

Scared of My Daughter's Friends

Dear Rosa,

I am scared out of my wits about the friends my fourteen-year-old daughter was hanging out with last year at school. This summer she seemed to be "free" of them and had some good friends from her childhood as friends for most of the summer. She was even friendlier to me these several last weeks. It was a good summer for all of us. Now we are facing the school year and the potential of those friends. I am frightened again for her (and me). Help.

Scared Out of My Wits

Dear Scared;

Find ways to calm yourself. In all seriousness, this is the first important thing to do in your situation. Fear will lead to bad decisions in this matter. Think the best about you and your daughter. Have a list of her good points handy. Remind yourself that you a parent who is *loved* by God. Take courage from this. Keep watch for early signs of unresolved tension. Don't wait until tension is off the charts between you to act toward resolution. Be in good communication with your spouse in this matter if you have one, or good friends with children this age if you do not. You need good support, make sure who you talk to about this will give you good input for both of you and will not: "take sides."

She had good friends this summer. That is a very good sign. Her relationship with you as parent(s) is the single most important dynamic in this situation (or any situation with teens according to research.) Believe it or not, teens across the board prefer a good relationship with their parents though they may not overtly show this to you. Stay in touch with her through conversation and concern without being over-bearing. Keep yourself emotionally available to her and nurture even mundane discussions between you. If your daughter has "softened" during the summer, perhaps she has decided, or is in the process of deciding, to hang with a less frightening crowd. When the time is right, before school starts or as soon as possible after school starts (do not put this off), ask her how she would like to handle the scary crowd if they approach her. If she is open to answer this, you have a good indication as to her change of heart. If she is open, practice what she will say to them with her. Help her think through words for the situation. If alienation begins again between you, and it might if you are trying too hard to help, find a qualified family therapist to assist you in this important time. Your daughter sounds as though she may be open to influence. This is a good thing given last year's experience. Stay alert to ways to provide the positive connection between the two of you. Expect a certain amount of ups and downs. If and when bad moods happen, do not resort to burning bridges by using hopeless

language when you are with your (such as “you always... you never...”) If your relationship with your daughter deteriorates, get help soon. You will buy time and a better future together if you find someone to mediate now rather than when things have moved to an emotional impasse.

- Rosa

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P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920*

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