

“Friending” & being friends

In May, 74 parents joined our group sessions for parents, focusing on how we can support our teenagers in building friendships among their peers. The topic in August will be “understanding common mental health issues which affect teens”. If you would like to join us, please do sign up at <http://tinyurl.com/SJII-mothers> or <http://tinyurl.com/SJII-fathers>.

During our sessions, I talked about the role of parents in developing our teenagers’ social skills. Children observe and learn from how parents interact with each other and how parents interact with their children and other people. For example, you will notice that if there are heightened emotions or conflict avoidant tendencies on the homefront, your teenager may exhibit similar patterns with their peers and friends. It is important to reflect on aspects of your behavior and family dynamics, which may be problematic. This awareness will help you react in more constructive ways. Parents were tasked to think of 2 or 3 friendship/relationship strengths that their teenagers have and share them with them. The sharing should be kept within a positive frame and they are to refrain from using the “but” word.

I emphasised that this developmental stage is when teenagers learn to bond with one another. The challenge is that technology promotes superficial connections and teenagers may not take time or effort to cultivate deeper real-life connections. Healthy relationships help us maintain a good emotional well-being and provide a buffer against stress. Parents need not be surprised if teenagers wish to try out different things and their interests may change from time to time. In fact, they may want to encourage their teenagers to have a range of experiences so that they can discover what they like and want in life, thus developing their self-identity. However, parents need to watch out for negative influences like smoking, drinking and drug abuse.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, I highlighted the part where Sam (*Emma Watson*) asked Charlie (*Logan Lerman*), “Why do I and everyone I love pick people who treat us like we’re nothing?” and Charlie responded, “We accept the love we think we deserve”. This exchange reminds us that we need to help build our teenagers’ self-esteem and self-worth so that they can accept people who will treat them well and let go of unhealthy friendships and relationships.



Useful Resources

A book by Daniel Siegel entitled “*Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*”
“*Raising Children*” website
(<http://tinyurl.com/parents-social1>)

“*Empowering Parents*” website
(<http://tinyurl.com/parents-social2>)

Character strengths (<https://www.viacharacter.org/>)

The Virtues Project (<http://www.virtuesproject.com>)

A film titled “*The Perks of being a Wallflower*”

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