

*My best friend has been getting
into a lot of trouble lately.
How do I help her?*

Friend in Need

QUESTION: MY BEST FRIEND IS acting like a jerk! Lately, she has been getting into a lot of trouble. She's become very rebellious and has to have her own way. She's always been a little resistant to authority, but it seems to keep building.

She goes to church and youth group, but I think she's just going because her other friends and I do. I want to tell her what she's doing, but I'm afraid she'll just laugh it off or get mad at me. Everyone I know (her friends) thinks she is acting like an airhead. I know she can be smart if she wants to be. But lately she doesn't seem to care about anything but herself and what she wants.

What should I do to show her what she's doing?

ANSWER: TO START WITH, YOU could pray for your friend. I don't say this just to be spiritual or trite. And I don't mean just pray a general prayer like "Lord, help Suzie get straightened out."

I mean pray regularly and specifically for your friend and every area of her life you know anything about, for needs and problems you know she's facing and for her relationships with specific other people—friends, teachers, parents, etc. And when one of those areas of her life comes up in conversation and it seems like a natural time, you might let her know you're praying for that concern. Say it in an "I'm sharing that concern with you" way, not an "I'm praying because something is wrong with you" way.

Pray too for your own relationship with your friend, that you'll be able to meet some of her needs for acceptance. That God will help you see the areas where you can affirm your friend (the positive things you can appreciate) and let her know what you appreciate about her. My guess is, that's what your friend needs more than anything else.

The time may come when it would be a good idea for you to sit down alone with your friend and, in the same tone as the letter you've written here, let her

know you love her and you're concerned about what her attitude and behavior are doing, both to her and to your relationship. You might actually share this letter with her.

She might react so defensively she doesn't hear a thing you're saying. But if you've prepared the foundation by showing her your love, acceptance and concern over a period of time, the chances of getting through to her will be much better. One thing I've learned is that there's little point in giving advice to anyone who's not ready to take it or to someone who isn't convinced of your genuine concern for them.

So work on accepting and affirming your friend before you start pointing out her problems and giving advice. And if you do confront her with your concern, no matter how she reacts, go out of your way in the following days and weeks to reassure her of your acceptance and affirmation.