

Choosing Your Friends

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INTRODUCTION

The effect of the peer group on the behavior of teens is widely known: teens who smoke, use drugs, or have sex most often have friends who do these things, too. During the middle-school years many young people will establish some of the most important friendships they will ever have. Because this is a highly volatile and formative period in the development of identity, the friends they choose can have a profound effect on the kind of person they eventually become. The friends they choose also says a lot about who they already are and what is important to them. Middle school is a good time for teens to begin thinking critically about these relationships, their significance, and their potential consequences. Yet students this age lack the insight and experience to analyze these relationships. When asked why someone is their friend, they will often say, “I don’t know... (s)he just is.”

Young children’s friendships are largely determined by where they live and with whom their parents associate. But by middle school, young people begin actively seeking ways to separate from their families and pursue their own paths. One area where this dynamic plays out and where the conflict can be enormous as a result, is in the area of friendship.

Parents worry when they see a child being led in a negative or destructive direction by a friend or group of friends, and will often confront the youngster in a challenging or controlling way. Young people typically react very strongly to any parental exertion of control by pulling further away and hanging on tighter to the friend(s). The teen ego is highly invested in carving out its own space in the world and one way a young person does this is through his or her friends.

As educators know, the way to make a useful analysis of teen relationships is to question them at their core by helping young people understand why we choose one person as a friend while rejecting another. Thinking critically about why we do what we do necessarily results in deeper insights, and often in changed behavior as well. Educators are in a unique position to affect the future of their students' lives by helping them develop the skills to examine their choices intelligently, and **Choosing Your Friends** is designed to assist them in that effort.

Interwoven stories show middle-school kids grappling with a variety of friend-oriented issues ranging from what happens (and why) to friendships as you get older to the idea that there are some people you just shouldn't be friends with. Onscreen discussion questions get students thinking and talking about the ideal friend, as well as the limits of friendship and loyalty.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After viewing this program and participating in the activities and discussion in this program, students will be able to:

- understand that there are reasons why they choose the friends they do.
- understand that people are defined in the minds of others by the friends they choose.
- recognize some of the consequences of the friendships they choose to pursue.
- understand some of their own values which are expressed through their friendships.
- better assess the positive and negative aspects of their own friendships.
- recognize that sometimes they may need to end a friendship.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

At her new school, Sierra is introduced to a group of students who have been friends since kindergarten. Later, Brittany describes each girl by personality traits when Sierra asks to clarify who each girl is. Elena, who is very smart, according to Brittany, is also outgoing and gets along with everyone. Lilly is shy but very trustworthy because she never gossips. Casey is cool but maybe a little wild. They all like art and work on the yearbook together. Asked to describe herself, Brittany jokes “I’m the modest, beautiful and intelligent one.” Onscreen discussion questions ask viewers to identify the personality traits of their own friends, and to discuss what their ideal friend would be like.

Dave’s mother tells him that her friend is coming to visit and bringing her son, Jimmy. Dave says he already has plans to go bike riding with another friend. His mother asks why they can’t all hang out together and Dave reminds her that Jimmy doesn’t have a bike and only likes to play video games, and not even the same ones Dave likes. Just as his mother responds that she expects him to be polite to her friend’s son, the friend calls with the news that her son isn’t coming with her after all. Onscreen discussion questions ask viewers to discuss how friendship changes as you get older and what role parents play.

When Brittany and Casey try to decide which project to do, Brittany discovers that Casey is stubborn and insists on doing the project she likes. Later, when Brittany tells her sister about it, they discuss why she chose to work with Casey. Onscreen questions ask the viewer to explore the issue of accepting a friend’s flaws.

Diego and Joey are with their friend Adam as he tags up with spray paint on an exterior school wall. The boys are caught by a security guard and when Joey’s father

comes to pick him up, his dad is holding him equally responsible even though he didn't actually tag up himself. Later, he argues with his parents about Adam and tells them he's a good friend. But his parents feel Joey should be friends with two other boys they think are nice. Joey says these boys are "boring." Onscreen discussion questions ask viewers to discuss why Joey wants to be friends with Adam and whether his parents are trying to control him, or are right about Adam.

Lilly finds herself bored hanging out at the mall with Casey and Sharon, who enjoy people watching and joking about how others dress or wear their hair. Lilly tells Casey she's going to leave, but Casey promises they will go to a movie if Lilly stays. Lilly gives in and stays. An onscreen discussion question ask viewers whether they think Lilly should stay just to please Casey.

After the movie, Lilly is upset to see that Sharon is shoplifting some makeup. She tells Casey she thinks it's wrong, but Casey says it's not a big deal. Onscreen discussion questions ask viewers to discuss what friends need to have in common.

