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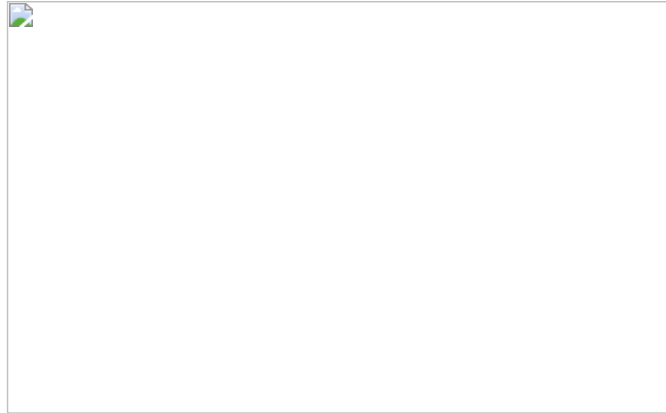
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HELP! I HATE MY KIDS' FRIENDS

BY MARIA MORA

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Wary of your teen's friends? You may be having good instincts, or it may be time to back off. Find out how to deal when you don't like the kids your teen hangs out with.

When you were growing up, you probably had a friend your parents didn't like. Maybe you *were* that friend. As a parent, the situation is much more worrisome. How do you deal when you hate your kids' friends?

It's actually OK to dislike your kids' friends

The teen years are all about

balancing control with a hands-off approach. As much as we'd love to save our children from heartbreak and hurt, it's impossible and unhealthy to control teen

relationships. [Natalie Blais Hjelsvold](#) is a parenting strategist who works with parents of teens. "We give our kids an amazing gift when we allow them the space and time to learn how to truly determine who is good for them and who is not," says Hjelsvold. "We give them the necessary skills to look at relationships from many angles and see where they are healthy and where they fall short. We don't like every adult we encounter in our lives — why would our children's friends be any different?"

“We don't like every adult we encounter in our lives — why would our children's friends be any different?”

Make an effort to get to know your teen's peer group

With so many teen subcultures and identities, there's a strong chance your child will connect with kids who don't fit in with your image of an ideal friend. Dennis Poncher is author and founder of [Because I Love You \(B.I.L.Y.\)](#), a parent and youth support group network. "I think it is a good idea to invite your child's friends over and get to know them better and not judge them on appearances but more on substance," says Poncher. "I also suggest that as a parent, you collect the phone numbers of your child's friends' parents and give them a call and introduce yourself."

Be clear about your expectations

While you don't want to control every aspect of your teen's life, you do need to set healthy boundaries. Be clear about your behavior expectations, including curfew, drugs and alcohol use and social media interaction. "Give them choices and reward the good choices as well as consequenceing the bad ones," says Poncher. "But they must have ownership of these choices — not you." Poncher suggests drug testing your teens if you have any concerns. "You test your child because you love them not because you do not trust them. This can also work as a deterrent and support a child's ability to say no to trying drugs if they feel pressured to do so."

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Recognize warning signs

You know your child. If you see major changes in behavior, such as problems with grades or disrupted sleep patterns, there could be a bigger issue at hand. "When the warning bells are too loud to ignore, or your child is at risk of being hurt or in trouble with the law, it is

“When the warning bells are too loud to ignore, or your child is at risk of being hurt or in trouble with the law, it is absolutely OK to step in and end the friendship.”

absolutely OK to step in and end the friendship," says Hjelsvold. "Drugs, alcohol, skipping school, sexually aggressive behaviors, are all reasons to take the lead and end the friendship." Give your teen healthy options to make friends, such as participation in school clubs or sports. Don't hesitate to reach out to school resources if you need support.

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