



FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIPS, TEACHING FRIENDSHIP

By Marilyn Sharpe

All of us wonder and worry – will my child have good friends? Will my child be a good friend? How can I help? What should I do if I don't approve of my child's friends? Slow down!

Before Christmas, I had breakfast with two beloved friends, celebrating the season of God's great gift to us in Jesus and God's wonderful gift of this friendship, which spans 25 years. We cherish just being together, sharing stories, savoring this long time tradition. We feel known and loved and understood. Friends celebrate.

Yesterday, I spoke to a lifelong friend on the anniversary of her mother's death, a woman who was my mother's best friend, my childhood friend's mother, and a woman who made room in her life for me when my own mother died 30 years ago. Friends remember.

On my way home, I stopped to visit a cherished friend who has incredible health issues, suffers pain and one crisis after another, looks death in the face, and still chooses to be present in this life. Friends share it all.

At work, I sit across the desk from a friend who deeply understands and shares my values and delights in the work we do. Friends know us as we are known.

I have been blessed with friends who walk with me and talk with me, sit in silence and send late night emails, laugh until tears stream and hand me tissue and wisdom and God's own sweet hope when times are dark.

How do children learn about friendship? They watch us. They listen. They learn.

Look in the mirror of your friendships. Does your child see you cherishing your friends, making time for them, celebrating their birthdays, building traditions, including them in your family? Does your child hear you talk about the stories you share, the dreams, the delight? Does your child see your face light up when a friend enters the room?

Say it out loud. Let your child know the qualities you value in a friend. Name them – loyalty, respect, listening, sharing, unconditional love, reconciliation and rebuilding trust, time together, shared values, remembering, delight, humor, fun, playfulness, loving me enough to challenge me, comfort, and loving me when I feel unworthy.

Catch your child being a good friend. Affirm the qualities you appreciate and name them.

Make room in your life for your child's friends. Invite, welcome, and include them. Get to know them, especially with the ones you really wish your child hadn't befriended. See what your child values, See them with the eyes of Jesus. Yes, supervise the ones that need it and let them catch your family's values. You may transform the life of another child ... and discover a love you didn't know you could feel for them. Years from now, the phone will ring and a young adult will say, "Mom? Dad?" and, although you are not related, you will know that the friendships of your family have made all the difference. After all, Jesus let us know that we are all family!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Let your child watch you with your close friends, observing, listening, laughing, spending time together, comforting one another, reconciling after a rocky passage in your friendship.
2. Include friends as extended family in your family's life and activities and prayers.
3. Talk about what qualities you and your child look for in a friend.
4. Name the qualities your child demonstrates that makes him or her a good friend.
5. Invite your child's friends to your home and include them in family activities.