Lilly and Sierra have become close friends. They share common interests and play basketball together. One day they discuss how they each are learning the language their parents know from their home countries. Sierra is learning Spanish and Lilly is learning Japanese. They decide to teach each other what they are learning. Onscreen discussion questions ask viewers to explore the benefits of having friends who are different from them.

In the school hall, Guy bumps into Diego by accident and tries to apologize but Adam turns it into a confrontation. A teacher breaks up the tense group, but Guy tells Diego he wants to see him after school to find out how tough he really is. Diego is dismayed and later tells Joey,

who was part of the confrontation, that he doesn't want to go fight Guy after school. He's tired of getting into trouble because of Adam, who doesn't know where to draw the line. Joey sticks up for Adam and says he's a loyal friend and that Diego should go to the fight. He tells Diego that he and Adam will back him up. Diego responds that he's going to try out for soccer after school. If Adam wants to fight Guy, he can. Onscreen discussion questions ask the viewers to discuss whether they agree with Joey or Diego, and whether loyalty should be blind in friendship.

Later, after soccer tryouts, Diego decides to go out with some of the new guys he meets on the team instead of going with Adam and Joey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- (1) Why do we choose the friends we choose?
- (2) Brittany describes each girl on the yearbook in terms of personality, values, and behavior. Elena is outgoing and likes a lot of other kids, Lilly is shy, and Casey is the wild one. Which of these personality characteristics appeals to you most. Why?
- (3) All human beings have flaws in their personalities or character. These flaws may show up in their everyday interactions with others, or they may only be apparent once in awhile. Of all the characters in the program, which one do you think has the most serious flaw? Which character would you least likely be friends with? Which character would you most likely be friends with? Why?
- (4) Discuss whether or not you think it's important to accept other people's flaws. Does it depend on what the flaw is? Explain.
- (5) Do your friends accept your flaws? Discuss.
- (6) What quality is most important to you in a friend: honesty, loyalty, intelligence, friendliness, empathy (caring), sense of humor, realistic, imaginative or exciting? Discuss why this quality is most important to you.
- (7) Do you think friends can influence each other's behavior for better or worse? Discuss how. Think about Adam and Casey. Discuss whether Diego or Joey could influence Adam. Does he influence them? How? What about Casey and her friends?

- (8) How can a teenager change his or her friends? Is this sometimes a good idea? Discuss why or why not?
- (9) What role do parents play in teen friendships? Is this role usually helpful or not? Why?
- (10) What are your own best qualities as a friend? Do your friends understand who you really are? Or do they only see the surface? If so, why do you think this is?

AGREE/DISAGREE

Write an A or D in the space provided, depending on whether or not you agree or disagree with the statement.

- _____ You don't really "choose" your friends. It just happens.
- _____ It's hard to be good friends with someone who is very different from you.
- _____ A good friend is someone who will do anything for you.
- _____ You can't always be honest with a friend.
- _____ The most important thing in friendship is loyalty.
- _____ You should never say anything to hurt a friend's feelings, even if it's true.
- _____ I have friends my parents don't care for.
- _____ My parents don't give my friend(s) a chance.
- _____ I have a friend who gets me into trouble.
- _____ The most important thing in friendship is trust.
- _____ You're better off with friends who like the same things you like.
- _____ I am very choosy about whom I'm friends with.

Teacher's Note: The statements can also be used as springboard for class discussion, especially when there are strong differences

of opinion.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- (1) Ask students to write an essay, poem, or short story about friendship.
- (2) Have your students form in small groups. Read them the following vignettes and ask them to work out a solution to the problem each presents. Give them three minutes to come up with each solution and have each group report their solution.
 - Lisa and Kristi have been friends for a long time. Lately, whenever they get together to do something, Kristi invites Morgan to come, too. Morgan and Kristi pick on Lisa when they're together like this. What might Lisa do?
 - Bobby and Dennis have been best friends for a long time. Now Bobby has a girlfriend and spends a lot of time with her. Dennis feels like he's being dumped.
 - Caitlin is interested in asking Rebecca, the new girl, to her birthday party but Caitlin's best friend Lily doesn't want her to. Lily thinks Rebecca is a snob.
 - Jeff and Steve are good friends but just had a big fight over the upcoming World Series. They each like a different team and during the argument Jeff told Steve he must be stupid to think the way he does. Now Jeff is avoiding Steve.
 - Frannie and some of her friends hang out at the town pool to swim and play cards. Sari has been playing with them but is starting to find playing cards boring. She's not sure she wants to go the pool anymore.

