

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

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WE'RE TEACHING THIS

Who are the people you enjoy hanging out with most? Your friends, right? They laugh at your jokes, reply to your Snapchats, invite you to the movies, and hang out with you, even when you smell bad or show off your terrible dance moves. And whether you have a huge group of friends or just one BFF, they can have a huge impact on who you are now and who you become later. Our group can sway us toward good decisions . . . or bad ones. There's a lot of influence

in who we hang out with, including our friends and people we look to for guidance. And there can be a lot of pain when a friendship ends. Perhaps that's why the Bible has so much to say about these topics. As we look to the Bible for advice, we'll discover how we should choose our friends and mentors, and how we should handle those friendships that fade over time.

THINK ABOUT THIS

by Autumn Ward

It can be difficult to know *how* to influence our teenagers. We give advice. They act like we've lost our minds. We give encouragement. They roll their eyes. Even when our teenage sons and daughters are respectful, it can feel like they're not listening. But we all know who they are listening to. They're all listening to their *friends*.

At this phase, one of our greatest opportunities to influence our kids is to have a relationship with their *friends*. And, it *isn't* always as difficult as it sounds. Having influence with a teenager doesn't mean you have to wear skinny jeans and know the names of pop stars. It doesn't mean you have to throw lavish parties or have the coolest house on the block. **Sometimes having influence is as simple as having them over to your home.**

In her article [Open Your Home](#) on [ParentCue.org](#), author

and mom of three, Autumn Ward, talks about the benefits and the costs of spending time with her kids' friends:

I love beautifully decorated homes with every little thing in place; a candle quietly burning, fresh flowers in a vase, soft music playing, spotless floors and bathrooms, freshly polished furniture. . . and vacuum lines on carpet.

As much as I would love to say this describes my home, it does not. I mean, I still try. I haven't totally given up on the dream, but I learned a long time ago that hosting kids in my home does not, in any way, help my straight-out-of-HGTV dream become a reality.

The sleepovers.
The football team hanging out.
The basketball team hanging out.

The soccer team hanging out.
(*We've had a lot of teams over the years!*)
The gang dropping by for a snack.
The impromptu bonfires.
The school study groups.

They've all left their mark on my home—literally.

The basement walls we finally painted got a layer of Dr. Pepper sprayed on them three weeks later.

The ceiling fan light fixture got shattered by a body pillow being waved in the air by one young man who was trying to fan away body odors.

The recliner no longer leans back all the way and kind of tilts to one side after a group of guys decided to see how many would fit in it. (*The answer is five, in case you're wondering.*)

Oh and the *handprints*. The walls of the staircase going down to my basement have the handprints of just about every teen we know.

Recently, after my son's high school graduation, I found myself staring at all those scuff marks and handprints. As I ran my hand across what would be ugly to most, I uttered a "thank you" to God. I thanked Him for helping me open

my home, because when I open my home, I open my heart. And in exchange, I received so much more than a beautifully decorated, clean house:

The sound of teens worshiping in my basement.
The laughter of boys being boys.
The excitement of girls talking over one another.
The huddle around the oven waiting for food.
The hugs from kids I barely knew.
The title of "Mom" from kids who aren't mine.
And the "thanks Mom" from the kids who are.

In that moment, I found myself overwhelmed with gratitude for the opportunity to care for, influence, and shape the kids who play such a role in the life of *my* kids—their friends.

Parents, open your home. Let your house be the hangout, the host home, the place where teens can be. Don't wait until you think your house is "good enough." All kids want is a place to be with the friends they want to be with.

Yes, it's exhausting and will cost you. But I promise you, it will be worth it.

Get connected to a wider community of parents at TheParentCue.org.

TRY THIS

This week, try investing in your kid's friends by offering to have them over. **You don't have to plan a party.** Just ask your kid what they're doing this week. Maybe it's . . .

- studying for a test.
- watching Netflix.
- shopping for a homecoming dress.
- watching the game.

Then ask, "Do you want to invite _____ to come over while you do that?"

When their friends come over, make an effort to just "be around." You don't have to watch the movie with them, but be there to greet them. Ask how they're doing. Offer snacks. When you do, you're communicating that you care about them and you're making an investment that will pay off over and over again.
