

KIDS AND CLIQUES

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Have you ever been to an event where you didn't know anyone? You walk in the room and nobody notices you. You look around the groups of people talking and laughing together, hoping to find someone you know or someone who will make eye contact with you and smile. Nothing! Around that time you begin feeling like wallpaper...invisible. You want to get out of there as quick as you can. I am a sociable person and yet this situation has happened to me many times and it has made me feel extremely uncomfortable. For that reason, I have become particularly diligent in making newcomers at church, parties or other events feel at ease. There is nothing like a welcoming smile and an extended hand to make you feel accepted. If I feel like this as an adult, how do children feel when they try to make friends in a new situation and nobody seems to care?

There is a difference between a social group and a clique. People who naturally gather together as a group because they have similar interests, needs, values or specific purpose, are just that – a group. However, this group can so easily become a clique if others feel they cannot get any attention from or enter the 'circle' of that group. More formalized cliques are groups that are all of the above, but they have a more exclusive membership, or may have a dominant style leader who imposes some rules. Members can be in the group one minute then lose favor and be out the next. The need to belong is so strong that members will often do anything to stay within the security and acceptance of the group. This may include peer pressure to do things that, as individuals, they would not normally do e.g. dangerous pranks or extreme dieting. I saw a movie recently where a group of schoolgirls all promised one another they would get pregnant and they did.

How can we, as parents, help our kids form healthy relationships with their peers? Their greatest need from pre-teen years on is to feel valued. Therefore, we need to tell them and show them often that we love them. When they have a family identity and a positive self-esteem they are not as likely to feel the need to gravitate towards exclusive cliques.

Encourage your children's involvement in a number of different groups where they can gather a wide friendship base. Talk to them about rejection, how it feels and how to overcome it. You might relate your own teenage experiences and how you dealt with cliques. Boost your children's self-confidence by exposing them to activities where they can experience success. Encourage them to read inspirational stories where people have overcome similar situations and risen to greatness. Get them involved in physical activity to keep them busy as well as healthy. Encourage them to hang around kids who are doing positive things with their lives.

Cliques are an inevitable part of society. Kids won't know how to navigate through their teen years unless we prepare them. By helping them understand the difference between healthy friendships and cliques, you are preparing them for the real world. You may help them, too, to be aware of others on the periphery of less formal cliques and invite them into the 'circle' or leave the 'circle' and engage them in conversation. It all falls under the heading of being aware of others' needs and that is a fine quality for you to have and one to teach your children.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.