



Friendships and Cliques

When Peers Become Problematic

Peer relationships are an important developmental milestone for children as they look for validation in others who share similar interests, values, hardships or burdens. A group of friends may be as few as two to many in number and are healthy social formations. It is when groups manifest unhealthy or detrimental behaviors that our society defines them as a “clique.” “Becoming a part of these groups sometimes causes kids to act differently than they otherwise would. Since ‘outsiders’ are sometimes mocked by cliques, new clique members may suddenly start acting differently towards the outsiders, even if they used to be

close friends with them” (Family Education, 2009).

As parents, we may regularly hear the word “every” in our child’s vocabulary. *Everyone is going. Everyone has an i-Pod. Everyone has friends.* Children are often dramatic in describing differences between themselves and others; however, repetitive complaints of not having friends may signal a more serious problem. “Helping your child deal with a clique can be tough, especially when the traits that you admire in your child are the reason he is being targeted by a group of kids. If your child looks, acts or dresses differ-



“Supportive people can provide comfort to a child who is being targeted or ignored by a clique.”

(Family Education, 2009)

ently than others do, she may be ridiculed and deemed ‘not worthy’ of belonging to a clique”

(Family Education, 2009). As adults, we realize that much of the teasing will pass but this time period can take an emotional toll on a child and leave lasting scars.

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Special points of interest:

- ♦ *How to help your child avoid the allure of a clique.*
- ♦ *The powerful influence of peers.*
- ♦ *Valentine’s Day. Is it too commercialized?*
- ♦ *The social dynamics of popularity, cliques and friendship.*
- ♦ *When stress is related to friends.*

Helpful Hints

When we discover our child is on the receiving end of antagonistic behavior, our first thought may be “What can I do to help?” or “What can I do to make a difference?”

When a parent becomes aware of their child’s distress, the child often pleads for them to stay out of it, don’t get involved, or to let him

“deal with it.” Nevertheless, when it comes to a child’s wellbeing we feel compelled to do *something*. Here are some suggestions:

*Help your child “expand their horizons” by looking for friends who may be “young, older, or outside of school” (Family Education, 2009). “Don’t

allow a clique to make you miss out on getting to know people who may become close friends”

(KidsHealth, 2009).

*Encourage your child to stand up for herself even if the clique goes on without her.

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Helpful Hints (continued)

It's not always easy to stand up for yourself or others but when you do, you become a stronger individual. Who knows, "there's also a chance that others might follow your lead and stop acting so clique-y"

(KidsHealth, 2009).

*Ask your child if he would like to invite someone over in order to get to know each other better. Having friend-



"With your support and guidance, your child can work out healthy ways to connect with friends and accept others in school."

(Family Education, 2009)

ships outside of a "clique" can help both realize "how silly it is to be part of an exclusive crowd" (Family Education, 2009).

*Stay true to yourself. "Some kids feel they need to change who they are to be accepted by certain people" (Family Education, 2009). "True friends will respect your mind, your rights, and your independent choices" (KidsHealth,

2009). You must be a good friend yourself to have friends so "be just the kind of friend you'd like to have" (KidsHealth, 2009).

"Once children get to high school they may discover a more relaxed, diverse social system. Until then, expect them to navigate some treacherous waters, while bearing in mind that experiencing a little rejection and learning to cope with it isn't necessarily a bad thing. It happens to all of us" (Today, 2009).

The Valentine's Day Paradox

Valentine's Day in early elementary years is usually an enjoyable experience consisting of card exchanges, games and treats. But what happens as your child gets older? "It's an event fraught with possibilities for hurt feelings because it becomes a competitive measure of popularity" (Family Education, 2009). The irony inherent in Valentine's Day is that while popular students have that notion reinforced, those less popular may have their relative position emphasized as well. For many students, there may be a year when

"We probably all have painful memories of at least one Valentine's Day that left us full of heartache rather than joy."
(Family Education, 2009)

Valentine's Day results in feeling left out, being disappointed or having hurt feelings. Affection may not be returned in kind or a child feels slighted by comparison to another. Regardless of the situation, Valen-

tine's Day is often filled with the commercialized pressure of giving and receiving (Family Education, 2009). While these situations can become learning opportunities, the rejection on such a recognized day can be daunting for our child. Discussing what happens to others, having the opportunity to demonstrate compassion and preparing for days of inevitable hurt prepare our child so they may rebound more quickly.

