

MIDDLE SCHOOL HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLs

Every kid needs tribes over time to give them belonging. And your small group is a great place for that kind of connection to take place! As a small group leader, you're a significant member of a student's tribe. But in the middle school years, your influence is limited. At this time in a student's life, a new group begins to dominate their tribe: *friends*.

For a middle schooler, friendships are *life*. This is the phase when students need somewhere to *belong*. To fit in. To be a part of. Some middle schoolers adapt quickly and have no issues finding a group of friends they connect with. But for many, some of their most embarrassing, painful memories will come from a middle school experience involving friends (or former friends). Learning how to control emotions, navigate conflict, and become active in choosing who to trust are vital lessons typically introduced in this phase.

How you talk about friendship matters—especially during the hormone-filled phase of middle school, when friendships have never mattered more. Your words could serve as a catalyst of positive change in how a student views and forms their own friendships.

Here are a few ideas of what to say—and what to avoid saying—when leading discussions about healthy friendships with middle schoolers:

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Here are a few ideas of what to say—and what to avoid saying—when leading discussions about healthy friendships with middle schoolers:

WHAT TO SAY:

- “Why do you choose the friends you choose?”
- “Think about a time a friend has made you angry or sad. How did you react? Was there something you could have done differently?”
- “Is there a friendship you used to have that no longer exists? What happened?”
- “Does social media play a role in friendships? Why or why not?”
- “Your friendships will change over the next couple years, and that’s okay as long as you continue to act with kindness.”
- “How have your friendships affected your reputation?”
- “Is it ever okay for a friend to make fun of or tease you?”
- “Your friends determine your direction. So choose them carefully.”
- “Tell me about a time you hurt a friend’s feelings. What did you learn from that experience?”
- “Who have you seen be a good friend? What about that relationship appeals to you?”

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- “Don’t be friends with _____. They’re not a good influence.”
- “Next time _____ hurts your feelings, you should get revenge.”
- “Things are so different now than they were when I was growing up. I’m so glad I’m not a teenager.”
- “If you don’t get invited to someone’s party, you’re better off. They’re probably not a good friend anyway.”
- “You can’t be friends with someone who doesn’t believe the same things you do.”
- “You don’t sound like you’re a very good friend.”

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