- Unlike most of the other guys, Kenny isn't interested in sports. He's getting very interested in music, although his friend Larry doesn't understand why. Larry thinks sports are the most important thing. Larry invited five guys including Kenny to come over and play basketball and then go swimming for his birthday. Kenny doesn't want to go but he also doesn't want to hurt Larry's feelings.
- (3) Ask students to fold a sheet of paper in half. In the first column have them write five personality traits they find appealing in other people. In the opposite column have them write the name of someone in the class who has that trait.
 - (4) Ask your students to write a paragraph describing themselves. Tell them to include positive and negative characteristics. Then have them pick what they regard as their own most positive quality and say why they think it is good.
 - (5) Interested students can select a book from the fiction list in the Bibliography (pages 15-16), or get a book from the library on their own that deals with a friendship. After reading the book, students can write a book report or prepare an oral report to give to the class. In the report have them explore the nature of the friendship and how they feel about the characters. Would they like either character as a friend? Why or why not?

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SCRIPT**Choosing Your Friends****ART TEACHER**

Hey girls, I want to introduce you to a new student. This is Sierra. She just started at our school yesterday. And she's interested in art and photography like you guys.

ELENA

Hi, Sierra, Nice to meet you.

TEACHER

I thought she could help you with the yearbook.

ELENA

Sure. Just join the insanity. I'm Elena. This is Brittany. That's Casey. And that's Lilly. You can sit here if you'd like.

SIERRA

Thanks.

GIRLS

Hi.

LILLY

Right now we're just seeing if we have candid shots of everyone in eighth grade. Since you don't know who everyone is you can work on layout with Brittany.

SIERRA

Sounds good.

CASEY

I'm thirsty. I'm just going to get a soda.

ELENA

I'll go, too. I'm hungry.

LILLY

I have to call my mom and tell her when to come get me.

CASEY

Do you guys want anything?

SIERRA

No thanks.

BRITTANY

No, I'm fine, thanks.

SIERRA

Are all you guys friends?

BRITTANY

Yeah. We've all known each other forever. Since kindergarten.

SIERRA

That's how long I knew my friends in my old school. I really miss them.

BRITTANY

I bet. You can eat lunch with us if you want.

SIERRA

Thanks. What are their names again? It's hard to keep everyone I meet straight.

BRITTANY

Well, there's Elena. She's really smart and funny. She has a lot of friends and she can hang out with any group of kids that she wants. Everybody likes

her. Lilly is really sweet, but she's kind of on the shy side. But you can trust her and talk to her about anything because she doesn't like gossip. There's Casey. She's the cool one. She's kind of the wild one out of the group. We all like art, so it's fun being on the yearbook together.

SIERRA

Okay...and how would you describe yourself?

BRITTANY

Me? I'm the beautiful, intelligent, and modest one.

ELENA

Sierra, look. We're starting a new part in the yearbook this year it's called "Best Friends."

SIERRA

That's really cool! You guys have quotes from kids about their friends.

ELENA

Maybe we should start a section called "New Friends."

BRITTANY

Yeah, that way we can include Sierra. See, I told you she was smart.

SIERRA

That's really nice of you guys. Let's see. Elena says, "Brittany is the nicest person I know. She wouldn't do a mean thing to anyone." And Brittany says "Elena can always make me laugh, no matter how sad I am." Oh, that's sweet.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you like about each of your friends?
- What would your ideal friend be like?

MOTHER

Elaine's coming over.

DAVE

Yeah...

MOTHER

And she's bringing Jimmy.

DAVE

Today? Peter and I are hanging out! Why does Jimmy have to come?

MOTHER

What's the problem? You guys get along.

DAVE

We don't have very much in common, if you didn't notice. The only reason we've always played together is because you're friends with his mom and we've been stuck with each other.

MOTHER

Really? I'm surprised to hear that.

DAVE

I was going bike riding with Peter today and Jimmy doesn't have a bike.

MOTHER

Look, he's coming over and you'd better not be rude to him. Besides, it's too late for me to call and ask her not to bring him. Play video games with him or something else.

DAVE

Playing video games is all he ever does. We don't even like the same games.

MOTHER

You guys used to get along fine with each other before.

DAVE

That was when we were little kids. Before I had a choice.

MOTHER

Hello? Oh hi Elaine. Really? He doesn't. Okay. See you soon. Bye.

I guess the feeling's mutual. Jimmy's not coming.

DAVE

Yes!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you were younger, what role did your parents play in who you made friends with?
- Discuss how making friends changes as you get older and more independent.

