



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

Michael G. Thompson , Lawrence J. Cohen , Catherine O'Neill Grace

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

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

Michael G. Thompson , Lawrence J. Cohen , Catherine O'Neill Grace

Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children Michael G. Thompson , Lawrence J. Cohen , Catherine O'Neill Grace

Friends broaden our children's horizons, share their joys and secrets, and accompany them on their journeys into ever wider worlds. But friends can also gossip and betray, tease and exclude. Children can cause untold suffering, not only for their peers but for parents as well. In this wise and insightful book, psychologist Michael Thompson, Ph.D., and children's book author Catherine O'Neill Grace, illuminate the crucial and often hidden role that friendship plays in the lives of children from birth through adolescence.

Drawing on fascinating new research as well as their own extensive experience in schools, Thompson and Grace demonstrate that children's friendships begin early-in infancy-and run exceptionally deep in intensity and loyalty. As children grow, their friendships become more complex and layered but also more emotionally fraught, marked by both extraordinary intimacy and bewildering cruelty. As parents, we watch, and often live through vicariously, the tumult that our children experience as they encounter the "cool" crowd, shifting alliances, bullies, and disloyal best friends.

Best Friends, Worst Enemies brings to life the drama of childhood relationships, guiding parents to a deeper understanding of the motives and meanings of social behavior. Here you will find penetrating discussions of the difference between friendship and popularity, how boys and girls deal in unique ways with intimacy and commitment, whether all kids need a best friend, why cliques form and what you can do about them.

Filled with anecdotes that ring amazingly true to life, *Best Friends, Worst Enemies* probes the magic and the heartbreak that all children experience with their friends. Parents, teachers, counselors-indeed anyone who cares about children-will find this an eye-opening and wonderfully affirming book.

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

Date : Published July 30th 2002 by Ballantine Books (first published January 1st 2001)

ISBN : 9780345442895

Author : Michael G. Thompson , Lawrence J. Cohen , Catherine O'Neill Grace

Format : Paperback 299 pages

Genre : Parenting, Nonfiction, Education, Psychology, Childrens, Teaching

 [Download Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social L ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children Michael G. Thompson , Lawrence J. Cohen , Catherine O'Neill Grace

From Reader Review Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children for online ebook

Ann says

5 Basic Types of Kids:

1. Popular: 15%; boys- athleticism/verbally quick; girls- attractiveness/sociability, all-wealth/class status; high levels of sociability, cognitive ability and low levels of aggression, withdrawal; social skills draw others to them because they have more fun with them.
 2. Accepted: 45%; high cognitive and sociability, low aggression, disruptiveness, and withdrawal.
 3. Rejected: 10-12%; most socially at risk; A) rejected-submissive: knows he is "out" of group and accepts it with great pain; respond well to therapy and classroom interventions. B) rejected-aggressive: display high aggression and disruptive behavior; suffers peer rejection; can make peers fearful of their unpredictable behavior; early interventions are strongly recommended.
 4. Neglected: 4%; neither liked or disliked, neither disruptive or overly distressed; socially off the radar; often compliant, adult-oriented, academically high achieving; may benefit socially by being drawn out or coached in sociability.
 5. Controversial: 4%; liked AND disliked; often class clowns, queen bees, bullies, or rebels.
- Extra: Ambiguous: 20%; may have characteristics from multiple categories but don't make cutoff for any specific one.

Bullying:

*Bullies tend to be physically larger, verbally facile, at ease with high levels of aggression, tend to not experience a high level of guilt, and don't have high educational aspirations. Victims are Opposites: physically smaller, share adult values, close to parents or teachers.

*2 kinds: 1) insecure bully: lacks social skills and picks on others to attempt to gain popularity. Likely to lose popularity at clumsy attempts of domination. 2) Socially skilled: able to intuit how others feel and exploit it.

Hazing:

Kids can be cruel to each other and want to be able to do so because it allows them to experiment with power.

