child's Friends

"All kids need is a little help, a little hope, and somebody who believes in them."—Earvin "Magic" Johnson, American professional basketball player

Who are your child's friends? What do you know about them? Getting to know your child's friends not only helps you know more about your child, but it also helps you become an asset builder for more kids. You don't need much time. You don't need any money. The little things you do to get to know your child's friends can make a big difference in their lives. Here's how.

Try it...

For all parents

- Learn the names of all of your child's friends. You may even want to consider creating a notebook with the information (particularly if your child has a lot of friends). Some asset-building parents keep a notebook that not only lists their child's friends but also the names of the parents (along with phone numbers, e-mail addresses, or an address). This information is particularly helpful as kids become teenagers because then you can more easily touch base with parents when kids are out and about.
- Make your home a welcoming place for your child's friends. Greet them by name. Smile and make eye contact with them. (Even if it's the only time you see them.) Consider having activities that make your home "the place" to be. Some parents have a video-game console. Others stock their cupboards with treats. Some parents enjoy hosting parties. Others like to do projects with kids. Still others put up a basketball hoop so that kids can play games together.
- When you attend games, concerts, and performances, congratulate your child first afterward but also make it a point to say hello to other kids.
- Learn how to start meaningful conversations with kids by downloading the free two-page Conversation Starters for Groups of Parents (under Grading Grown-Ups 2002) on [Search Institute's Web site](#).

For parents with children ages birth to 5

- If your child is in preschool or a child-care center, spend a few minutes with your child and the other children around drop-off or pick-up times. Get down on the floor (or sit at their tables). Say hello to the other children.
- Smile at young children whenever you see them. Get to know the names of the children of your neighbors, extended family, and employees. Say hi to these children and call them by name whenever you see them.
- Read young children's faces for cues about how to act around them. (Some are very

shy, and others may have had a hard day.) Interact with young children in ways that make them draw closer to you. Change what you're doing if young children pull away or frown.

For parents with children ages 6 - 9

- Find out the names of children your child meets at school. Invite one child over to your home at a time. At first, have activities planned during the playtime (in case the children discover that they don't know what to do or find themselves squabbling). As children get older, they often become more independent in their play.
- Attend school events whenever possible. Ask your child to introduce you to their friends. Spend a few moments asking their friends questions such as: What do you love to play? What's your favorite sport? What's your favorite book?
- Consider creating birthday parties that help kids get to know each other—and also help you get to know them. Plan some get-to-know-you games, like games from the book [Great Group Games](#).

For parents with children ages 10 - 15

- At this age, your kids may not like to spend much family time, so ask them to invite a friend to family activities and family getaways. This often makes family reunions and family activities more appealing.
- During the spring or summer, have your child and his or her friends plant a vegetable, herb, or flower garden in your yard or in a community garden. Offer to help out along the way. (Kids at this age are often most interested in the beginning steps of planting and later steps of harvesting but not much in between.) Projects such as these help kids get to know each other (while you also get to know them) and also helps them feel proud of what they've accomplished.
- Monitor how your child reacts to you getting to know their friends. Some are okay with you getting to know their friends' names, but they may not be too happy if you become overly friendly with them.
- If you don't like one or more of your child's friends, distinguish between your preferences and areas of concern. (We all have people we prefer to be with, and the same is true with our child's friends.) If you are concerned about one of your child's friends (because the friend cuts class or uses drugs), say that your preference is not to be friends with people who can get you into trouble, and you want your child to use the same guideline that you do.
- Friendships sometimes can shift during this age as children move up to different schools. Continue to get to know their friends as these friendships change and emerge.

For parents with children ages 16 - 18

- Continue to greet your teenager's friends and ask them how they are. Some will be quite talkative, so make time to listen to what they have to say.
- If you see one of your teenager's friends when you're shopping or out in the community, go out of your way to say hello. Many appreciate the connection, especially if you notice what they're doing. (Many older teenagers work and enjoy seeing someone who knows them.)
- Create a relaxed, home environment so that teenagers enjoy coming to your home.

Some parents stock the refrigerator with juices and soda pop. Others always have a fresh loaf of banana bread out. Teenagers love to eat, and they're more likely to talk when they have something to eat.