



A New School Year is Here!

Surviving the Social World

Happiness. It's a concept we hold dear; if you are a parent, this is an emotion you want your child to experience. Lawrence Cohan, Ph.D., a psychologist, consultant, and author, says that one of the most difficult things to hear from your child is "I'm being teased" (PBS; 2008). Adults understand that all friendships and relationships will have good and bad times. The question most often asked is, "What is normal school behavior?" Dr. Cohan describes normal social pain as "the sadness, anger, and jealousy that friendship brings" (PBS; 2008). Your child's best friend may find a *new* best friend. Your child may speak of occasional teasing and name-calling. Your child may tell you he or she is nervous at the beginning of a new school year. Your child may not be invited to a party. These things happen...*in moderation*.



*Helping Your Child
Find Happiness*

When does normal become abnormal? Think of words like never, frequently, constantly, or regularly. Your child *never* receives an invitation, *frequently* speaks of teasing, *constantly* avoids going to school, or *regularly* speaks of bullying or being bullied. Michael Thompson, Ph.D. explains that when a child is on either end of the social spectrum, he or she may need guidance in finding "their social place" (PBS; 2008).

Cohan describes friendship as "social experimentation" and suggests we talk with children empathetically, and help children find their inner resilience.

Promoting Healthy Social Skills

A decade ago, kids freely roamed neighborhoods visiting their friends. Football games, races, jumping in leaves, riding bicycles, and coming in at dark were part of childhood. Kids used their imaginations, had conversations, and took part in physical activity. Our generation today is consumed by the media, spending large amounts of time watching television, playing video games, and exploring the internet. Diane Leven, Ph.D., a Professor of Education, explains that adults can "reduce the impact media has on time spent with friends by helping kids develop a repertoire of activities that are not connected to computer use, electronic games, and watching T.V." (Levy, PBS; 2008). Technology is a large part of learning in today's world but we must encourage kids to discuss what they're watching and doing; we can also set limits as to how much time is spent on isolated activities. Leven emphasizes the importance of children interacting with others when they are young because "research has found that patterns of behavior at age eight are related to behavior in adulthood" (Levy, Winnetka Alliance; 2008).

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- ♦ *Developing healthy social skills.*
- ♦ *Bulldozing bullying myths.*
- ♦ *Be the difference in someone's day!*
- ♦ *Teasing*
- ♦ *Recognizing school work.*

When My Child is Teased

Children tease one another; they call one another names. Usually, name-calling and teasing is done with a fun, well-intentioned spirit. At other times, a child may purposefully hurt another individual by the words and names he or she is using. If your child approaches you with teasing or name-calling concerns, Dr. Beth M. Levy, a school psychologist, has suggested the following



“Adults often underestimate the stress and anguish teasing and name-calling cause children.”

(Levy, NASP; 2008)

strategies to help children manage these situations:

- 1) Repeat and clarify what is said so he or she knows you sincerely understand.
- 2) Praise your child when he or she attempts to problem-solve on his or her own.
- 3) Practice keeping the emotions in check by role-playing situation examples.

4) Ask your child to look you in the eyes when speaking, demonstrating confidence.

(Levy, NASP; 2008)

Social skills include having an assortment of coping strategies. When we tell children to “ignore” a problem, we are asking them to mask their true emotions. This may be confusing, as children may interpret their feelings as insignificant or misunderstood. When we discuss our child’s concerns, we are saying, “Your thoughts and feelings matter. I hear you. I’m listening.”

Truth or Myth?

Kids will be kids. Bullying is part of growing up.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, describes bullying as “aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power or strength, often repeated over time” (HRSA; 2008). The intense and chronic antagonism that signifies bullying is not a normal “part of growing up.” It is an abnormal and destructive behavior.

Bulldoze Bullying Myths

When a student is bullied, his or her physical and mental well being is targeted. Mentally, there may be increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Physically, a child may complain about his or her head or stomach; sleeplessness may occur. Problems eventually escalate, affect-

ing grades and attendance.

Those who intimidate tend to have their own of burden as well. A bully may bring worries from home into the school. He or she may feel popularity is gained by putting down others. Intimidators often fear losing control or being caught.

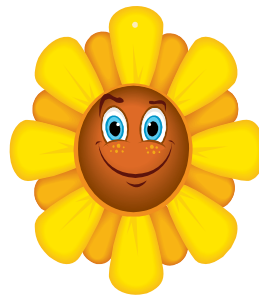
Bullying is not just “child’s play” and should be taken seriously.

