Female Friendships during the Pre-Teen Years

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and Betsy Esser
Learning Goals

• To understand the developmental stages and how those stages affect social interactions and friendships
• To understand relational aggression and ways to combat “drama” between girls
• To discuss things that we, as parents and educators, can do to help our girls through these issues
### Developmental Characteristics and Social Impacts

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Characteristic</th>
<th>How it impacts friendships</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Not all teenagers enter and exit adolescence at the same age or display the same behaviors. Throughout adolescence, a youngster can be farther along in some areas of development than in others.</td>
<td>If one friend is maturing faster than another it might be difficult for them to continue having common interests and they might spend less time together as a result.</td>
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<td>Close friendships gain importance as pre-teens start to form stronger, more complex friendships and peer relationships. Young people begin to have a deeper capacity for caring and sharing and for developing more intimate relationships.</td>
<td>As the emphasis shifts to having closer and stronger friendships, we begin to see more individualized, deep friendships as opposed to large groups.</td>
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<td>During the earlier years of childhood, a child’s life mainly revolved around the family. Teens make more of their own choices about friends, sports, studying and school.</td>
<td>Friendships that have been fostered by strong family friendships and neighborhood proximity might start to dwindle as teens are making more of their own friend choices. The possibility of friendships extends beyond neighborhood friends, homeroom classmates, family friends, etc. especially in middle school where class changes provide opportunities for new friendships.</td>
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<td>Improved abilities to use speech to express oneself.</td>
<td>Improved ability to state thoughts and stand up for oneself could cause conflicts or changes in the friendship (ex. Instead of just going home and talking about something that annoys you about a friend, you might just tell the friend what annoys you).</td>
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<td>The search for identity begins in the pre-teen years. Children’s emerging identity is shaped over time by internal and external influences. They begin to develop their own personality and interests, although parents are still very important.</td>
<td>As girls form their identities they might find that the person they want to be could begin to differ from the identity their friend is taking on.</td>
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<td>Peer pressure begins to influence personal interest, decisions and/or clothing style.</td>
<td>Peer pressure might influence one friend to make choices that her other friends don’t agree with and cause a conflict in the relationship.</td>
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<td>More interest in romantic relationships.</td>
<td>If a friend enters a romantic relationship, that could mean less time spent with the friend and more time spent with the significant other.</td>
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Relational Aggression

• Girls and women often use their relationships with one another to hurt each other.

• One of the biggest reasons girl bullying occurs is because we have a difficult time being assertive with one another.
  – It is easier for us to cut someone out of our lives or talk badly about them behind their backs.
  – It may feel good in the moment but these actions make situations worse, are hurtful to others, and don’t really get us what we want.
Relational Aggression

- Exclusion
- Gossip
- Rumor Spreading
- Teasing
- Name Calling
- Manipulating Friendships
- Using the internet/social media to hurt another person
Relational Aggression

• What to do when you’re the target:
  – Be assertive, stand up for your rights
  – Tell a trusted adult

• What do to when you’re a bystander
  – Stand up and say something to the aggressor
  – Tell a trusted adult
  – Give support to the target
How to be Assertive

• I Statements vs. You Statements
  – I feel __________________________
  – Because or When you __________________________
  – In the future, I want __________________________.
Relational Aggression

• What to do when you’ve been the aggressor:
  – Acknowledge what has happened and that there are healthier ways to communicate our feelings and needs
  – Apologize for the hurtful behavior
  – We have the power to “right” a “wrong”
How to Support

• Helping our girls understand and define the problem:
  
  **Rude** – When someone unintentionally says something or does something hurtful, and they just do it once
  
  **Mean** – When someone intentionally says something or does something hurtful, and they just do it once
  
  **Bullying/Relational Aggression** - When someone intentionally says something or does something hurtful, and they keep on doing it—even if they see you’re upset or you’ve asked them to stop
How to Support

• Girls need to be the experts on their own lives.
  – Listen calmly and concentrate on hearing and understanding her point of view
  – Use open ended questions – Ex. Tell me about that
  – Love and mutual respect can coexist with differing points of view

• Understand your daughter’s feelings. Try not to make judgments. Keep the door open to any subject.
  – Be in tune with your tone of voice, body language, facial expression – these can open girls up or shut them down
How to Support

• Try not to minimize her experiences.
  – Invite her to talk more and resist trying to automatically fix it for her

• Eliminate black and white thinking – friendships are fluid.
  – It doesn’t always have to be an abrupt end to a friendship. Friendships change over time.

• Encourage your daughter to work through friendship changes on her own with your guidance and support.
  – Help her establish healthy boundaries
Resources

• Girls Without Limits by Dr. Lisa Hinkelman
• Queen Bees and Wannabees by Rosalind Wiseman
• Stressed-Out Girls by Dr. Roni Cohen-Sandler
• “Trust me, mom everyone else is going!” by Dr. Roni Cohen
• Best Friends, Worst Enemies by Dr. Michael Thompson
• Why Do They Act That Way? By Dr. David Walsh
• American Girl books
Resources

• Trudy Ludwig - [http://www.trudyludwig.com/](http://www.trudyludwig.com/)

• CDC Child Development
  – Middle Childhood 9-11
    • [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle2.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle2.html)
  – Young Teens 12-14
  – Teenagers 15-17
    • [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/adolescence2.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/adolescence2.html)