Gender wars:

Remember that the way a child behaves at school, under sway of socially powerful kids, may not reflect his or her deepest feelings. A reassuring fact is that children's social pain tends to get better over time.

Conflict, Betrayal, and Managing It:

1. Connection- profound need to be special in another's eyes
 2. Recognition - want to compete and feel success to gain recognition
 3. Power- often shaped by gender: boys- physical dominance, girls- contemptuous or patronizing
- *Every person wants these 3 things. and the very fact of wanting them puts us into conflict with ourselves and our friends.
- *The best practice for friendship is having a friend and working out conflicts.

Sex:

Adolescents learn from bitter experience that sex cannot be played as a casual game. They find the heart and body are connected.

Teens don't know that good sex takes a depth of intimacy and maturity. We need to tell them the most gratifying sex is found in committed, loving partnerships characterized by equality and open communication.

Final Thoughts:

1. Friendships are more important than popularity.
 2. Support children's friendships.
 3. Make kids welcome in your home.
 4. Be a good role model and teacher on friendships.
 5. Provide a range of friendship and group opportunities.
 6. Make friends with kids' parents and enemies.
- Empathize with social pain, but keep it in perspective.
-

Ilib4kids says

305.231 THO

High recommended.

Coauthor of "Raising Cain"

also author of Speaking of Boys: Answers to the Most-Asked Questions About Raising Sons

my summary: this is complete psychological evaluation and explanation of the social life of children. It is not only to understand children, but also provide the guidance to adult social life. I like chap 5 In the Jungle: the power of the group in children's Lives. a very through psychological explanation of group life.

Chap 6: Social Cruelty in the lives of children is deep psychological analysis of social cruelty on bully, hazing.

1. Summary of Social life: Clique, Social status in social hierarchy. Difference between social popularity and true friendship
2. devoted friendship, battle over popularity, parental anguish over social cruelty.
3. Parents Listen sympathetically, stay confident, provide opportunities, our own early attachment, and love for our children. How to nourish multiplicity vs. enforced uniformity of peer groups.
4. P22 It seems contradictory, but if you want you child to be adventurous, you need to cuddle her more. If you want to child to always be close, you need to applaud her exploration. --my words: it confirms with my child's rearing experience. I always find if you want the child do something, you just need to cultivate opposite stuff.
5. Chap 3 p44 Most children younger than 3 are not able to share consistently enough to make regularly reciprocal play possible. By 5, most children have taken that development step. terms: play plateau. p40 Social skills and friendship are not the same thing.
6. Good friendship: Loyalty, intimacy, reciprocity, commitment

7. Chap 5 The laws of Group life

Law 1: "Be like your peers". The peer pressure is not overt and coercive. It comes within, the desire to fit it.

p82 Stuart Hauser found that a small fraction of adolescents only 4% -seem to be able to make moral decisions by looking inward to their own conscience and values, instead of outward to the behavior of group.

Law 2: You must belong to a group. All of us hunger for group identity and closeness.

Law 3: Be in or be out.

Law 4: Find a place in the social hierarchy.

Law 5: You must play a role. p90 Every class has a leader, a clown, a suck-up, a goody-goody, a jock, and a flirt. p92 It is difficult for adults to grasp the fact the morality is not just an individual trait. Conscience is part of an individual's makeup, but morality is a phenomenon of the group of which we are a part and the roles we are asked to play. Remember, we all want to be part of the "B-Line Club", even if what the people

in the club say or do is flat-out wrong and we know it.

p97 The group will require children to deny parts of themselves; the group will require a child to say and do things that make a parent feel as if he or she no longer recognizes his or her child. If you work with children, you must become accustomed to the "us" and the "them", kids versus adults.

8. Chap 6: Social Cruelty in the lives of children

I. Diffusion of responsibility: no individual sense of responsibility, that is why Cruelty happens in group.

II: Risky shift Group tend to make riskier and groupthink which people suspend their better judgment and go along with group's ideas, values, and ethics. decisions. A powerful personality with a good judgment can influence a group and vice versa.

