



NEWS FROM THE PEER RELATIONS STUDY GROUP / UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Helping your child to build positive peer relations

What do teens tell parents about peers?

IN THIS ISSUE

Quick quiz for parents

How confident are you that you could answer these questions correctly?

- * Who are your child's 3 best friends?
- * How many text messages did your child receive last weekend?
- * When was the last time your child had a big argument with a friend?
- * Which of your child's friends has gotten into trouble for something they did at school?
- * The last evening your child spent with friends, what are all the things they did?

Closeness counts

"If she's close to her parents, she's okay with talking about everything. But if she's not so close to her parents she might not tell anything." According to Mia (we've changed the names of all teens quoted in this newsletter), a 10th-grade Asian American, closeness with parents is one of the most important things teens consider when deciding what information to share with parents.

Stephen, an African American student in his first year of high school, says that sharing information can also build closeness. After telling parents about issues with friends, he says, "Your parent will be able to trust you more because they think you can handle yourself in tough situations. You don't give in to the peer pressure to keep everything secret."

Teens also consider sharing things with parents when they cannot handle it by themselves. Simone is 14 years old and African American. When she had a problem with one of her peers she went to her mom for advice. "I tell my mom a lot," Simone admits, "because she knows more than I do. She's been on this world more, so I do like to get her opinion a lot. So I did ask her what I could do, how I can help my friend."

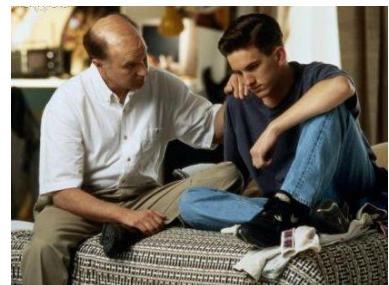
For more information:
PEER RELATIONS STUDY GROUP
<http://prsg.education.wisc.edu/>



Closeness counts

page 1

Teens talk about how having a close and trusting relationship with parents matters in their decisions about what to tell parents about their peer relationships.



Why not tell parents?

page 2

Protection seems to be a big reason why teens don't tell parents things about peers. Teens try to protect their friends, peer relationships, and freedom to pursue social activities. But there are limits to not telling



Advice for parents

page 2

Five tips for keeping good communication with your teen about peer relationships.

About our study

Remember when your children were younger? You always knew what they were doing with friends because there was always a set of adult eyes on them—yours or someone else you knew. When children become teens it's hard to follow them around. Actually, according to recent studies, it turns out that most of what parents know about a teen's activities and relationships with peers comes from what their child decides to tell parents. So, how do teens decide what to tell? The answers may surprise you. In this newsletter we report findings from our interviews with a diverse sample of 20 middle and high school students. We don't use the real names of study participants, but we do include the words and ideas they shared with us.

Why not tell parents?

Teens have their reasons

Teens think carefully about what they tell parents about peers. When they decide not to share something, “protection” may be a big reason.

First, teens want to protect their friends from getting in trouble. Young people worry that if they share information, their parent might start to think less of the friend. Or worse, parents may report the incident to the friend’s parents and get the teen in trouble.

Teens also want to protect their own social life. What could happen if they let parents know certain things? “Getting grounded,” one girl said. “They could lose a lot of their cell phones or whatever, or their parents would probably make them stop hanging out with the people that affect them also.”

Teens try to protect their relationships with friends by honoring a promise they make to a peer to keep something confidential. Teens

take these promises very seriously. “If she promised her friends not to tell about this,” Mia said, “I guess she is not going to tell her parents. Even if they ask, she might just change the subject, talk about other things. But she’s not going to tell her parents because she promised her friend not to tell anybody.”



What would happen if a teen broke a promise not to share information? According to Simone, “I think that would mess it up, especially with your friend because your friend wouldn’t be able to trust you anymore. And other friends are gonna think you can’t really be trusted because you tell people’s secrets. So I think that would ruin a lot of relationships with her friends.” Diego, a 15 year-Latino student, agrees. “Being a ‘snitch’ is a pretty bad reputation and friends may not want to share things with you.”

Dr. Brad Brown, Professor of Educational Psychology at U.W.-Madison and Director of the study, understands Simone’s and Diego’s feelings. “Friendships become much more important during the teen years,” he says. “Just as teens want to keep a trusting relationship with parents, they also want to maintain trust among their friends. They have to think about both sets of relationships when deciding what to share with parents.”

But there *are* times when teens will break this “code of silence.” When a peer does something with potentially serious consequences, like using drugs, you may need to break confidentiality and ask parents for advice on how to help a friend before things get really out of hand.

“Your friend may be mad at you for awhile,” Amy, a 12-year old European American said; “But then they’ll realize you were trying to help and they’ll maybe forgive you.” Stephen agrees. If friends do something really bad, “Maybe you need new friends. You would probably tell your parents, like the names. You probably wouldn’t care if the friends got in trouble because they were doing something not smart.”

“If she promised her friends not to tell about this, she’s not going to tell her parents.”

“Just as teens want to keep a trusting relationship with parents, they also want to maintain trust among friends”

Information About Peers Study

Department of Educational Psychology
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dr. Brad Brown, Principal Investigator
Hsun-yu Chan, Study Co-Director
Angie Calvin, Study Co-Director

Special thanks to:

Colleen Berg, Rebecca Carlin,
Deenah Givens, Eric Hartwig,
Goodman Community Center
Wisconsin Youth Company

What can parents do?

Helpful Tips

What can parents do to keep up-to-date with their teen’s relationships with peers? Here are some tips:

1. **Build a warm and trusting relationship with your child.** Teens really want to have a close relationship with parents. Teens are much more likely to share information with parents when they sense that parents care and trust them.
2. **Help your child learn how to make good friends before the teen years.** Help your child learn good social skills. Knowing how to make and keep friends in childhood makes it easier to make wise choices in adolescence.
3. **Make your home a welcome place for teens.** The more time your child spends with

friends at your home, the easier it is to get to know his/her friends and know what they’re up to.

4. **Want to know something? Ask!** It’s okay to ask your child what’s going on with peers. But try to respect your child’s wishes not to break a friend’s confidences. And when your child tells you something in confidence, keep it confidential (unless it involves serious harm to your child or a peer).
5. **Advising works better than ordering.** Teens need to learn to work through issues with peers on their own. They’ll appreciate your advice more than your trying to take control of the situation.