



JUNIOR HIGH GROUP STUDY

# FRIENDS & PEER PRESSURE

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General Editor



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# How to Use the *Uncommon* Junior High Group Studies

Each *Uncommon* junior high group study contains 12 sessions, which are divided into 2 stand-alone units of 6 sessions each. You may choose to teach all 12 sessions consecutively, or to use just one unit, or to present each session separately. You know your group, so do what works best for you and your students.

This is your leader's guidebook for teaching your group. Electronic files (in PDF format) for each session's student handouts are available online at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/). The handouts include the "Reflect" section of each study, formatted for easy printing, in addition to any student worksheets for the session. You may print as many copies as you need for your group.

Each individual session begins with a brief overview of the "big idea" of the lesson, the aims of the session, the primary Bible verse and additional verses that tie in to the topic being discussed. Each of the 12 sessions is geared to be 45 to 90 minutes in length and is comprised of two options that you can choose from, based on the type of group that you have. Option 1 tends to be a more active learning experience, while Option 2 tends to be a more discussion-oriented exercise.

The sections in each session are as follows:

## **Starter**

Young people will stay in your youth group longer if they feel comfortable and make friends. This first section helps students get to know each other better and focus on the theme of the lesson in a fun and engaging way.

## **Message**

The Message section enables students to look up to God by relating the words of Scripture to the session topic.

## Dig

Unfortunately, many young people are biblically illiterate. In this section, students look inward and discover how God's Word connects with their own world.

## Apply

Young people need the opportunity to think through the issues at hand. The apply section leads students out into their world with specific challenges to apply at school, at home and with their friends.

## Reflect

This concluding section of the study allows students to reflect on the material presented in the session. You can print these pages from the PDF found at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/uncommon\\_jh\\_friends\\_and\\_peer\\_pressure.zip](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/uncommon_jh_friends_and_peer_pressure.zip) and give them to your students as a handout for them to work on throughout the week.

### Want More Options?

An additional option for each section, along with accompanying worksheets, is available in PDF format at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/uncommon\\_jh\\_friends\\_and\\_peer\\_pressure.zip](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/uncommon_jh_friends_and_peer_pressure.zip).

# UNIT I

## Friends

Why talk with junior-highers about friends? Because it's who they are! It's a core issue in their world. When puberty hits, life changes. I know this is an obvious, oversimplified statement, but it's really the understatement of the century for young teens.

Life for junior-highers is all about change. They're a bundle of physical, emotional, mental, spiritual and relational changes. The world of a young teen is expanding, both as a result of these changes and from attending a school that now draws from a region rather than the local neighborhood. With this personal world-expansion come new friendships, formed around common interests rather than physical proximity.

So, why talk to junior-highers about friends? Because there aren't many things more important to junior-highers than friendship. Their identities are just beginning to form, and junior-highers need to understand the dynamics of true friendship. How do you speak with junior-highers about friends? The subject of friends is so broad—there are a hundred different sessions you could teach, and most junior-highers aren't interested in a 100-week teaching series! Here are a handful of things that are good for junior-highers to understand:

- *God cares about our friendships.* God's not disinterested. He designed relationships, after all. And He desires for us to have healthy, fun, supportive friendships.
- *The best way to have good friendships is to be a good friend.* This sounds a bit cliché, I know, but it's a very true statement that young teens often miss. They can be in a friendship for completely selfish reasons, treat a friend with disrespect and be bossy, and still wonder why it's not a good friendship.
- *Friendships often change as you grow up.* It's okay—even normal—for students to experience changes in their friendships when they move

from childhood into their teenage years. Help them to understand that it's not necessarily a failed friendship if they don't still hit it off with their best friend from second grade.

- *Everyone is lonely sometimes.* The biggest friendship issue for some of the students in your group will be that they have no friends. Sometimes this is only a false perception, but sometimes it is the true reality. Help them understand that they aren't freaks or losers. It's tough to develop good friends, and everyone goes through times in life when they have fewer friends than they would like.

Enjoy speaking with your junior-highers about friends. It's one of those rare subjects they will show some interest in!

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## SESSION I

# BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS

## THE BIG IDEA

Challenging one another by asking hard questions builds friendships.

