

PARENTING MATTERS: FRIENDSHIP

— MIDDLE SCHOOL - BOYS —

LIFE LOOKS A LITTLE LIKE...

A quest to keep up with your sons current hobby. Their friendships are framed by what they are interested in, anything from a sport to a card or video game to a type of music or art. You may see them ditch a group that they've known for awhile because their interests are changing. Some of these hobbies are temporary, but some may be long term, so invest in what they like and get to know the people who support those interests.



YOU PARENT THEM WELL WHEN YOU...

KNOW:

Transitions are a natural part of this stage. Their friend group will likely change at least once or twice over the course of the middle school years. Groups will also vary in size, from an entire sports team to just a few close friends. All of this testing out is their way of defining who they are and how they fit into their world. Know that their current friends aren't necessarily their forever friends, but that they're still a huge piece of your son's life.

EXPECT:

Their interest may not be what you expect, or even what you wholeheartedly approve of. This will likely be the season where they drop their childhood interests and test out a few new ones. This can be disconcerting for you, especially if their interest has shaped a big piece of your life. Expect to struggle a bit personally as you allow your child to lead you through their new found identity.

PREPARE:

You should be your sons biggest cheerleader. When you cheer them on in their interests (even the ones you don't necessarily love), you show them that you love them, not the things that they do. If you hesitate in supporting them, they may misinterpret that as a lack of love or acceptance. Prepare to be their biggest advocate and be vocal in your support, as these things will pay off in the long run.

TALK:

Work hard to connect with your son, with each other as parents, and with other influencers in your child's life. Parenting isn't only a family matter, it includes a network and community, and that's a good thing. Ask your student about their best friends, their friend groups, how their friends and classmates make them feel, and what they admire about their friends. As you chat with them, point them towards the bigger picture. Remind them that their friendships are valuable, but their confidence and self-identity are more important.

ENGAGE YOUR FAITH BY...

Cheerlead their Interests

Start by knowing your student's interests, they may change frequently so ask them often what they enjoy. Be intentional in learning more about those things and cheerlead them well! Join in their activity; play the sport or video game, try out the hobby, research the topic. Don't be the coach in this time, allow them to teach you about themselves and their interest, and become their advocate.

Be the Host

Model what healthy community can look like. Become the influencer for your student's friends by networking with the parents and opening your home and your family. You can do this through conversation, but you should also be doing it by actually hosting! Text the other parents, make the chips and queso, stock the cooler, and bring the students to you. When you set yourself up to steer this ship, you make yourself an influencer in the lives of your student and their friends.

ENGAGE YOUR FAITH BY...

Romans 12: 12-16

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.

Parents, you model to them what friendship looks like, so follow a Biblical model of friendship and hospitality. Children take their cues from you, so be intentional to show them what healthy relationships that focus on presence, bringing peace between people, and patience when things get hard. Pray for friends to come into your children's lives that help push them towards Christ and family friends who can help raise up your children with a heart for hospitality.

RESOURCES...

> Web

Parents Approach to Friendships – Search Raisingchildren.net.au: *Teenage Friends*

What it Takes to Make Middle School Friendships Last – Search Chicagotribune.com: *Middle School Friendships*

Helping Boys Form Deeper Relationships – Search NPR.org: *Moms Helping Boys*

Friend Drama – Search Imperfectfamilies.com: *Friendship Drama*



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