Pride Within

Begin the school year with a focus on positive acts of kindness. Record kind acts towards others in a notebook or journal. A child may need guidance at first. You may ask, “What did you do today to make someone else feel better?” Your child may have held a door open for someone, helped another student pick up his or her dropped supplies, or took up for someone being picked on or left out. Smiling at a new stu-

dent may have made his or her first day at school much easier. Asking someone to play with you at recess may have made him or her feel important. The list of kind deeds is endless.

We often fall into the trap of concentrating on how others make “us”



*Make Someone’s Day!
Be the Difference!*

feel. We give our power away when we allow others to impact our day.

When we focus on how we’re treating others, it’s not only contagious but rewarding. We begin to feel good about ourselves and realize our day is brighter as well.

Growing Little People

Throughout my career, I've often been asked, "What do you do?" and I like to respond "I grow little people." As parents, we feel the same way because we're in charge of molding our child to become a self-assured, independent adult.



Paving the way to a future filled with success!

We love our children and when our child comes to us, we want to "fix" things. We want to make things better.

We must be careful, however, not to remain the "problem solver."

Lawrence Cohen, Ph.D. suggests we encourage children to solve their own problems by first asking what they've done, what they've tried, what else can be tried, or how what they did worked? (PBS; 2008). Asking empowering questions facilitates social independence. Solutions are not always

easy for a child to find. You may ask, "What would you like me to do to help?" Dr. Cohen strongly encourages parents to "help your child figure out his own solution" (PBS; 2008). If your child has difficulty finding the words to explain her emotions, say something like, "You seem to feel lonely" or "Your words are telling me you may feel disappointed."

When we guide children to discover their own solutions, we create self-sufficient adults.

Stepping Up to Help Out

Many parents would like to do more at their child's school but it's often hard to know how to contribute effectively.

If you want to make a difference in your child's school this year, begin by asking the office how you can volunteer. You may be asked to do several things but choose what you're most comfortable with.

Whether it's helping plan an event,

working for the teacher, shelving books in the library, or reading to a class, there's so much you can do.

Elementary students, especially, love having you around their school and classmates.

Your involvement shows a child you care about their education and you want to know more about their school and friends. Above all others, your child desires your interest and

**"Make a Difference
in Your Child's
School This Year!"**

approval.

One warning: You will be surrounded at lunch with your new-found friends!

Choose the Spot!

Children want you to be proud of them. More important, we want children to be proud of what they achieve.

With your child's *assistance*, ask where a good place would be to show off graded school work, spelling tests, pictures, and writing projects.

The refrigerator may be set aside for one particular kind of work as it can become too crowded. A cork board may hold everything else.

When family or friends come over, demonstrate pride in their hard work and accomplishments. Your child may claim



Make Your Home the Place of Recognition!

embarrassment, but all children love to know you take pride in their achievements. This is just one other way to say, "Hey! I like you. I like who you are!"

At the end of the year, what a great way to "view" growth!

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Promoting social & emotional fitness for kids.

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Resources:

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PBS Parents. "The Secrets of Your Child's Social Life: The Tough Stuff." http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/social_tough.html (accessed August, 2008).

PBS Parents. "The Secrets of Your Child's Social Life: What Parents Can Do." http://www.pbs.org/parents/goingtoschool/social_parents.html (accessed August, 2008).

Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood. "Buy, Buy Childhood." <http://www.winnetkaalliance.org/pdf/SpringSummer08.pdf> (accessed August, 2008).

August Q&A

My child has told me there's a girl bullying others on the school bus. From what I can understand, the bully is very careful not to get caught. What should I do?

We often ask students to tell the bus driver when something happens on their bus. However, time is so limited because bus drivers are on a strict schedule. It's difficult for a student to talk privately with the bus driver while loading or unloading the bus.

Ask your child to speak to his or her teacher. The teacher may direct your child to an administrator

or may be able to contact the bus driver directly. This is a good opportunity for your child to take control without your assistance, which is empowering.



If the situation continues, you may need to email, write or visit with the school principal. Some school districts have a bus disciplinarian; bus discipline procedures are in place and parents can bring their concerns directly to the bus facility.

Check with your child's office staff

or your local district office and ask who it is best to speak with.

Remember: You should never approach a child yourself and/or his or her parents.

It is noteworthy that your child came to you with his or her concern. This demonstrates compassion for other human beings and a trusting relationship between the two of you. Make sure to praise your child for his or her bravery to "do the right thing."

If you have a question concerning bullies or bullying, please email daphne@trevorromain.com. Your name and email address will remain confidential.