

**BEST FRIENDS, WORST ENEMIES,
UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL LIVES OF CHILDREN**

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- Groups are the highways of childhood. If the other children are moving at a safe speed, yours will too. If the other children are moving too fast, it will be difficult and socially dangerous for your child to move slowly.
- Friendship, by contrast, resembles the side streets and back roads. Friends can move at their own pace.
- Harry Stack Sullivan: Friends are as important to young adolescents as parents are to infants.
- One of the best things about a good friendship is the ability it offers to air conflicts and resolve differences. A nonfriend can just walk away from conflict or escalate it out of control.
- Friends help children grow wings
- Friendship exposes children to different social norms.
- Friendship can compensate for lacks in a child's life.
- Close friends hold each other in mind and trust that their friend holds them in mind.
- Friendship keeps children connected.
- Good kids are often responding to exactly the same set of underlying principles as bad kids... the laws of group life.
- The motivation to conform comes from within each child; it doesn't have to be imposed from outside. It is the magnetism of the group that exerts pressure; it is the desire to belong.
- Middle schoolers are insecure because of all the changes going on in their bodies and in their lives, and they are totally dedicated to the group. For both reasons they are strongly pulled toward conformity.
- Stuart Hauser found that a small fraction of adolescents – only 4 percent – seem to be able to make moral decisions by looking inward to their own conscience and values, instead of outward to the behavior of the group...96 percent are routinely susceptible to group pressure.
- Status hierarchy exists in every classroom in every school in the land. It is an inevitable phenomenon of groups.
- Laws of Group Life
 - Be like your peers
 - You must belong to a group
 - Be in – or be out
 - Find a place in the social hierarchy
 - You must play a role
- A person's nature might help determine what role he or she is selected to play, but the fact of different roles is one of those universal aspects of group life.
- We behave in accordance with the role that is assigned to us.
- Children designate who is an "acceptable victim" even if they do not participate in the teasing or bullying.
- Children behave toward one another in accordance with the models they have experienced. We do unto others as others have done to us.

- For developmental reasons, eighth grade can be a tough year for many kids and when a school has a cruel social dynamic at work in a class, it can drive even steady, veteran teachers to drink.
- Teachers can cut through the cruelty not by attacking the group but by proposing a democratic project. Tap into the power of a common mission (superordinate goal) to make a group cohere and to help it chart a new course and a new identity.
- It is not enough just to put groups together in one place. Indeed, when two groups are in an us-and-them frame of mind, being close together increases the friction. They must have a common goal, a common mission.
- Because of a human need for group cohesion, kids are loyal to a destructive way of conducting themselves.
- Boys who urge other boys to do something destructive are trying to impress their peers with the ability to influence a younger male, to control his behavior in public.
- Adolescents act differently when they are with their peers. When together they can be much less mature and empathic than they otherwise might be on their own.
- The same force of group life that allows a star player to give all the credit to his supportive teammates can diffuse the responsibility in a group so that it takes inappropriate action.
- Groups tend to make riskier decision than any of the individuals in them would have made if acting alone (risky shift).
- Groupthink: people suspend their better judgment and go along with the group's ideas, values and ethics.
- All groups have rules. When the rule is positive, we are happy, All groups mete out punishment for breaking those rules.
- Children suffer at the hands of groups from four painful practices: teasing and name-calling; exclusion, rejection and scapegoating; bullying; and hazing.
- Name-calling, an experiment in social power, is a way of testing one's verbal muscles.
- Verbal teasing can also be a way to find one's level in a group or of expressing affection or of basic communication, usually between boys. It may be an individual effort by a child who wishes to impress the group.
- Our children learn from TV that the way to be funny is to be insulting, that the way to dominate others is by verbal attack.
- Most teasing happens to enforce the rules of the group.
- All children are teased and called names. That's the bad news. The good news is that most children are resilient and find a way to deal with the insults that rain down in school.
- Five types of kids: popular children (15%), accepted (45%) rejected (12%), neglected (4%) and controversial (4%), and ambiguous (20%)
- Neglected children tend to be compliant, adult-oriented and academically high-achieving.
- Aggression and disruptive behavior are major causes of peer rejection throughout childhood and elementary school. Once they are rejected, they are the least responsive to adult interventions.
- Studies have shown that classmates are five times more likely to attribute negative motivations to the actions of an unpopular child in comparison to exactly the same behavior by a popular child.
- Isolation starts in elementary school and continues through middle and high schools. Rejected-submissive and rejected-aggressive children don't just grow out of it. It takes intelligent, purposeful intervention on the part of educators and parents to reroute these children's lives.
- The group, all rejecting a child together, diffuses the responsibility so much that no one feels the moral pangs that would lead him/her to stand up to the group and stop the scapegoating. Successful

school-wide bully prevention programs focus on bystanders, helping them take moral responsibility for intervening in attacks and exclusion and helping them make a special effort to include everyone.

