



Parents, Peers, Popularity, Power: Navigating Children's Friendships

- **Developing successful relationships.**
- **Guiding children toward being good friends.**
- **Managing relationships at home and school.**
- **Learning your role as a parent in peer issues.**

Presented by Sheila Dubin, M.S.

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Workshop Outline

- **Nature of friendships**
- **What friendships provide children at different developmental stages**
- **Differences between girls and boys**
- **Nature of cliques**
- **Tools of dominance**
- **Teasing**
- **What is a parent's role in their child's social sphere**
- **Tools for helping children**

Childhood Friendships

- Children of different ages possess different capacities for friendships.
- Friendships are important for children in the development of their sense of self.
- Between the ages of three and seven, friendships are about proximity, learning to share, learning to resolve conflict and developing affection for others outside of their family.
- Between the ages of seven and twelve, friendships, besides being about shared interests, provide an arena for coaching and mutual discussion of appropriate gender norms and behavior.
- The essence of adolescent friendships is personal disclosure and discovery. This is the beginning of the distinction between a friend and an acquaintance
- For girls, friendships are about the interaction; for boys it's about the action.
- Girls are more prone to develop a small cluster of tight, intimate girlfriends, while boys are more prone to hang out in larger, more loosely structured packs.
- Girls' interactions satisfy social and communal needs
- Boys' interactions serve to promote and solidify individualistic needs. They tend to come together in competitive hierarchies.
- Girls' favor excluding, snubbing, and gossiping as their tools of power.
- Boys' typically use physical and verbal aggression in their bid for power.

- Well-liked children are kids whom other kids find pleasant to be around because:
 - They know how to easily fit into the ongoing activity
 - They are assertive without being overbearing
 - In a group, they know how to give and take
 - They are willing to share their things and their ideas
 - They show empathy
 - They have a sense of humor
 - They display a sense of self- confidence
- Children need a variety of arenas where friendships can develop. This is especially true when children are going through difficult times with schoolmates.
- At some point, all children will be the giver and receiver of social cruelties.
- At a time when individual self confidence is shaky(middle school), cliques provide a sense of security, affirmation, support and belonging.
- There is a difference between being popular and having friends.
Popularity is about status in the group, friendships are about making connections that will enhance growth and self worth.

Children and Teasing

Teasing is a universal problem in elementary school and middle school years.

While it can be hurtful, parents need to recognize that this is all a part of learning about social groupings, about who and what is a friend, and about deciding how you are going to handle mean people.

When teasing happens: Offer sympathy. Let your son or daughter know that you understand how much name calling or teasing can hurt, and that she must be angry and confused about what this other child has done.

Your child needs some time to get it out before you jump in with problem solving.

So:

1. Ask "What happened". If not getting enough of a picture, ask your child to paint a picture for you with their words. Listen, listen and listen. Then you can ask, How did you get out of that situation? How did you know to do that? Was it effective?
2. Ask if talking about it is enough, or if they want to try to figure out something else to do if it happens again?
3. Ask how they want you to help them in that process.
4. Talk with them about possible ways to handle the teasing.

CHILD'S JOB

- Tell an adult
- Have conference with teacher
- Use humor as a retort-
- Develop a one-line comeback- That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard.

PARENT'S JOB

- Have some patience- (unless teasing or words used are extreme)
- Check in with child -So how's that playground stuff going? Don't make it a focus of your conversations with child.
- Parents and school work together to create climate in which being cruel is not acceptable and not cool
- Meet with teacher and let her know what is going on, to make her aware.
- Not being defensive when you are told your child is teasing or bullying.
Working with the teachers as a team, with your child's and the other child's welfare in mind.
- Allowing child to suffer the consequences of his actions. Consequences need to be about teaching and rectifying the situation
- Be aware of labeling kids.
- Parents need to look at their own behaviors and assess if they are contributing to the climate of social outcasting. (certain families not invited to functions)

SCHOOL'S JOB

- Forming rules of social conduct... everyone plays... no name calling... no put-downs.
- When incidences do come up. talking about them in relation to the rules
- Teachers promote the less popular kids/
- Structured games at lunch and recess
- Give kids alternatives to being on playground if becomes too hard to handle
- Do hypothetical social problem solving in the classroom
- Work with parents in a nonaccusatory way. Both victims and perpetrator's needs have to be taken into account.

Recommended Books

Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children

By: Michael Thompson, Ph.D., Catherine O'Neill Grace, & Lawrence J. Cohen, Ph.D.

Mom, They're Teasing Me: Helping Your Child Solve Social Problems

By: Michael Thompson, Ph.D., Catherine O'Neill Grace, & Lawrence J. Cohen, Ph.D.

The Friendship Factor

By: Kenneth H. Rubin, Ph.D

Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls

By: Rachel Simmons

Queen Bees and Wannabes

By: Rosalind Wiseman

You Can't Say You Can't Play

By: Vivian Gussin Paley

Cliques

By: Charlene C. Giannetti and Margaret Sagarese