## SESSION AIMS

In this session you will guide students to (1) learn about the strong friendship between Jonathan and David that challenged them both to think and grow; (2) feel the need to build friendships that will challenge them to think and grow; and (3) act by identifying at least one friendship that has the potential to help them grow.

## THE BIGGEST VERSE

“Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, ‘What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to take my life?’” (1 Samuel 20:1).

## OTHER IMPORTANT VERSES

1 Samuel 18:7-8; 20:1-4; Proverbs 12:15; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 15:7

**Note:** Additional options and worksheets in 8½" x 11" format for this session are available for download at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh\\_friends\\_and\\_peer\\_pressure.zip](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/jh_friends_and_peer_pressure.zip).



## STARTER

**Option 1: Go to the Wall.** For this option, you need just this book!

Greet students and explain that you're going to start this new series on friendship by playing *Go to the Wall*. Ask everyone to stand in the center of the room. (It's best to play this in a room that's not too filled with furniture—perhaps an empty classroom, instead of the youth room that's filled with folding chairs and the refreshment table still covered with remnants of last week's donuts.)

Tell students that you're going to call out four types of food and they need to listen to see which they like the most. As you call out the types of food, assign a wall for each one and tell students to go to that wall. For instance, you might say: "If you like Mexican food, go to that wall; Chinese, go stand at that wall; Italian, go to that wall; and if you prefer Mom's home cookin', go to that wall."

Next, do the same with vacations by asking students which vacation location they would prefer: a tropical beach; a cabin in the mountains; a Paris hotel; an amusement park in Orlando.

Continue the activity with other choices:

- Music styles: country, ska, rock 'n' roll, rap or pop
- Cars: VW Bug, Mercedes convertible, Jeep Wrangler or Porsche
- Fast food: McDonald's, Taco Bell, Subway or Burger King
- Movies: adventure, science fiction, comedy or horror

Add to or change the lists to fit your group.

You'll find that students will enjoy the decision-making and have fun being able to choose whatever they want. They'll also be surprised to see who else in their group ends up at the same wall with them—and who doesn't.

When you're finished, invite students to take their places and ask, "Did anyone feel left out when you went to a wall and some of your friends were at a



### Youth Leader Tip

It's fun when, throughout the course of the group meeting, someone says something that is off-the-wall or just funny, you sentence him or her by saying, "Go to the wall!"

different one? Was anyone surprised by the decisions of others? Did any two people here go to all of the same walls together?"

Explain that just as we have different tastes in food, restaurants, cars and music, we often enjoy hanging out with different kinds of friends. There are friends we have that make us laugh and let us goof off. We have friends for talking and sharing secrets. There are "just-for-fun" friends for going to a movie and the mall with. Some of us have those special friends who challenge us and hold us accountable for our actions. There are even "crying-together" friends.

Explain that today, you're going to look at how close friends can challenge us by asking hard and sometimes uncomfortable questions.

**Option 2: Word Up.** For this option, you need copies of "Word Up" (found on the following page), a bell or buzzer, a stopwatch and 3x5-inch index cards. If you're into prizes, you might want to prepare something for the winning team. Ahead of time, cut apart the cards in the "Word Up" handout. (This game is similar to Charades, except that you talk!)

Greet students and explain that the topic of this new series is friendship. Next, divide the group into two teams. If the numbers work out equally, dividing the group into girls and guys can make for fun, healthy competition. The girls' team chooses someone to go first, and then only that girl is shown a card with a main word written on it in all uppercase letters. This main word is the word that she has to try to get her team to say by using verbal clues, including words, phrases or sentences. Also listed on the card are words that she *cannot use* while trying to get her team members to guess the main word.

The first team member has 20 seconds to get her team to guess the word. If she succeeds, then the next girl on the team gets a card and tries to do the same thing with a different word in 20 seconds or less.

If the first team cannot do it in 20 seconds, the guys' team goes next, repeating the process. Once the second team fails to guess a word within 20 seconds, it's the first team's turn again. As the leader, you need to watch the card closely and listen to the hints being given to the teams. If "forbidden" words are used, ring the bell or buzz the buzzer, and the point and the turn goes to the other team.

