Your relationship with your children: friendship or friendly?

As a parent, you hope that your children will find that one special, meaningful friendship. A best friend that your son or daughter can talk to, spend time learning and growing with, and confide in. But should that best friend be you?



Sure there are moments when being your child's friend seems like a good idea. But juggling the role of pal and parent can be tricky, sticky and borderline impossible when times are tough.

Benefits of being a best buddy

Kids are more apt to tell you secrets and details that you want and need to know as a parent
Children are more likely to listen to your advice
You have someone to share and discuss your problems with

- Your children will like and accept you
- You'll have more fun together

But most of these benefits meet your needs and not your children's. Your child needs you to listen, give support, provide direction and advice, but it is not a mutual relationship. The role of parent is a specific and important one that has those, as well as, added responsibilities.

The parent’s role is to:

- Set limits and boundaries
- Enact consequences
- Reinforce positive behaviour
- Provide accurate information
- Act as a role model

It is difficult to balance these roles and still remain your child's friend. It is important to maintain a friendly atmosphere in your relationship, but due to the power difference involved in the parent-child relationship, mutuality is not an option.

Being friendly with your child

In an effort to have your child’s love and respect, it is important to try and weave a balance between the aspects of friendship that are positive for the child, while maintaining the integrity of the parental role. This includes:

- Creating an environment where your child gets accurate information from you and feels comfortable asking you difficult questions knowing they will not be judged
- Giving your child the privacy and respect they need when it comes to his or her thoughts and feelings
- Ensuring that your child knows that you love them and that you will always be there to support them even if they do not always agree with your decisions
- Being patient with your child
- Giving them all of what they need and some of what they want
- Clearly outlining, and modeling, the role of a parent
- Behaving in a way that earns—not only demands—their trust and respect

- Ensuring that your child or children are not unduly saddled with grown-up information or responsibilities; allowing room for your children to be children

It is important to show an interest in your child's hopes, dreams, goals, friends, school work and personality. Let your children know that you love them unconditionally. Support them in making healthy life choices. Ensure that both you and your children have a good support network within and outside the home. Spend quality time with your children and their peers and let them have the freedom to grow.

If you take care of your own needs for connection and support with other adults, your children will feel more comfortable in reaching out and making friends of their own. By practising a parental style of interest, respect, and some distance, you will be sowing the seeds of a solid parent-child relationship that will last a life-time.