

From the Heart. . .

. . . Life Skills for Today

By Sharon L. Benedict MS, ACC



Don't Let the Dreams Fade

“In pursuit of passions, always be young. In your relationship with others, always be a grown-up. Set a standard and stay faithful to it.” At a Dartmouth College commencement, June 2005, Tom Brokaw, Former News Anchor and Managing Editor, "NBC Nightly News", clearly affirmed the supreme connection between the pursuit of our passions and dreams with the relationships we have in life. Dreams are wonderful thoughts to keep us young at heart but need life relationships that help our dreams and core values come true.

The core values and the relationships we have are key motivators for setting a standard and staying faithful to it. Without them, we falter every time, and our dreams fade. My close friend, Nancy, was always there when I needed a morale boost or a kind correction—keeping my dreams alive. Her courageous fight with melanoma and passing gave me a lifetime of gratitude for her being part of my life. My husband, John, has also been one of my strongest supporters for helping my dreams come true. These are just two of the many people in my life that made all the difference—when I was disappointed, even despairing, and when I was celebrating.

As this New Year begins, what are your dreams you want to nurture and keep alive? During this month's articles, think about those deeper life passions you have kept quiet about. Isn't it time to take a closer look at what your life could be like with those dreams realized? Who do you want to share the journey with? Who can help you make them come true? Believe me, it's not a selfish thing to reach out to help others fulfill their dreams while you do the same. Take the journey together.

"Sometimes our light goes out but is blown again into flames by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light." Albert Schweitzer

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Your Best Friend A Relationship to Value

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

For Melody Beattie, well known author of classic books on co-dependency and meditation, champions what happens when gratitude becomes your daily bread. It not only opens your heart of acceptance, but also brings clarity, peace, and vision to your life, makes your house truly a home and refuge, and that stranger your friend.

Who is your best friend? Did you have a best friend in the second grade, your teen years, young adult years, today? Did you choose your best friend just because you "hit it off"? Or was there something more you saw in the relationship? What are those special qualities of a best friend? Here are top three qualities to consider when choosing your best friend:

Honesty, Truthfulness, Trustworthy

Nothing impacts a relationship more than being able to trust another person's words. A best friend will *walk the talk*.

Acceptance

A best friend offers a relationship where you feel comfortable being yourself around him or her. A best friend may not always agree with you, but will be honest with you and accept you as you are.

Shared Life Values

At the core of every relationship are shared life values. Know what yours are before you commit to and step into any friendship, particularly with choosing a best friend. Core values that are not shared will distract and get you off track from your life goals. Any only after many years will you look back at what you missed. A best friend should have the effect of making you a better person through your association; and be supportive in your strategic life journey. So, consider this ancient biblical proverb when deciding with whom you want to share your life journey (no matter all long the season of friendship):

He who walks [as a companion] with wise men is wise, but he who associates with [self-confident] fools is [a fool himself and] shall smart for it. (Proverbs 13:20)

Naturally, we like to be with people who make us feel good. Yet, sometimes we have a blind side that eventually wounds us. Our best friends, whether they are young or old, are those who help us stay headed in the right direction, who care about us, and correct us when we are about to make an unwise decision.

When making friends you may want to ask yourself, "Who are their friends? Those they hang around tell you a great deal about the person. What do mature and respected people you know say about them? How do these potential friends treat others? Unless they consistently demonstrate honesty, integrity, patience, and consideration for others, you have no guarantee you will always be

treated well. So give the relationship some time to prove out the character of your new friend in real life.

You are encouraged to also talk to potential friends about more serious topics, in order to reveal their true personality, motivations, and values. Are they kind or cold? Are they basically positive and cheerful—or negative and cynical? Are they generous or self-serving? If they frequently talk critically of others to you, what makes you think they may not do the same to you behind your back?

Deep down, you know when something isn't quite right with this potential friend, let alone best friend. Listen to your own inner voice—the conscience we all have and occasionally ignore. Why? Mostly because we don't want to hurt the other person's feelings; and we don't like conflict. We may also have some personal need we think will be met by this person being our friend or best friend. Check out your motives. You will save yourself any number of problems later down the road.