After about five minutes or after all the words have been guessed, invite students back to their places and say, "As you can see, saying the wrong words is often very easy to do. Saying the right thing is usually harder to do, and the right words are hard to find. This is also true in our friendships. We often say the wrong words because we don't know what the right words are."



# WORD UP

## SECRET

whisper  
tell  
private  
keep  
children

## FAMILY

mom  
dad  
brother  
sister  
home

## COMPUTER

type  
internet  
E-mail  
mouse  
screen

## JEANS

blue  
pants  
wear  
denim  
legs

## FILM

camera  
photo  
movie  
produce  
color

## BOOK

read  
school  
write  
paper  
words

## MUSIC

listen  
CD player  
iPod  
stereo  
radio

## SCHOOL

class  
student  
teacher  
learn  
junior high

## FRIEND

time  
pal  
someone  
buddy  
talk

## CAR

drive  
steering wheel  
road  
go  
gasoline

## COMMERCIAL

radio  
television  
sell  
jingle  
buy

## CHEWING GUM

mouth  
bubbles  
pink  
tongue  
blow

## BASKETBALL

hoop  
team  
court  
dribble  
players

## MILK

cookies  
nonfat  
low fat  
white  
cereal

## LAMP

light  
light bulb  
read  
room  
lampshade

## CALENDAR

days  
months  
years  
plans  
meetings

Explain that today you're going to look at how friends who ask hard questions and say words that challenge us can really be a good thing for us.

## MESSAGE

**Option 1: David and Jonathan's Arms.** For this option, you need just this fantastic book.

Ask for four volunteers and assign them the following roles: *David*, *David's arms*, *Jonathan* and *Jonathan's arms*. Explain that the Bible is full of stories about all kinds of friendships, and you're going to read a portion from probably the most famous friendship in all of the Old Testament.

Instruct the volunteers that they will be acting out a short passage. The two students playing David and Jonathan simply repeat what you (as the narrator) read, but the volunteers playing their arms should act with exaggerated animation in keeping with these particular verbs: "exclaimed," "protested," "fumed" and "begged." The probably hilarious catch is that David and Jonathan must hold their hands behind their backs while the two volunteers playing their arms stand behind them, slipping their arms through to the front to gesture as their talking partner repeats the Scripture verses. (*Note: Giving the volunteers a few moments of rehearsal might help in making the delivery more creative and lively.*)

Next, read the following script adapted from 1 Samuel 20:1-4, making sure to pause long enough to give the arms time to act out the emotions.

**David exclaimed:** (pause) "What have I done? Why is your father so determined to kill me?"

**Jonathan protested:** (pause) "That's not true! I'm sure he's not planning any such thing, for he always tells me everything he's going to do, even little things, and I know he wouldn't hide something like this from me. It just isn't so."

**David fumed:** (pause) "Of course you don't know about it! Your father knows perfectly well about our friendship, so he has said to himself, 'I won't tell Jonathan—why should I hurt him?' But the truth is that I am only a step away from death! I swear it by the Lord and by your own soul!"

**Jonathan begged:** (pause) "Whatever you want me to do, I will do it for you."

When you are finished, thank your Oscar-winning cast—especially the arms—for their creative input in helping demonstrate the way that Scripture can come alive.

Explain that Jonathan and David were the best of friends, and in this passage, David had to inform Jonathan of some disturbing news about Jonathan's father.<sup>1</sup> Their friendship was put to the test, but it passed with flying colors. Read 1 Samuel 20:1-4, and then lead a discussion about the following questions:

- What might have been some of Jonathan's emotions when David told him the disturbing news about his father? *Anger, denial.*
- What were some of David's emotions? *Desperation, anxiety.*
- How is Jonathan's final question a gesture of his loyal commitment (see verse 4)? *He was no longer defending his father and he wanted to know how he could help.*

If students are open to discussing how they would have felt if they had been Jonathan or David, encourage them to share.

Make it clear that Jonathan and David's friendship was strong and special, but strengthened even more as they both took risks and shared the truth. David was the kind of friend who cared enough to tell it like it was, and Jonathan was the kind of friend who was loyal even through the tough times.

