

How can you cultivate an environment within your youth ministry that fosters the development of good friendships? One way is to model authentic friendships in your own life and with students. Here are 12 skills to consider when developing good friends:

1. **Communicate.** Good communication is foundational to good friendships. Model good communication by listening well and authentically sharing thoughts and feelings.
2. **Listen.** Even though listening is part of good communication, it deserves a spot of its own. It's that important. As I've heard Jim Burns say numerous times, "Listening is the language of love."
3. **Be positive.** "Leading behavioral researchers have told us that as much as 77 percent of everything we think about is negative, counterproductive, and works against us."¹³ Such negative programming, in many cases, is unintentional. It comes from teachers, parents, siblings, peers, and the media. But negative input, even if unintentional, is still negative. If you want to develop *good* friendships, be positive—and especially look for the positive in obviously negative situations. I don't know about you, but these are the kind of people I want to befriend.
4. **Don't gossip.** "The perverse stir up dissension, and gossips separate close friends" (Proverbs 16:28). Enough said.
5. **Fight fair.** Friends fight. Not smack-downs, but they disagree and argue. One way you can tell if a friendship is mature is if friends disagree agreeably.
6. **Sacrifice.** Whether you agree with popular self-help guru Wayne Dyer or not, he's definitely right about one thing: "It's never crowded along the extra mile." True friends travel the extra mile for each other.
7. **Be there.** Friends are available for each other, especially when the going gets tough.
8. **Invest time.** Time is the greatest investment a person can make in a friendship.
9. **Love.** Love "always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (1 Corinthians 13:7).