BRITTANY

Okay, we have to choose a topic for our science report.

CASEY

I'm really interested in rainforests.

BRITTANY

I was thinking about volcanoes. I know a cool way of making a model for one.

CASEY

Everybody does that. Plus, I know some cool things we could do for rainforests. I really like animals.

BRITTANY

Maybe we could go online and find something we'd both be interested in.

Look...this is really cool. We could do our project on ocean reefs instead of volcanoes or rainforests. And this will be good for you because reefs have animals.

CASEY

You mean fish. That's different. Look, I'm doing my report on rainforests. If you want to do it with me, that's fine. Otherwise, we should probably find new partners.

BRITTANY

Fine...relax. We can do rainforests. Let me find some sites.

• • •

SISTER

Here's your sweater back. Did you and Casey finish that project already?

BRITTANY

No, we hardly even got started. Casey can just be so stubborn. Everything just had to be her way. I wanted us to pick a project that we would both like. But she decided it had to be rainforests. So, I guess that's what we're doing.

SISTER

Well, why did you want to work with Casey anyway?

BRITTANY

She's a really good artist and I know that the pictures she'll make for the report will be beautiful. She has a lot of good ideas. She's just sort of...stubborn, I guess.

SISTER

Maybe if you'd done it with Elena or Lilly you'd be able to compromise. Some people know how to compromise and some people don't.

BRITTANY

Casey is fun to hang out with, she's just not always considerate.

SISTER

She doesn't sound like a good choice for doing a project with. You probably have other friends who are easier to work with.

BRITTANY

No kidding.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss whether or not Brittany should just accept Casey's faults and still be friends.
- Discuss whether or not there is such a thing as "a perfect friend."

ADAM

Want to tag it?

FATHER

I'm here for Joey, my son.

OFFICER

You must be Mr. Curtis. I just have some paperwork for you to sign.

FATHER

What's going to happen to him now?

OFFICER

We're going to require him to come back this weekend and paint and clean up at the school.

FATHER

No court?

OFFICER

Since we've never caught him before and he's young, we'll give him a second chance. This time, the punishment is cleaning and painting. Now, if he does it again...he will go to court.

JOEY

I didn't even *do* anything! Why should I even have to clean up and paint? I didn't tag it!

FATHER

You're lucky they're not taking you to court! You chose to be in this situation and now you're going to have to pay the consequences. You're grounded this weekend!

• • •

MOTHER

I just can't believe your attitude towards the whole thing. You should be grateful you're not going to have a police record.

JOEY

Mom, I didn't *do* anything. Adam tagged-up, not me. Just because my friend did it doesn't mean I was going to do it!

FATHER

Adam! Last time it was Adam. Adam! Every time anything happens, it's Adam's fault. Why are you still friends with him?

JOEY

He's my friend, that's all! I don't know. He's a good friend to me.

FATHER

Good friend to you. You know what, maybe you need to rethink what that means.

MOTHER

Can't you be friends with Larry or Steve? They're nice kids.

JOEY

They're boring!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Discuss whether or not you think Joey's parents are just trying to control him.
- Why do you imagine Joey wants to be friends with Adam?

SHARON

Look at that girl's hair! It's a mess! Can you believe the way some people go out of the house.

CASEY

Maybe she doesn't own a mirror.

SHARON

I'm sure she doesn't...it probably broke the last time she looked in it.

CASEY

You are too funny, Sharon.

SHARON

Next victim. Look at his pants! He looks like a clown.

CASEY

Are you okay?

LILLY

I'm fine. But can we *do* something? This is boring.

SHARON

I'm sorry, did you know that kid?

LILLY

No.

SHARON

Did you like his pants?

LILLY

I don't really care about his pants.

SHARON

I think you liked his pants. Maybe you like him. Lilly likes the bozo.

LILLY

Ha-ha. Shut up, Sharon.

SHARON

I'm only joking. You don't have to take it so seriously. I'm going to get a soda.

LILLY

You know what, I'm going home now.

CASEY

Oh come on. She's just joking. It's just her sense of humor.

LILLY

I think her sense of humor is dumb. Plus, I thought we were going to a movie or something. Something besides standing here.

CASEY

If you stay, I'll convince her to go to the movie. But don't ditch me Lilly. I wouldn't ditch you.

LILLY

Alright. If that's the way you feel.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- If you were Lilly, would you hang out with Casey and Sharon? Discuss your reasons.

LILLY

That was a pretty good movie.

SHARON

Yeah, it was alright. I've been meaning to do some shopping.

SALESWOMAN

Can I help you?

CASEY

No, thanks.

LILLY

Sorry.