Transition to the next point by encouraging students to think of people in their own lives who care enough to speak the truth, even though it might hurt.

**Option 2: Bittersweet Friendship.** For this option, you need several Bibles, one package of unsweetened baking chocolate (found in your local grocery store's baking aisle) and enough "real" candy (chocolate bars) for everyone. (*Note:* Most unsweetened baking chocolate bars come divided in smaller squares just like a regular chocolate bar; make sure you get enough so that each member in the group receives a small square.)



### Youth Leader Tip

Be sensitive to students who may not have many friends in the group, and when the time comes to divide them into small groups, be careful not to pair up a set of best friends with a third person.

Begin by explaining, “We all have different types of friends and we share with them in different ways. Sometimes our most important friendships are built around difficult situations and hard times. Often those times are uncomfortable and sometimes they can be painful, but the friendship sees us through and even helps us learn and grow in the midst of it all.”

Next, break the unsweetened chocolate bar into enough individual squares for everyone. Pass the chocolate around and invite each person to take a piece but not to eat it yet. Once all the students have a piece, instruct them to put the chocolate in their mouths at the same time. Their responses should be simultaneous and similar: *Yuck! Eww!*

Apologize for the bitter shock, and as you pass around “real” chocolate, explain that a friendship can be just like bitter chocolate: It seems sweet at a glance, but it can turn bitter and challenging. There is a great story of friendship in the Bible that was bittersweet—namely, the bitterness of trouble and the sweetness of undying friendship between two men. Have students follow along as you read 1 Samuel 20:1-4 aloud. Explain that Jonathan and David were great friends, but this disturbing news had the potential to ruin their relationship.

Discuss the following:

- What did David risk by informing Jonathan about his dad’s hatred? *Rejection, losing his friend, angering Jonathan.*
- What did Jonathan risk by pledging his loyal support to David? *He risked his father’s love and support, even his own life.*
- Did the conversation here in this passage seem sweet or bitter at first? *Bitter. It turned sweet when Jonathan said, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you” (see verse 4).*

Explain that the friendship between Jonathan and David was strong and special and was strengthened even more as they shared the truth—no matter how hard it may have been for David to share it or Jonathan to hear it.

## DIG

**Option 1: One Voice.** For this option, you need newsprint and a felt-tip pen (or a whiteboard and a dry-erase marker) and a blindfold.

Ask for one volunteer and have him come up to the front. Blindfold him and give him the marker. Explain that you are going to write down a word and the students are to guide the volunteer in drawing a picture of that word

by yelling out instructions—but *not* telling the volunteer what the word is. Be sure to tell them that the louder, the better, so the instructions can be heard!

Once the volunteer is blindfolded, write the word “house” (remind the group not to say it out loud). At your signal, they should yell out instructions, such as “Draw a straight line across.” Allow a few minutes to see how far the volunteer gets.

Let the volunteer see the results of his efforts, applaud his work and ask for another volunteer. Blindfold the new volunteer and give her the marker with the same instructions. The difference this time is that you will choose *only one student* to give the instructions to the volunteer. Write the word “car” and ask the instructor to begin giving directions. After a few minutes, remove the blindfold and congratulate both the instructor and the instructee on their fine piece of art!

Ask the first volunteer, “How did you feel when everyone was shouting directions at you?” (*Confused, frustrated, unsure.*) Ask the second volunteer, “How did you feel?” (*Guided, secure.*) Explain that we all need help in life, and friends are the perfect people to give us that help. Now, it might not be that we need friends to help us to do something like drawing, but we will probably need our friends around for more important things. The world is filled with all kinds of voices shouting different messages at us; it can be confusing and deafening. But when we need help and direction or maybe encouragement, the single voice of one friend can do the job.

Ask, “When are some times we need advice or help from a friend?” (*When we feel lonely; when we’re having family problems; when we’re struggling at school.*) “What are some things a good friend might say or ask that might be pretty tough to hear?” (*You really shouldn’t be doing that; how’s your relationship with God; you should tell your parents; you were wrong.*) Allow students to ponder this last question. Try to avoid hypothetical answers and push for real experiences when a friend dared to confront them.

