



The Catholic Youth Community of St. John Neumann

Dear Parents,

As I look back on my life, I had some friendships that just fall apart. It was very painful at the time, but now I am grateful because I see what these “friends” did with their lives. My Father frequently said, “Your friends will determine the quality and direction of your life.” Had I stayed friends with these folks, who knows where I would have ended up and what my life would look like now! I’m glad I listened to dear old dad! (For once...)

I am sure you can look back at your own life and see how different friendships influenced and steered your life, especially once you hit your teenage years and beyond. As your teen’s parents, you have the most influential voice in their lives, but this all too quickly changes once your kids hit a certain age. All of a sudden, their peers have greater and greater influence over them. When your kids are young, you plan the play dates. You know the parents of their friends - often their friends are the children of your friends. Ultimately, you controlled their social life!

Things start to change as kids hit Middle School, and by High School, you don’t even know all of their friends, much less the parents of their friends. This is why it is so important to help your kids understand that their friends will determine the quality and direction of their lives!

Possibly one of the best ways to do this is to share an experience or two from your own life that would be appropriate to prove this point. Was there a friendship you had to end because you didn’t like the direction your life was going? Maybe you didn’t see it right away, but you eventually got there. Was there a friend who significantly helped you through a tough time? Concrete examples like these may help your teen who might not otherwise have the ability to see long-term consequences in the here and now. If not from your own life, maybe your child has a friend who may not be making great decisions as a result of the crowd he or she is hanging with, and you can help your child connect the dots. Be honest in your sharing - your teen will appreciate your efforts and honesty!

Sometimes it helps to talk to your teen about what short and long-term goals they have for their own life. Then you can ask them if they have friends that are helping or hindering them from achieving those goals. You can ask if they think their friends have the same values and aspirations as they do. In other words, use their ambitions as a way to have a conversation about the quality of their friendships. Helping your child determine if their friends are good ones or not is a much better tactic than telling them who you approve or disapprove of.

One other thing I would like to suggest on the topic of teen friendships is if at all possible, to open up your home as a place that welcomes your child’s friends. Take a look at the following recourse I provide here for you on that very subject. As parents, you are beginning to have to let go of control of your teens’ lives, but you do not have to abdicate all of your influence. It is your job to help your child discern what healthy friendships look like and which friends will lead them down the path they really want to go. Be encouraged!

Peace,

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8 Powerful Reasons Why You Should Open Your Home to Your Teen's Friends

#1 You'll Get to Know Your Teen's Friends

Considering that their friends hold the power to influence your kids perhaps even more than you do sometimes, let them know you're happy to welcome their friends into your home.

Occasionally toss out comments like, *"Hey, Dad and I are thinking about throwing a few burgers and hot dogs on the grill Saturday afternoon. How 'bout you invite a few friends over? Just let me know the number!"* or, *"Hey why don't you invite some buddies over to play video games? We can order some pizza and I'll get drinks."* (Food always works. Lol)

#2 You'll Get an Inside Glimpse into Your Teen's Life

Your kids act far different around their friends than they do around the family. They even share secrets and have some pretty interesting discussions with their friends that they might never share with you.

Your goal is NOT to hover or eavesdrop on your kids and their friends, but you can pick up on a lot of cues here and there (or just "overhear" things) that can give you a bird's eye view into your teen's "behind the scenes" life.



#3 You'll Strengthen Your Relationship with Your Teen By Showing Them You Care About Them *and* Their Friends

One of the *big* "upsides" to letting your teen invite their friends over is that you'll be strengthening your relationship with them in the process. Let's face it, in a lot of cases, your kids' friends are their world. To them, they're not *just* friends, they're family. So when you don't accept their friends, you're basically saying to your kids, "I don't accept you and I don't trust your choices," which can really backfire on you.

The cool thing about opening your home to your kids' friends is that you're telling your kids, "We know you care about your friends, so we want to care about them, too." And, since we all know teens *sometimes* make poor choices when it comes to friends, the closer we are to them *and* their friends, the more influence you'll have if you don't approve.

#4 You'll Reinforce Your Teen's Sense of Security by Giving Them a Comfortable Safe Zone to Hang Out

It's important to note that even if you make your home the coolest hangout house on the block with "perks" like having a pool, techy gaming devices, a ping pong table, and an

endless supply of snacks, your teen *still* may choose their friend's houses over theirs. And, that's okay... just keep dropping suggestions to your teen and giving them the freedom to have their friends over.

On the flip side, for some teens, (especially teens who haven't quite stepped out of their comfort zone yet), their home can be their safe zone and they might actually prefer to have their friends at their house rather than venturing out into the unknown territory of someone else's house. Either way, make your home a comfortable, inviting (non-judgy) safe zone for your kids and their friends where they can escape from the world and just chill.

#5 You'll have Peace of Mind Knowing Who Your Teen is With and What They're Doing

One of the many upsides of opening your home to your kid's friends is you know who they're with, what they're doing, and that they're safe and sound under your roof - and, there's something to be said for that!

You lose that reassurance when you're not the "house of choice" and, considering the fact that not all parents share the same ideals when it comes to adult supervision and house rules, there's a chance you're putting your teen at risk when they hang at other houses.

#6 You'll Hold the Power to Be a Positive Role Model in the Lives of Your Teen's Friends

My house growing up had a revolving door with my friends. Momma Curran took her role as "the hangout house" seriously. She was a positive role model for my friends from

showing kindness and empathy, to exhibiting strong morals and values in my home. She knew inherently that my dad's and her words and actions were a powerful influence my friends in a big way.

The bottom line is, your teenager *and* their friends are watching you all the time. Stressed out so you get tipsy? They're watching. Get frustrated so you drop the "F" bomb and start yelling? They're watching. Start gossiping about other kids and/or parents? They're watching.

As a role model, you can either be a positive or negative influence – *choose positive*. You may be the *only* positive role model a teen has in their life.

#7 You'll Be Part of the Memory Making

Sometimes I would come home from school or work and it was not uncommon to find one of my friends talking to my parents - they didn't come over to see me! My friends called my Mom, "Mrs. C" and my Dad, "Papa John!" My parents were like second parents to my friends... and frankly, the only parents some had. (A few of my friends had really bad home lives, but they were loved at the Currans!)

My parents loved my friends and were involved in their lives. We shared and made so many amazing memories together. My friends loved my parents! You can have the same house! *That's* a perk you don't want to miss!

#8 Because Hearing Your Teen Let Loose and Laugh with Their Friends is the Best Sound in the World!