

Friendship, Popularity, and Social Cruelty: What Parents Can Do To Help Children Navigate Their Social World

- **Accept that all children experience *normal social pain*:**

- ✦ Liking someone more than that person likes you
- ✦ Being teased or excluded occasionally
- ✦ Having secrets betrayed
- ✦ Wishing to have a higher social status
- ✦ Suffering from effects of social “experiments”

- **Pay special care to children at serious risk:**

- ✦ Rejected-submissive children (outcasts who withdraw)
- ✦ Rejected-aggressive children (outcasts who strike back)
- ✦ Neglected children (unknown or unappreciated by peers)
- ✦ Controversial children (liked *and* disliked)
- ✦ Dethroned queen bees (may be seen to “deserve” their comeuppance)

- **Go beyond thinking in terms of “bullies” and “victims”**

- ✦ Talk openly about power, dominance, and other “hidden” social dynamics
- ✦ Make a special effort to include *everyone*
- ✦ Teach social skills to excluded children, empower “bystanders,” and coach natural leaders to be pro-social instead of mean

- **Don’t worry, be ~~happy~~ trustful:**

- ✦ Trust that friendship is more important than popularity
- ✦ Trust in the resilience of young people
- ✦ Separate your own childhood social traumas from your child’s experience
- ✦ Focus on positive coping rather than pain and victimhood