Read Proverbs 12:15 and then explain, “The Bible tells us it’s important to surround ourselves with friends who care enough to give good advice that will stretch us and challenge us even though it might hurt. This advice might even come from your youth leader. Ouch!”

**Option 2: To Tell or Not to Tell?** For this option, you need your Bible.

Introduce this step by explaining that just as Jonathan had David to tell him some harsh but important truths, we also need people in our lives who care enough to be brutally honest. Then read the following case study:

Katie and Natasha have been friends since the second grade, and best friends since the fifth. Now they are in seventh grade together. Their favorite topics of discussion these days are boys and clothes.

About two months into the school year, Katie begins to hear comments and criticisms from others about how Natasha wears “skimpy” clothes. She even hears some people call her derogatory names. Katie is hurt by what people are saying about her friend, but the harder thing is that she somewhat agrees with them. Natasha is dressing a little differently lately. She considers talking to her, but is too afraid Natasha will be hurt.

Katie loves Natasha, no matter what she wears. She just doesn’t want her to get a reputation and really wants her to know what people are saying so maybe she can do something about it.

Ask the group if they would confront Natasha or not. If so, why? If they were in Katie’s position, what would they say to Natasha? How might Natasha respond to Katie’s confrontation?

Explain that there’s a great verse in the Bible, Proverbs 12:15: “The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.” God puts people in our lives to challenge, correct and confront us when we need it. If all we did with our friends was go to the mall and movies, we’d be poorer—both spiritually and financially! It’s important that we allow friendships to develop to the place where we can ask hard questions and tell the truth even when it hurts.

## APPLY

**Option 1: Friend of Jesus.** You’ll need a lot of prayer and several gift Bibles to give to students who make a commitment to Christ during this session.

Explain that you’ve talked about friendships that help us grow, and that you’re going to conclude by taking a closer look at the friendship that can help us grow more than any other. It’s our friendship with Jesus. Read Mark 8:27-30 aloud, then explain that Jesus asked His friend Peter the most important question of all time: “Who do you say I am?” Explain that Jesus asks each of us that question, too: “Who do you say I am?” There are three ways to answer: Jesus is a liar, a lunatic or the Lord.

Tell the group that today, just like Peter, they have the chance to answer that question themselves. They might say that everything Jesus said and did was a lie, or they might say He was crazy. But if they believe He is their Lord,



they need to acknowledge that fact. Ask them to repeat the following prayer after you:

*Jesus (pause for students to repeat),  
I know I often do wrong things (pause),  
and I know I need You to be my Lord (pause).  
Please come into my life (pause)  
and take it over (pause). Amen.*

Explain that if anyone prayed the prayer and intends to make Jesus the Lord of his or her whole life, the Bible teaches that all of heaven is rejoicing (see Luke 15:7)—and you want to rejoice with them! Ask any student who prayed with you to come and see you so that you can give them a Bible and answer any questions they might have about salvation.

**Option 2: Growing-Up Questions.** For this option, you will need copies of “Growing-Up Questions” (found on the next page) and pens or pencils.

Now that you’ve talked about our need to ask our friends some tough questions, explain that you want to get even more practical. Distribute copies of “Growing-Up Questions” and pens or pencils; then ask students to put a checkmark by each question they think they can ask someone important to them this week. (The handout questions correlate with varied levels of adolescent spiritual maturity, so there should be at least one question that will work for each student.)

After giving students a few minutes to do this, ask them to circle the *one* question they will commit to asking this week. Close in prayer, asking God to give each student the courage to approach a friend this week and ask him or her a question that will help him or her think and grow.



### Youth Leader Tip

Approximately 60 percent of Christians say they accepted Jesus before the age of 18. This step allows them to make this important decision by describing the most important question that can help them grow: Who is Jesus?

# GROWING-UP QUESTIONS

Check out these important people and put a check mark next to any question that you think you could ask them this week.

## MY PARENTS

- What is one extra chore I can do this week to help you out?
- What is one thing you wish I understood about you?
- If everyone would drive the same speed, would all of the traffic jams on the highways disappear?
- What could I do to help us get along better at home?

## MY GOD

- How do You want me to grow this week?
- Who do You want me to tell about You this week?
- How can I obey You when I'm around my friends?
- What's the square root of 9,586,342?