III Group all have rules. When the rules is "Be nice and don't get trouble", parents are happy. Otherwise, not. Children suffer at the hands of groups from 4 painful practices.

I. teasing and name-calling

II. exclusion, rejection, and scapegoating

III. Bullying

p123 Almost any child is attracted to the idea of exercising a bully's kind of power if he or she could.

p125 Bully behavior in general becomes more intense starting in 6th grade and continues to be sou up through around 10th grade.

IV. Hazing

p136 why hazing: It is because all children experiment with power and find it exciting...The experience of hurting the feeling of another child and feeling the thrill of one's own power is absolutely universal. .. And the group's way of diffusing responsibility - "everything was doing it" - lessens the burden of guilt or moral culpability.

my comments: why we behavior bad: one reason from the books I read is we project our worst fears on the other people, instead of looking inwards, face our fears to solve it, we vent them outside, ferociously attack them to deny them. It make us look and feel good at expense of their people pains. Homophobia and name-calling, like "sissy", "bitch" all of kinds things we fear.

p106 Rejection by the group is an example of in versus out, exacerbated by the diffusion of moral responsibility that happens when a group has agreed to single someone as a scapegoat. Children who bully feel little or no moral responsibility or empathy. Meanwhile, innocent bystanders suffer from a lack of clear moral direction and are afraid of bully or the group turning against them.

p110 Rejection and exclusion

5 types of kids

popular children: 15%

Accepted children: 45%

Rejected children: 10-12%: rejected-submissive and rejected-aggressive. they are children at highest risk socially.

Neglected children: 4%, neglected children tend to be compliant, adult-oriented, and academically high-achieving

Controversial children: 4% like and dislike at the same time. Class clown (some find entertaining, some find obnoxious), or queens of cliques; bullies; rebels.

Ambiguous children

Rejected issue:

p114 Researchers have found that aggression and disruptive behavior are major causes of peer rejection throughout childhood and elementary school. Children who cannot control their level of anger, or who regularly interrupt the flow of the class become candidates for rejection.

p118-119 10-12% rejected category is not a a rare phenomenon. It is a daily sight in 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 issue of group responsibility is crucial in understanding why a child can be brutally rejected year after year. The group, all rejecting together, diffuses the responsibility so much that no one feels the moral pangs that would lead him

or her to stand up to the group and scapegoating.

Bully issue:

Stereotype bully is rare, group bully is normal.

Chap 7

Every child want 3 things in life: connection, recognition and power.

p165 This physical and social jousting begins in nursery school, intensifies in the elementary school, becomes rigidly codified by middle school, and begins to loose its grip in grip school or college.

p173: The tools of dominance:

Girls: excluding, snubbing, backbiting, gossiping

Boys: physical and verbal aggression.

p194 It can be hard to get started in a healthy romantic relationship if these early needs were not met.

p199 reserving sex for a committed, trusting relationship can be true for boys as it is for girls. ...We need to let kids know that the most gratifying and meaningful sex is to be found in committed, loving partnerships characterized by equality and open communication.

Chap 11 What Schools Can do

p216 Holding strong value and using those values to inform your decisions is what makes a moral school

p223 They might be intimidated or afraid of becoming targets themselves, or they might get a vicarious thrill out of the the show. No matter what, they can be encouraged to take an active role in maintaining respect and civility in a school.

Programs:

CCTC (Council to Combat Teen Cruelty); Open Circle; PeaceBuilders

Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility by Thomas Lickona

The Kindness of Children by Vivian Gussin Paley

Practicing Virtues: Moral Traditions at Quaker and Military Boarding Schools by Kim Hays

Chap 12 What Parents Can Do

p240 Recognize the crucial difference between Friendship and popularity, friendship is more important.

p242 According to researchers, of the 8 essential elements a child receives from other children as he grows up, 7 can be found in friendship. There are affection, intimacy, a reliable alliance, instrumental aid, nurturance, companionship, and an enhancement of self-worth. Only one thing can not provide is the sense of inclusion of group.

