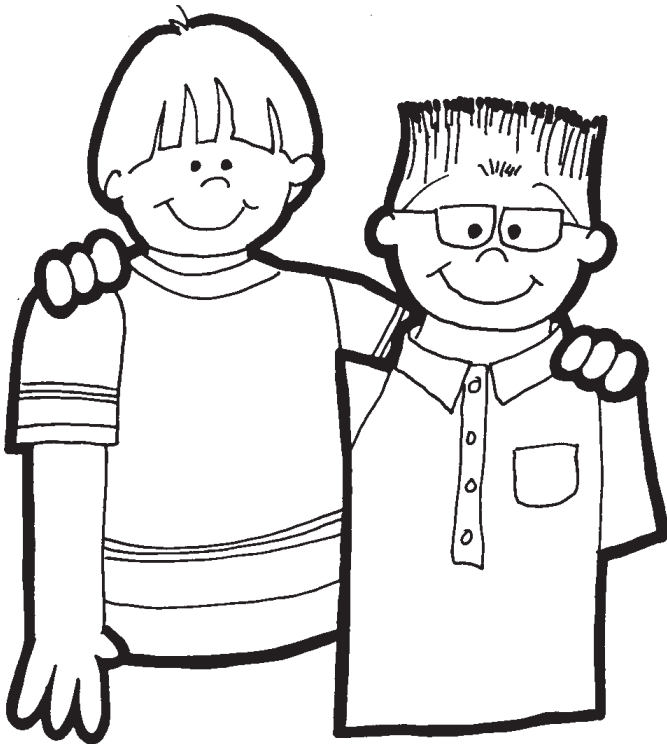


that satisfy both them and their parents. "Guidance" means allowing them the opportunity to make some of these choices, but also helping them to make healthy choices.

Sometimes your child will use your rules to help him say no to his friends. He may argue about these rules, but rules do help a child say no. Rules provide structure. Fair rules are very important at this age.

Consider negotiating and compromising on some rules, like curfew, clothing and hair styles. Don't "sweat the small stuff." A major argument over a pair of jeans or style of haircut is pointless when there are far more important issues to deal with! Save your energy and your child's attention for the important issues.



Parents often are so concerned about negative or troublesome peer pressure that they forget friends can be a positive force in a child's life. For example, if your child's peers stress achievement and good grades, your child will probably strive to earn good grades. Friends help your child try new behavior and discover what is appropriate and acceptable. Friends allow peers to feel they are important and that they belong. When your child's friends visit your home, invite them to share in part of your family's activities, if possible. This is important to your child. But don't monopolize your child's friends.

Parents sometimes think they have lost control of their children when in fact the children are simply learning about people outside of their family, people who are important to them and with whom they can get along. People outside of the family can be powerful motivators and influences on your children. A healthy or positive relationship with another peer or adult outside the family can be an important ally. It's not necessarily a rejection of you as a parent. It's more of a reflection of their need to expand their experiences.

Remember that children want your approval, support, reasoning and guidance rather than your control. Parents still influence children more than friends. Research indicates that parents are more influential than peers or media. Providing a healthy role model is a major responsibility for parents. Your actions speak louder than words. For example, if you do not want your child to smoke, it will be more likely to happen if you do not smoke!

Parents aren't often aware of their influence because sixth-graders are exploring new behaviors and questioning old behaviors with their peers. Be patient with them. They'll make some decisions that will be mistakes and some decisions that you will be proud of. Encourage and support the positive efforts and successes. Share your feelings and help them understand their mistakes in a respectful manner.

This newsletter is published for North Dakota families with sixth-graders by the NDSU Extension Service and distributed through your county extension office. See your extension agent for more parenting information and other nutrition, youth and family programs.