

Helping students avoid bad influences

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As a parent, you take your job of guiding and positively influencing your child seriously. Unfortunately, as many parents learn when they first send their children to preschool, it doesn't take long to undo some of that work! Throughout your child's life, he will encounter positive influences among his peers — and negative ones.



Wondering what to do when your child is socializing with the wrong kind of child at school, or worse, the wrong crowd? [Charlotte Reznick, PhD](#), an educational psychologist, associate professor at UCLA and author of the book: *The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success*, offers advice to parents who are concerned about their child's friends.

PRESCHOOL

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Young children can easily be influenced into a positive direction if parents and teachers are consistent. If you see negative behavior when your child starts school, talk with their teacher right away to make sure you are on the same page.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

As your child gets bigger, your concerns do, too. Telling your child not to hang out with a particular student at school, however, won't always earn the response you're seeking. Children learn to rebel, even at a young age; often, the forbidden becomes more interesting. Instead, do your best to *direct* your child when you can. Set up playdates with other families who have similar values and whose children have common interests with yours. Encourage your child's positive behaviors.

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JUNIOR HIGH/[HIGH SCHOOL](#)

Occasionally, the “bad kids” appeal to otherwise well behaved teenagers, just as some teens are drawn to unhealthy or risky behaviors. You can help by instilling confidence in your teen. Your goal is for your child to have a very strong sense of himself so that he won’t want to blindly follow another person. “Provide positive outlets for connectedness,” Reznick suggests, such as sports or volunteerism.

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IF YOU MUST PUT YOUR FOOT DOWN

In some instances, you may have to draw the line in the sand and forbid your child to keep company with another student. If that’s necessary, Reznick counsels parents to make the reasons clear. For example, tell your child, “He’s stealing. And we’re sad that he is in a troubled place right now, but your behavior changes when you’re around him. We will all be better off if you don’t have any more contact, so please respect that.” And then stick with it! Reznick says that the best thing to do is help your child make good decisions for himself, but if that’s not happening and there is a real danger, you have to exert your role as a parent.

Reznick encourages parents to follow their instincts when it comes to their children, and this area is no exception. You cannot control every last thing your child does, especially as he becomes a teenager, but you *can* exert your influence and set boundaries. It’s your job!

More about [avoiding bad influences >>](#)