## MY FRIENDS

- How can I help you with your homework this week?
- How can I be a better friend to you?
- Is there anything of mine you'd like to borrow?
- How do you get your hair so clean and shiny?

## MY YOUTH LEADER

- Can I wash your car? Better yet, can I take up a collection to buy you a new car?
- How can I help out with the youth ministry this month?
- How can I be praying for you and your family?

## REFLECT

The following short devotions are for the students to reflect on and answer during the week. You can make a copy of these pages and distribute to your class or print out from the PDF available online at [www.gospellight.com/uncommon/uncommon\\_jh\\_friends\\_and\\_peer\\_pressure.zip](http://www.gospellight.com/uncommon/uncommon_jh_friends_and_peer_pressure.zip).

### 1—SHARPEN UP

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Flip to Proverbs 27:17 and get sharpened!

Imagine you're camping and it's time to roast some marshmallows. Oh, no! You forgot the wire coat hangers to put the marshmallows on! You find a nice long stick, but it has a blunt, thick tip. What could you rub it against to make it sharp?

- The lint in your pocket
- A piece of squishy gum stuck to your shoe
- A big hard rock
- The side of your nylon tent

Do you and your friends sharpen each other like iron sharpening iron, or are you squishy-soft like bubble gum?

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What do you think it means to be strong like iron?

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What can you say that would help your friends to sharpen up today?

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## 2—SPEAK UP

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Flip to Galatians 6:1-5 and see what you should be carrying for your friends.

Andrew and Jared were friends at church, but they didn't hang out that much together at school. It wasn't that they didn't like each other; they just hung out with different groups. Jared played on the school soccer team and spent most of his time with the kids on the team, and Andrew hung out with the skaters.

One day, Andrew stood a few people behind Jared in the lunch line and heard Jared and his friends making fun of the lunch lady, saying really mean things about her.

The next night at youth group, Andrew walked up to Jared when he was alone and said, "I heard what you were saying about Lunch Lady Lu Anne yesterday. I know you probably didn't mean to, but it sure didn't sound like stuff a Christian should be saying."

Sometimes your friends will tell you things that are hard to hear, and sometimes you'll have to tell your friends things that are hard to say. A friend might try to tell you a way you were sinning or you might feel God wants you to say something to one of your friends.

As you walk with God today, ask Him to help you listen to your friends and ask Him to give you the right words to say to them.

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## 3—BUILD UP

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Run, don't walk, to 1 Thessalonians 5:4-11 and learn how to build!

If you were going to build a fort for your little cousin in your backyard, what kind of things would you want to use to make the fort a strong one?

- A package of Pop Tarts, some straws and a jar of paste
- Two graham crackers, a gallon of paint and some peanut butter
- An old refrigerator box, some two-by-fours and a heavy blanket

Every conversation you have with your friends can build them and you, too. When you speak with your friends, are you giving them solid things, like encouragement and wisdom, to build with, or are the things you tell them silly or mean or sinful? Make it a point to be extra encouraging to all of your friends today.

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## 4—MAN (OR WOMAN!) UP

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Flip, flip, flip to Ruth 1:14-18 and read about an amazing friend.

Lydia was the most popular seventh grader at Flying Mongoose Junior High. She was the prettiest, most fun girl in the whole class and she made excellent brownies, too. Everyone liked her, especially her two good friends Angie and Cori and, of course, her boyfriend Jason, the most popular guy in the eighth grade.

In the summer before eighth grade, everything changed for Lydia. Her boyfriend dumped her, she got a really bad haircut, and to top it all off, she and her mom moved across town and she had to go to another school—Tiny Dog Middle School. Lydia told Cori and Angie that she didn't want them to hang out with her anymore. Cori said okay and went back to the friends she hung out with before she knew Lydia, but Angie said "No way!" and asked her parents to transfer her to Tiny Dog so Lydia wouldn't have to be alone.

Sometimes being a really good friend means doing things that may not be easy.

Is there a friend you know who is going through a tough time? Call him or her and ask how he or she is and if there is anything you can do to help.

If you're going through a hard time, call a friend and ask him or her to pray with you.