

FRIENDS

Preteens are children between the ages of 10 and 12. Many important changes occur in children during this time. Every child is different. As you try some of the suggestions below, keep your individual child's personality in mind.



For a child approaching puberty friends take on a new role, forming a support network during this time of increasing independence.

Parents are the most important people in a child's life. However, at this age, friends may become even more important. Feeling part of a group helps children feel good about themselves, and gives them a sense of belonging as they become more independent than before. Your child wants to be with her friends more often and wants their support and approval. For parents who have recently moved to Canada, the influence of friends, especially Canadian-born friends, can increase tension when it comes to cultural values. How will you preserve your family cultural values, but still help your child to be happy and a part of Canadian society? The preteen years are a good time to start talking about these issues with your child, since challenges and tensions often increase as your child gets older (especially in the teenage years).



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How you can help – and stay connected to your child

1. **Get to know your child's friends.** Welcome your child's friends into your home. You don't want your child to feel that she has to hide her activities from you. Talk to your child about her friends, but try not to be critical. Get to know the parents of your child's best friends to increase your comfort level and understand your child better. Celebrate that your child has friends – it is a good thing!
2. **Be aware of your child's social media and online activity.** The computer, smart phones and online programs can be great learning tools and ways to connect with friends, but they can also be harmful and unsafe for children. For example, "cyberbullying" has become much more common, and parents need to be aware their child's social media usage and help children to protect themselves and their personal information.
3. **Handle bullying seriously and carefully.** It can be hard for children to solve bullying problems on their own. So, when bullying occurs adults often need to help. First, Gather information. Talk with friends, teachers, coaches and other adults involved in your child's life. You may need to talk to the parents of children who bullied your child, but be careful. In a bullying situation, it is common for all parents to think their child is the victim and the other, the bully. Sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between simple conflict and bullying, so make sure you have all the correct information before you act.
4. **Get to know your child's favourite music, films and interests.** Your child will want to choose their own music, movies and clothing styles. Friends will strongly impact these choices. You may not always like your child's choices, but this doesn't mean they are harmful. Try to find a balance that allows your child some choice, while also letting them know what is not acceptable. Taking an interest will show that you care. And, even if you don't happen to like all their music, you may just find something you both like to listen to!



"Janina is about to turn 12 and when I look at her and her friend, I see their wonderful energy, enthusiasm and confidence. You can tell that they're excited to be this age with its possibilities. They enjoy being together and they just seem to love their lives."

Need more support?

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Or contact your family doctor, local public health organization, or school guidance counsellor.

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