So, when choosing friends, know that your relationship at times may be like *iron sharpening iron*. . . *so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend* (Proverbs 27:17). As two people “*rub*” on it each other with the qualities of a best friend—Honesty/Truthfulness/Trustworthy, Acceptance, Shared Life Values—you will both help each other grow in integrity together; and the bonds of friendship between you will only get stronger. This week, say *thank you* to your best friend for being there for you. Next week's article will discuss other types and degrees of friendships we experience throughout our lives—at home, in our neighborhood, community, work, and the world.

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Childhood Friends Relationships to Value

We all know friends come in all shapes, sizes, location, and degrees of friendship. At home, in the neighborhood, church, work, community, nation, and the world, friends make all the difference in our lives. Yet, childhood friends impact our lives even more than we realize.

These young friendships are actually the *Training Ground for all Adult Relationships!* According to the University of Maine, Center for Learning (2000), Nicolas R. Houtman, University Public Affairs Writer, reports that “All it takes is one best friend to stave off the loneliness and depression of a child – even if that youngster is considered an outsider with the “in crowd” of peers. . . The key is in helping children establish high-quality friendships that provide validation, intimacy, companionship and conflict resolution skills. Such intervention, the researchers say, begins with involved parents. “

Cynthia Erdley, University of Maine Associate Professor of Psychology, concur that, “We know that children who are rejected by their peer group are at risk for a variety of negative outcomes that have implications for their psychological adjustment as adults. More recent studies are beginning to

uncover similar risks for children who fail to develop close friendships. For instance, children without friends appear to be at increased risk for depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. . .”

Manfred H. M. van Dulmen, University of Minnesota, presented a paper at the biennial meetings of the Society for Research on Adolescence (March 12th, 2004 Baltimore). His research results showed that “. . . the quality of family and friendship relationships each uniquely predict young adulthood externalizing behavior problems.” However, between ages 16 to 26, the quality of family life, was a more significant predictor of change in externalizing behavior problems.

So, how do children establish high-quality friendships that impact a lifetime? It begins with the parents creating a nurturing, stable, and accepting environment for their children. It also mean parents must make choices about where they live, who their own friends are, how they treat their own children, and help their children choose those friendships that will make all the difference. This is not an easy task for the parent, let alone their children.

In our latch-key society, the problem mounts. Today, about one third of all school-age children, an estimated five million between ages five and 13, are so-called latchkey children—kids who care for themselves while parents are at work. For the peace of mind of working parents, according to the New York Times (2004) a Spring, Texas, school district implemented RFID technology to equip some 28,000 kids with computerized ID badges so their parents can track their whereabouts to and from school. Yet, the risks and problems don't go away, particularly for children under twelve and also have internet access. How do

these millions of kids choose friends in the midst of a latchkey life. Again, parents who have to work outside the home must take the lead.

What are some basic criteria parents and kids can look for when choosing childhood friends? According to Fred Frankel, Ph.D., director of the UCLA Children's Friendship Program and author of *A Good Friend is Hard to Find*, "parents of grade-school-aged children should seize the opportunity to introduce good friendships into a child's life before the pre-teen years. In doing so, parents can pave the way for their child to continue solid friendships and help surround their child with good influences. . . Keep in mind that these children will grow up to be the young adults that your child will listen to and emulate."

For those parents that would like some coaching help in parenting their kids, I encourage you to seek out a parenting coach—who can help you get on the right track, helping your kids developing wholesome friendships at any age. Check out the Boerne Chamber of Commerce listing for professional coaches.

Since this month's topic is on *Relationships/Core Values*, next week's article will discuss friendships during the teen years. In the meantime, here are a few tips to get you started with your younger ones:

- **Ask your child about his or her playmates** at school.
- **Watch who your child seems to share similar interests and family values.**
- **Actively network with other parents and arrange one-on-one time with the children** without you intruding (set up play dates so children can gradually get to know each other and see themselves as equals. Same

gender friendships help children preserve equality and acceptance that offset potential teasing boys do when associating with a girl in a public setting. Without some solid same-gender friends, such teasing may impact girl-boy friendships later in life).

