

A Souring Friendship - How to Help Your Child

Are your child's friendships mutually supportive and healthy or are they sometimes full of battles and hurt? Your child might be questioning themselves about how much effort to put into a relationship and whether it's time to talk to their friend about what's happening. In assisting your child, try to pinpoint what doesn't feel right.

Some questions to ask might be:

Are you feeling...

- nervous or down when your friend is about?
- that the fun has disappeared?
- that your friend only wants to talk about themselves and does not listen and respond kindly?
- in conflict because your friend has different values and you are not seeing eye to eye on important issues?
- belittled, judged negatively or criticised?
- that your friend might have begun a rumour about you?
- let down because your friend has been dishonest, unreliable or not following through on promises?

Before abandoning a friendship, the challenge is for your child to bring attention to their friend's behaviour to try to resolve the issue/s. Sensitivity and gentleness is respectful and is the approach which is most likely to achieve the best outcome. One way to achieve this is in the use of "I" statements. For example, "I feel that we haven't been very close lately and that our friendship is suffering."

"I miss the closeness that we used to have as friends. I'd like to talk about it."

"I felt let down when you didn't message me because I thought that you would."

These are short statements and a situation where "less is more". They provide an opening for the friend to respond, and the statements cannot be denied as true because they are about the person's feelings. The most important thing to do next is to encourage your child to listen, as the friend will highlight their feelings and it may be revealed that there have been some provoking behaviours which have caused the friend to behave negatively. It may be a situation where agreeing to disagree is appropriate and may provide an opportunity to highlight the great aspects of the friendship. Remind your child to avoid any blaming and accusing and end the discussion positively.

If it becomes clear that the friendship cannot be salvaged, one option is to avoid the person, but the better option is to encourage your child to talk to the friend about using specific examples of the times when he/she felt let down as this lets the person know why your child feels the friendship is not working.

The discussion may put the friendship back on track. Agreeing to ban gossiping, planning to spend more time together and agreeing to speak up when an issue occurs are respectful ways to improve the relationship. These types of confrontations are great practice for future relationship issues.

Gai Bath and Andrea Maver
SMC Counsellors

gbath@smc.tas.edu.au

amaver@smc.tas.edu.au