1. Don't worry so much. Remember that you gave your child a sociable start in life
2. Recognize the crucial difference between friendship and popularity. Friendship is more important.
3. Support children's friendship
4. Make our child's friends welcome in your home.
5. Be a good friendship role and teacher.
6. Provide a wide range of friendship and group opportunities.
7. Make friends with the parents of your child's friend (and enemies)
8. Emphasize with your child's social pain, but keep it perspective.

p252 There are 4 reasons why parents feel the pain more. First, children get over it sooner. Second, children are highly motivated to work things out and reconcile with their friends and peer group. Third, they deliberately hand over their pain to us so we can carry it for a while. Fourth, and most significantly, we suffer from excesses of empathy because we we carry around all our own old memories of ow we were treated as children and how we felt about it.

9. Know where your child stands in the group. If your child is in trouble socially, step in to help. If your child is popular or accepted, help him or her be a positive moral leader. Don't act like middle schooler yourself. p257 60% of children are going to be in the popular or accepted categories at school; 20% are classified as ambiguous but not considered at risk. Then 4% of neglected children who have made that one vital friend by the end of elementary school are considered to be out of harm's way. That leaves approximately 15% who are at risk. They may be lonely at best and mercilessly teased at worst. If your child is one of these kids, you have to face this painful fact and wade in to help before your child drowns.

There are 5 things you can do if you suspect your child is social trouble. First, you need to talk with your child's teacher. Second, you need to assess whether your child lacks some social skills. Third, you must ask yourself whether your child's troubles are sufficiently serious to warrant some psychotherapy. Fourth, you should consider family therapy. Fifth, if your child is isolated, you should keep up your connections with other parents.

10. Take the long view.

researchers: Willard Hartup, Hohn Coie, Kenneth Dodge

psychological and psychoanalytic theorists: Sigmund Freud, Alfred Alder, Abraham Maslow.

Books referred:

The Two Sexes: Growing Up Apart, Coming Together by Eleanor Emmons Maccoby

Peacemaking Among Primates by Frans de Waal

Desegregated Schools: Appraisals of an American Experiment Ray C. Rist

Children's Friendships In Culturally Diverse Classrooms by James G. Deegan

Playful Parenting by Lawrence J. Cohen

Jill says

I can not tell a lie - I only read one chapter of this book. But it was a 3-star chapter!

If you spent time with me on an everyday basis, you would hear me say one thing over and over, and that is that my students have social issues. Literally every day, at least 3-4 times a day, I hear the following sentence (said in a whiny voice), "Susie doesn't want to be my friend." Or, "Bobby said I can't play with him." I am literally at my wit's end. So, in an attempt to combat my impending insanity, I checked out this book to try to understand what is going on.

I read about 10 pages before I realized that 90% of this book was meant for parents. So I skipped to page 212, which was the chapter entitled: What Schools Can Do. Perfect! What I learned is that I need to basically talk nonstop about being kind, treating others nicely, not excluding people, and so on. This makes sense to me. I have started to get books out of the bib about being friends and whatever, and apparently I need to keep doing that. When I read a book this week and I told them that I was reading it because some people in our class have a hard time being friends, they all TOTALLY knew what I was talking about! So it's important to get the kids involved and talking.

This book also reminded me of a book I heard about a while ago, You Can't Say You Can't Play. I just put it on hold so I should be getting it soon!

Laurie says

My school's consulting psychologist suggested we both read this book over the summer. I had agreed to assist her with setting up advisory-type lunch time groups in the upcoming school year, and noted that I would find it helpful to have some guidance in working with younger children (having had years of experience being a 7th and 8th grade advisor, but none with working with 3rd graders in an advisory context).