- **Quality is more important than quantity**—*don't worry about how many friends, just the quality of friends.* Boys tend to enlarge their circle and possibly choose one or two best friends from the group. Girls, on the other hand, develop close, intense friendships. They don't add many friendships to their existing circle, but do replace friendships when others are lost.
- **When noticing that your child wants to be part of a clique, advise them to befriend a particular child to see if a friendship forms.** If trying to imitate unacceptable behavior, take steps to discourage that particular friendship in a positive way—i.e. simply encourage different friendships and set up play dates accordingly.
- **At an appropriate time, share that some friendships change as they grow older**—the bond may not be strong or they develop different interests. Be aware of those times to help them understand and feel confident about who they are throughout those changes in both themselves and their friends.
- **Quickest Ways to make friends**—Help your child to

Smile. Practice being friendly. Be a friend. Kids who show an interest in other kids, are kind and friendly, make good friends.

Say something nice about them and mean it. When you receive one, remember, the best and easiest reply to a compliment is a simple "Thank You".

Ask your new friends questions about themselves to get acquainted—be curious but respectful with your questions; and be sure to share something about yourself to add to the conversation too.

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Teenage Friends—Terrific or Torturous?

When you hear the word, teenager, do you cringe or wish your teen was that cute, cuddly baby again? Are you inundated with so many things to be concerned for your teen? Are these on your list of worries?:

- What do I say when they come home with body piercing or tattoos?
- How do I help them with the pimple problems?
- How do I get them more job-motivated during the teen years?
- How long can I postpone the sex, drug, alcohol conversation? (If you already have asked yourself this, don't postpone any longer!)
- How do I keep my teens safe in this complex world?

You may wonder, "What do these questions have to do with teenage friendships?"

First of all, depending in what part of the country you live, body piercing and tattoos are more than rings hanging from the ears or a tiny heart tattoo on the ankle. And if your teen's friends think it cool to spread a skull/cross bone across their arm or pierce the tongue and belly button, guess what? Your teen just may show up with one without getting your permission.

With the pimple problems, they seem to be part of every teen's life. And how friends react to this problem, says a lot about how your teen will be impacted

later in life. No matter the job, the environment they choose to work in often reflects what their friends say about it, particularly if their friends work there too. Most teens want to work just to have the cash and keep from getting bored, especially during the summer months. Just like many of us, teens often start with babysitting jobs in the neighborhood. Others are keenly focused on what types of jobs will help them in a future career.

According to Teens4Hire, teens most prefer to work at retail stores, casual/fast food restaurants, office environment using basic computer and phone skills, and outdoors. Believe it or not, 30% of teens surveyed also said they needed the money to help family, 23% to get work experience, 22% money for college, 14% to buy fun stuff, and 11% to just keep busy.

When it comes to the sex, drug, alcohol conversation, do it as soon as possible—even preteen. Undoubtedly their friends have already shared with each other more than you can imagine. Your conversation and involvement, whether they want it now or not, will bring a thank you later in their life. Ron Huxley, author of the book *"Love & Limits: Achieving a Balance in Parenting"* offers ten secrets teens want you to know that directly impact this essential conversation. The tips will also determine whether their friends will be terrific or torturous for both you and your teen.

1. Teens want parents to know them.
2. Teens are troubled by peer pressure.
3. Teens perceive the world with emotionally charged lenses.
4. Teens have very few time management skills.

5. Teens like the practical and social side of school.
6. Teens want limits placed on them.
7. Teens often feel insecure and anxious about growing up.
8. Teens fail mostly due to inexperience rather than maliciousness.
9. Teens want respect too!
10. Teens want to have fun.

If you and your teen can connect with these ten secrets, I am confident you will find your teen will work hard at staying safe growing up in this complex world. Then healthy adult friendships, at home, work, and play, will only grow stronger. So, rest easier parents as you release them to discover their own wisdom and path into adulthood.

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