- The group licenses bullies. The group finds a child with antisocial tendencies and provokes that child into acting like a bully. The bully is not always the same child. Group determines acceptable targets.
- The list of people it is okay to tease or humiliate depends on the context. (lawyers, blondes, women, men, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bill Clinton, etc.)
- In eighth grade, any sign of empathy or compassion in a classmate is considered "gay" by boys.
- Kids who are far down the social ladder bully kids who are even lower.
- Insecure bully is a child who lacks social skills and makes a clumsy bid for popularity by picking on others.
- Bullies are able to intuit how other people feel and then exploit their insights. They know what buttons to push in order to dominate others.
- Bully with low self-esteem is a myth. Children who bully feel good about themselves and their level of aggression. And why shouldn't they? The group has silently approved of their aggression.
- Hazing involves intentional humiliation of the individual; initiation never does.
- Teenagers perceive any change in hazing tradition as a usurpation of their power.
- There is recent, preliminary neurological research that suggests that adolescents cannot read facial expressions – especially fear – as accurately as adults can.
- All children experiment with power and find it exciting. They experiment with everything in life – competition, attractiveness, sexuality, athleticism, and academic prowess.
- Group's way of diffusing responsibility – everyone was doing it – lessens the burden of guilt or moral culpability.
- Research tells us that early adolescents have higher highs and lower lows than adults; they feel things more keenly than we do.
- Children want three things: connection, recognition and power.
- For all primates, making peace is a natural as making war.
- When adults ask me to recommend a curriculum that will help children understand friendship, I never know what to say. Deep down I have to admit that a curriculum can't really teach children all they need to master. The best practice for friendship is having a friend and working it out. Counselor-led groups are there for children who cannot get into the game or who are so confused by the complex currents that they start to panic.
- Triangulation: Instead of speaking directly to the person who has offended us, we discuss our friendship problems with the new person.
- Much of the cruelty that is attributed to cliques has to do with the pressure that a group implicitly or explicitly puts on kids to abandon their friends.
- As children move from the world of their families to the world of peers, they stop for a while in a middle world of cliques and narrowly defined social groups. Children suffer when they are excluded and when they constantly fear rejection.
- Cliques are so important and universal that almost every child finds himself in a clique, even if it is the off-clique.
- Gender becomes the child's first "home team" to root for, and the other gender is an appropriate target for put-downs.
- As children move away from the worst battles of the popularity wars, they leave behind what I call the primitive Darwinism of middle school, where size matters. Muscle size, breast size, and wallet size give way to characteristics such as leadership ability, character, and charisma.

- In high school popular kids aren't necessarily the leaders. This divergence of popularity and leadership may mean that the most popular girls may paradoxically no longer be the most liked, or even broadly liked at all.
- The way a child behaves at school, under the sway of socially powerful kids, may not reflect his or her deepest feelings. The pain caused by the emotional split between accepted behavior in the group and private behavior at home or in the neighborhood can be memorable.
- Often schools unwittingly reinforce the pattern of the most visible activities being the most strongly gendered. (e.g. male athletics)
- Young love is a way to reexperience the pleasures of early attachment and childhood innocence that may have been lying dormant of a while.
- For many boys, having a girlfriend means finally being able to talk to someone about their emotions.
- What schools can do
 1. Create a moral school
 - In addition to providing basic safety, schools have to think about producing good citizens with leadership skills, empathy, and responsibility, not just people who can get a certain score on a standardized test.
 - A moral school is a school where people spend a lot of time discussing what a moral school is.
 - Moral schools live their values every day, at every level of the school. The ideals of the school, the rules, the disciplinary measures, the policies, all were rooted in each school's core values.
 2. Include everyone in conversation
 - Exhortation is the least effective method for changing prejudiced attitudes; in fact, it often produces a result opposite from the desired effect. The same is true for trying to change all types of cruelty and mean behavior. Simply telling kids to be nice to other kids isn't going to accomplish much. Ask questions and get a conversation going.
 - Students feel that adults care very much about what goes on but know very little about what goes on.
 - Race, class, and academic achievement are difficult topics to discuss, but they are the source of teasing, exclusion and social cruelty.
 3. Be proactive
 - Pair teased student with popular tenth or eleventh grade advisor.
 - Unite student athletes with marginalized kids.
 4. Instill ethical standards
 - Exclusion and teasing are as inevitable as the tide. Make a rule: You Can't Say You Can't Play
 - Rules work only when they become the moral ideal, a standard to strive for as a class and as a community: We will use extra effort to include all students in activities at our school.
 5. Encourage good citizenship
 - Choose ideal mentors to embody the virtues you would like children to leave school with (e.g. Martin Luther King, Thoreau, etc.)
 6. Take a systems approach
 7. Harness the power of teachers
 - Take charge of the social groupings in the classroom; it cuts down on the social anxiety of the children. In such a classroom, an unpopular child will be less unpopular by the end of the year.
 8. Work in your community for smaller, more caring schools
 - Every minute you spend effectively helping children feel safer, more accepted, more included, and better able to build good friendships means that children will be able to pay better attention in class, enjoy being at school, and focus on their school work instead of on the popularity wars. So it actually adds time, or at least productive time, to the academic school day.