In my 30 plus years as a teacher in independent schools in New York and Connecticut I have heard Michael Thompson talk to teachers and parents on multiple occasions. His easy-going, accessible approach in person carries over to his writing style. I took notes on each chapter, mainly quick reminders of anything I found useful, so that come the fall I wouldn't forget the main points.

Ultimately, the gist of Thompson's book reminded me of a flyer sent by the college my older son attended to parents of freshmen. Both provide similar advice: Your child will call home crying/complaining/venting. You will listen. They will hang up and feel much better, having relieved themselves of their burden. You will carry around that burden and feel you need to solve it.

And the advice of both Thompson and the college? Just listen. Then do nothing. Unless you are explicitly asked to do something by the child. Or, as Thompson delineates, unless you observe that your child has some very serious social issues. And if that is the case, he provides numerous questions to ask yourself or the child's teacher to help you as the parent determine what course of action - if any - is useful to take.

This book was published in 2001, and I am a tad curious to know if Thompson would change any of his commentary now that it is 2016.

Caitlin says

This book does two things - reassures adults and parents that they aren't alone in their concerns about their children's friendships and then gives some advice about how to deal with these issues. This book is solid in its research and I was able to read it quickly because I teach this material. But I would be hesitant to recommend it to friends and family...it's the kind of book you can read when your kids are little. But if you're looking for immediate solutions, right now, this would probably feel too slow and too academic. After reading, "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen..." I was hoping this book would be more like that, which I do highly recommend!

Marc Geraldez says

This book was recommended by my children's school and appreciate them for it. Reading this book was an eye-opening experience that did bring flashbacks of my childhood. At first, I thought it was doom and gloom and that there is nothing for parents to do in regards to the impending, unavoidable experiences that children sometimes go through. But the more I progressed through the book, the anxiety and fear dissipated as potentials "solutions" were provided on how to tackle these experiences with your children. This book is something I would whole-heartedly recommend to other parents.

Alessandra Trindle says

It's rare for me to read non-fiction and even more rare for me to read anything in the category of "self-help". Much like I think economists can't predict for human emotions in market decisions, most psychologists can't account for a person's full motivations. However, this book was recommended to me as the PA President of the kids' school, and it behooved me to take heed.

Basically the author's premise is that kids are far more motivated by their peer groups than their parents, especially as they get older. Wise parents can assist their children in navigating the social whirl, but ultimately, the child will fall into a peer group where s/he "belongs." For parents who endured lunchroom loneliness and locker room bullies, this concept is a bit terrifying, but the basic truth of the book shines through: Popularity is far less important to a child's development than friendship. Having one or two very good friends does more that is positive for a child's development than being the "alpha male" or the "queen bee." Not that popularity in and of itself is bad, but his premise is that the traits for popularity (athletic prowess in boys and femininity in girls) loses traction as soon as they graduate from high school.

What can parents do to help their children?

- 1) Listen
- 2) Observe
- 3) Provide social constructs where the child is comfortable developmentally
- 4) Provide opportunities to be kind and to receive kindness
- 5) Allow the children to figure out their social dilemmas on their own
- 6) Maintain mature attitudes in regard to other parents and their children's behavior toward your child(ren).

The last two are perhaps the most important points. Children take more from the perceived rules of their peer group than from their parents. While parents can buffer or provide an oasis, it is impossible for them to create a utopian ideal for their child(ren). Strong parental attachments and happy homes definitely help a child with managing peer groups, but it is like the Sorting Hat at Hogwarts. Your child is going to go where his or her peers deem s/he belongs.

The final point is perhaps the most difficult. When I was a kid, parents were incredibly unconcerned about bullying and bad behavior in general. "Let kids be kids" was the mantra, and there is a certain wisdom in that. However, in the past twenty years or so, there has been an emphasis on deterring bullying and on creating more equitable school environments. Parents get riled up when they hear that their child has a problem socially. It's common to be defensive and say "Not my kid!" in assessing the root causes, but child psychology is perhaps even more complicated than that of adults. Often a parent, who has a child with playground difficulties, will learn that it's THEIR child, who shot the first arrow. The reasons why the child behaved in such a manner will generally require some attention. There's always a reason. Finding it and understanding it are the hard parts for parents.