Be Available

One of the most difficult transitions for parents is when children become more independent, naturally seeking friendships beyond their family circle. Peers offer a wealth of positive influence, including feedback, advice, encouragement, and friendship. However, peers may also pressure your child into uncomfortable situations. Peer pressure may never be a problem for you and your child

but remember that "the pressure to conform can be powerful and hard to resist" (KidsHealth, 2009). Begin dialogue early with your child so that when conformity becomes an issue and new experiences arise, he will most likely come to you for advice. One of



"Although you might think your pre-teen wants you to be invisible, it's more important than ever to show your support."
(Today, 2009)

the greatest gifts you can give your child is to teach her to listen to her heart (KidsHealth, 2009). If it doesn't feel right, it's probably not the right thing to do.

Meaningful Conversations

Cliques have always existed but in our minds each generation seems to be harsher than the previous. We often find ourselves comparing our childhood to our child's by saying, "When I was a kid, we didn't have 'x' or 'y.'" Technology advances have given clique behaviors another avenue of expression and future generations will find different means as well. Al-



"Challenge kids to think and talk about whether they're proud of the way they act in school." (KidsHealth, 2009)

though our stories often receive "eye rolls" from our child, we can mention the hurtful experiences we had in school to demonstrate "cliques have been around for a long time" (KidsHealth, 2009). By sharing our painful experiences and the positive outcome, we help put rejection in perspective as our stories often show how quickly things can change (KidsHealth, 2009). We also help our children when we relay

experiences they can relate to. Movie and book characters who "triumph in the face of rejection send strong messages about the importance of being true to your own nature and the value of being a good friend, even in difficult social situations" (KidsHealth, 2009).

Openly discuss social dynamics by acknowledging "that people are often judged by the way they look, act, or dress but that often people act mean and put others down because they lack self-confidence and try to cover up by maintaining control" (KidsHealth, 2009).

Media Matters

Social rejection exists on many levels. Television programs are attracting viewers with "reality shows" based on who is in and out, like *The Bachelor*, *Survivors* and *The Apprentice*. Guests may learn that love is not reciprocated, some may be voted off an island while others are booted out of the office (Be Family, 2009). "Cliques appear to be part of the human condition. At best they form a support group; at worst they become a confining box" (Be Family,

2009). What example is this portraying for our youth? In each episode, individuals are squeezing others out, seeking to be the potential "new star" (Be Family, 2009). We can turn off our televisions and lead by example by "moving past the small, limited world of the clique"

(Be Family, 2009). By removing ourselves from the competition, we demonstrate self-confidence and our children feel empowered to do the same.

"Focus on what you have—not what you are missing."

(Be Family, 2009)

Help Out With the Bail-Out

Most adults can recall a time, or numerous times, when they found themselves in a situation where they had to say no. For students, "no matter how wisely they choose their friends, or how well they think they know them, sooner or later they will have to make decisions that are difficult and could be unpopular" (KidsHealth, 2009). Dr.

D'Arcy Lyness recommends having a "bail-out" code phrase that your child can use "without losing face with peers" (KidsHealth, 2009). An "earache," for example may be a code phrase for "can you come get me?" While true friends should never



"Sometimes the stresses in your life can actually come from your peers."

(KidsHealth, 2009)

need an apology or explanation, allow your child to use you as an excuse. "Blame your parents: 'Are you kidding? If my mom found out, she'd kill me, and her spies are everywhere'" (KidsHealth, 2009).

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Daphne Morris, M.Ed., met Trevor Romain in 1992 when he visited a school as a guest speaker. Impressed by Trevor's profound and meaningful impact on students, Daphne joined The Trevor Romain Company in 2006. A former elementary school principal, Daphne holds two Master's degrees in education.

February Q&A

Q: This year my eleven year old wants to give gifts for Valentine's Day. How should I handle the request?



It may be a good time to discuss how you feel about the holiday. What are your expectations from family and friends? Do you want others to spend a lot of money or simply wish you a Happy Valentine's Day? "Remember that as parents, we transmit values to our children through our behavior. If we celebrate Valentine's Day by exchanging expensive gifts, it is likely that our children will want to do the same" (Family Education, 2009).

"If you are concerned, as many of us are, about rampant commercialism, encourage your child to make his valentines. Buying gifts for classmates should be discouraged" (Family Education, 2009). If your child wants to do something for a best friend, make arrangements for them to do something together. "It's never too early to help children express love and friendship in ways that transcend materialism" (Family Education, 2009).

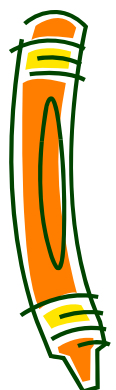
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