SHARON

I can't believe you dropped that lipstick! That was so funny!

CASEY

I was so nervous...she scared me!

SHARON

Do you think it's my color?

CASEY

I can't believe you got something. That woman came out of nowhere.

SHARON

Lilly, did you get anything or where you scared?

LILLY

I didn't try to get anything.

SHARON

Why not?

LILLY

I just didn't want to, okay.

SHARON

Well, excuse me.

• • •

CASEY

Are you okay?

LILLY

I'm fine, but I didn't know you guys would be...shoplifting.

CASEY

It's not a big deal. We've done it before. As long as you don't take anything with an alarm tag on it, you're safe. We've never been caught.

LILLY

Yeah, but it's not right. What if your family owned a store and someone tried to steal from it. Would it be okay then?

CASEY

It's not that big of a deal. It's only a lipstick.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- What kinds of things do friends need to have in common?

LILLY

Good game.

SIERRA

It'd be better if I could ever beat you.

LILLY

Give it time. I've been playing a lot longer than you. You'll get better if you practice.

SIERRA

Yeah.

LILLY

Oh, I've been meaning to ask you a favor. Do you have the notes from science for the test next week?

SIERRA

Uh-huh.

LILLY

Would you mind if I copied them? Mine didn't come out so good. For some reason my notes never make much sense.

SIERRA

Sure, no problem. We could study together on Saturday. Then hang out.

LILLY

That would be really cool, but I'm starting some classes on Saturday.

SIERRA

What kind of classes?

LILLY

Japanese lessons.

SIERRA

Cool! I wish I knew some Japanese.

LILLY

You speak Spanish!

SIERRA

I know, but Japanese would be so cool.

LILLY

I could teach you to write your name.

SIERRA

Then I could teach you some Spanish.

LILLY

Maybe, we could both teach each other a little bit and soon we could be tri-lingual.

SIERRA

Cool. Why do you have to take lessons? Why don't they just teach you at home?

LILLY

My mom wants me to learn how to speak Japanese and learn about the culture and traditions and stuff.

SIERRA

I just learn at home automatically.

LILLY

My mom's the only one that can speak Japanese in my family. But maybe soon we'll be able to talk about my dad right in front of him!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How are Sierra and Lilly similar? How are they different?
- What benefit might come from having a friend who is very different from you?

GUY

Sorry.

ADAM

You better be sorry!

GUY

What did you just say?

DIEGO

I didn't say any...

ADAM

He said you better be sorry. I got your back, Diego.

GUY

Good, because you're gonna need help. You have a rep like you're so tough. We'll see how tough you are right now.

TEACHER

Come on boys! Cut it out! Let's go!

GUY

I'll see you after school, tough guy.

• • •

DIEGO

I don't know what Adam's problem is. Now I have to fight this guy after school?

JOEY

Adam has attitude sometimes, but he totally backed you up. He's a good friend.

DIEGO

I wouldn't have needed him to back me up if he hadn't started the whole thing. That guy said I act like a tough guy. When have I ever acted like that? He's got me confused with Adam...

JOEY

At least Adam is loyal. Good friends are loyal to each other.

DIEGO

I'm sick of getting in trouble because of Adam. Now people are starting to think that I'm just like him just because I hang out with him. I used to think he was funny, but sometimes he goes too far.

JOEY

If you don't show up, you're a punk and not a good friend. I wouldn't back out and neither would Adam.

DIEGO

I'm not backing out of it, because I was never in it. I'm not going to any fight.

JOEY

You're not going?

DIEGO

I'm trying out for soccer after school. Adam can fight the guy if he he wants.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Who do you agree with: Diego or Joey? Should friends always be loyal, even if it means doing something wrong?

GEORGE

Hey man, you're pretty good.

DIEGO

Thanks.

GEORGE

Most new guys want to hog the ball, but you pass it. The coach likes that. You'll probably make the team.

DIEGO

Thanks. What's your name?

GEORGE

I'm George. You?

DIEGO

Diego. How long have you been playing?

GEORGE

Since last year on the school team, but I've played for fun since I was little.

DIEGO

Yeah, you look pretty good out there.

GEORGE

Thanks. Hey you want to hang out now? Some of the guys go for pizza after practice. You could come if you want.

DIEGO

Yeah? ...I might have to do something first.

GEORGE

Okay. Just come on over when you feel like it.

DIEGO

Actually, nevermind. I'm ready now.

GEORGE

Cool.

DIEGO

So where do you guys go for pizza?

DISCUSSION QUESTION

- Why do people get a reputation based on who their friends are? Is this fair?

THE END