Finally, the author talks extensively about his own two children, their friendships, and the friendships of the parents involved. There are several examples where the children have had a falling out or where they are going through a difficult period socially, and the author stresses that it is CRUCIAL that the parents maintain an even keel in their relationship with their friends. Compounding the hurt and drama by behaving like a middle school kid oneself does no one any good. Also, admitting that the parents may be good friends and that the kids may, at best, tolerate each other isn't a terrible approach.

In short, kids are complicated. We adults have to give them good tools to use on their journey, but we have to let them find their own way. Eventually, they all get where they are going.

Kirsti says

3.5 stars. The authors are insightful and compassionate about children and teens. Unfortunately, nearly all the examples are of upper-middle-class straight white people from Massachusetts. I would have found the book more compelling if the authors had made more of an effort to include the rest of the country and different income levels.

Interesting insights:

* Researchers believe that some children are capable of bonding with friends as early as one year old. Children younger than this can't crawl toward the child who interests them. Most of the very young children in day care focus on adults--they track the adults with their eyes to make sure that some other child isn't getting more praise, attention, lap time, and so on. But a few children at this age focus on another child, move toward him or her, hand things to him or her, and (according to teachers) seem to be at a loose end on days when that child is absent.

* Bullies are a part of life, and it's important for parents and teachers to intervene whenever possible. But most people don't realize how essential bystanders are to the bullying process. If other children stick up for the bullied child, then the bully rarely makes another attempt at teasing. If the others ignore or encourage the behavior, the bully continues.

* "Bullies are allowed to do the dirty work of the group, picking on rejected kids. They are stopped from bullying just anyone."

* To reduce the amount of bullying and hazing at a school, stop lecturing teachers and students about bullying and start trying to understand the entire social system at the school. You'll need students' help with this because they witness the subtle bullying--unkind remarks and exclusions as opposed to hitting and shoving.

* Cliques are also part of life. Children and adults are fascinated with them because cliques are an opportunity to experiment with power--whether they're in the middle school lunchroom or in a courtroom or in Congress.

Crystal says

Not as good as I had hoped, and very broad- covering from early childhood through adolescence. I don't think that is helpful to parents who are seeing their kids struggle socially right now. But, still good general info.

Hima says

Good insight into child psychology and group behavior.

Rachel says

3.5 stars - I found the last chapter "What Parents Can Do", to be the most insightful, especially the topic of "interviewing for pain."

William says

Anecdotal with just a few poorly explained preventions in the the last two chapters.

Petra Stock says

Probably three and a half stars. I enjoyed the first few chapters, especially the personal stories, but reached my psychology reading limit about half way in.

Jason says

While this book is a little dated in its references to technology (which I'm sure play a greater role now-a-days) I feel like the author prepared me a bit for the horrors that await me as my kids enter middle school. I read this in order to understand more about the pressures that kids are under and what I can do to help as a parent.

I learned much about the experience of girls (generally of course) versus boys. Reading this is a schizophrenic experience since you'll be comparing his comments with your own childhood experience and then seconds later anticipating going through it as a parent.

I'd recommend this book to any parent, but especially parents who are concerned that their kids could bully or be bullied. I think about this because I think I was bullied but also because the experience of bullying is probably very different for today's kids.

There's an element of the Lovecraftian where I pale at the unspeakable cruelties that he describes as a normal part of growing up anywhere. He leaves some hope that while kids can be crueler than any well-functioning adult, they can also be angelically kind to others.

I found the writing style to be readable and devoid of that annoying fluff that authors with only one idea use to pad out their purchase-catalyzing title. There's much to learn here and I plan to refer back to it.

Caroline says

Highly useful book on childhood friendships and group dynamics. Was recommended by our elementary school principal and it was both reassuring and full of good advice.
