

PRESCHOOL

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 child's tribe. So keep in mind that your conversations about friendship matter—even during this early phase of preschool. Your words could serve as the foundation of how a kid views and forms their own friendships.

A marker of the preschool phase is that *everyone* is a friend. The mailman. The neighbor down the street. The cashier at the grocery store. The family dog. To a preschooler, friends come in all shapes, sizes, genders, and species. The key to discussing friendships with a preschooler is to keep it basic, specific, and concrete—keeping your focus on what it looks like to be a good friend. Acting out situations, playing games, and funny stories are the best teachers in this phase.

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

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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 preschoolers:

WHAT TO SAY:

- What does it mean to be a friend?
- Do you watch any shows or read any books about friends?
How do they treat one another? What type of things do friends do together?
- Friends are kind and loving to one another. What does it mean to be kind and loving?
- Good friends ask one another questions. Let's take turns asking each other questions like friends.
- Friends share with one another. Who shares with you?
Who do you share with?
- Friends use nice words when they play together. What are some examples of nice words?
- Has a friend ever made you sad or hurt your feelings?
What did you do? What did you say?
- Have you ever seen someone sitting or playing by themselves?
What did you do? How could you be a friend to them?
- Friends forgive one another. What does it mean to forgive someone?

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- If someone hurts your feelings, they're not a good friend.
- You should choose one friend and that's it.
- If you don't have lots of friends, maybe you aren't very nice.

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ELEMENTARY

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Elementary schoolers are all about *fun*. And nothing is more fun than friends! At this age, friendships can change from week to week. Sometimes they change from day to day! But their importance isn't marginalized by their inconstant nature. Not getting invited to a sleepover or being the last kid picked for the kickball game can be heartbreaking to a kid. Even the seemingly small things, like not sitting by your favorite friend at lunch, can be a big deal to an elementary schooler.

And as the phases progress, so does your group's capacity to compel one another. To shape one another. To critically affect one another. So take care with how you approach the topic of friends—even during this early phase of elementary school. No fight is too silly or disappointment too small to unpack.

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

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WHAT TO SAY:

- “What’s your favorite show, book, or movie about friends? How are they good friends to each other?”
- “Tell me about how you met your best friend. What kind of things do you enjoy doing together?”
- “Name three words that describe a good friend.”
- “Think about a time a friend has made you angry or sad. What happened?”
- “If you wanted to become a friend with someone new, what would you do?”
- “Have you ever felt like you needed to “tattle” on a friend?”
- “Have you ever wanted something a friend had? What happened?”
- “Friends forgive one another. What does it mean to forgive someone?”
- “If you saw your friend being mean or rude to someone, what would you do?”

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- “Everyone should be your friend.”
- “You can only have one best friend.”
- “If you don’t have lots of friends, maybe you aren’t very nice.”
- “If someone hurts your feelings, you shouldn’t be their friend.”
- “Don’t be friends with _____. They’re not a good influence.”
- “_____ isn’t a good friend.”

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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:

MIDDLE SCHOOL

HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS



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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."

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?"
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HIGH SCHOOL HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLs

Every student 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 high school years, your influence is limited. At this time in a student's life, a new group dominates their tribe: *friends*

High school ushers students into a phase of increased independence. Whom they choose to spend time with is no longer dominated by their parents' choices, but their own. And the people they decide to put their trust in can drastically change the trajectory of a high schooler's life. While it may be easy as small group leaders to see the likely outcome of some relationships, that's not always the case for high schoolers that are still developing their abilities of logic and reason. Gentle encouragement, calm responses, and a listening ear are the best tools in approaching the sometimes sensitive topic of healthy and unhealthy friendships.

In your group, how you talk about friends matters—especially during high school, the phase when friendships often matter more to students than family relationships. Your words could serve as a catalyst of positive change in how a student views and forms their own friendships.

The idea isn't to make a judgment on the friends your student is hanging out with but to find a place that's healthiest for them in their life.

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

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The idea isn't to make a judgment on the friends your student is hanging out with but to find a place that's healthiest for them in their life.

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

WHAT TO SAY:

- "What's the most important quality of a solid friendship?"
- "How does social media affect friendships?"
- "How have your friendships affected your reputation?"
- "Have you ever had to confront a friend? Was there something you could've done differently?"
- "Are there any adults you know of whose friendship you admire? What about that relationship is appealing to you?"
- "Your friendships will change over the next couple years, and that's okay."
- "When it comes to your friends, do you make wise decisions and do you have their best interests in my mind?"
- "Who are the people that make you like yourself more after you're around them? Do you have friends that make you like yourself less?"
- "Your friends determine your direction. If that's true, where do you think you'll be in the future?"

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- "Don't be friends with _____. They're not a good influence."
- "You're going to college soon so your current friendships don't really matter."
- "Things are so different now than they were when I was growing up. I'm so glad I'm not a teenager."
- "I've heard bad things about _____. Maybe you should think twice before hanging out with them."
- "How many times have I told you that _____ is not a good friend?"
- "You shouldn't be friends with someone who doesn't believe the same things you do."

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