



Topic  
Better Living

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Parenting

# Raising Emotionally and Socially Healthy Kids

Course Guidebook

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## Eileen Kennedy-Moore, Ph.D.

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Dr. Kennedy-Moore is the coauthor of two books for parents, *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids: Nurturing Your Child's True Potential* and *The Unwritten Rules of Friendship: Simple Strategies to Help Your Child Make Friends*, as well as a book for mental health professionals, *Expressing Emotion: Myths, Realities, and Therapeutic Strategies*. She also has written an award-winning children's book, *What About Me? 12 Ways to Get Your Parents' Attention (Without Hitting Your Sister)*, and is currently working on a funny and practical book about friendship for children. Her books have been translated into Estonian, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Dr. Kennedy-Moore has published academic articles in the *Review of General Psychology* and the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. She is a fellow of the American Psychological Association's Division 42, Psychologists in Independent Practice, and Division 46, the Society for Media Psychology and Technology. She is also a member of the American Society of Journalists and Authors.

In addition to her academic work, Dr. Kennedy-Moore has been quoted in numerous popular magazines and newspapers, such as *Parents*, *Real Simple*, *Family Circle*, *Woman's Day*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. She serves on the advisory board for *Parents* magazine and writes an in-depth blog about children's social and emotional development at PsychologyToday.com. Dr. Kennedy-Moore has been a featured guest on many highly rated and

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A native of Chicago, Dr. Kennedy-Moore also lived in Lima, Peru, and Madrid, Spain, while growing up. She currently has a private practice in Princeton, New Jersey, where she works with adults, children, and families (license #35SI00425400). Her gentle, practical approach draws from research but is grounded by her experience as a mother of four. ■

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## Disclaimer

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This series of lectures is intended to increase your understanding of the emotional and social lives of children and is for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for, nor does it replace, professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment of mental health conditions.

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# Raising Emotionally and Socially Healthy Kids

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## Scope:

One of the crucial roles of parents is to help their children develop the emotional and social skills they need to thrive. Every child struggles, at some point, with painful feelings or friendship problems. Whether your child needs to gain self-confidence or learn to rein in temper outbursts, make new friends or resolve conflicts with existing friends, this course offers practical advice to help children manage emotions and build healthy friendships. Throughout this lecture series, you'll find true-to-life examples, research-based tips, and attainable solutions. You'll come away with a deeper understanding of your child's emotional and social development, from toddler to early teen years, and discover strategies to help your child overcome obstacles to growth.

The first six lectures demonstrate teachable skills for emotional health. Lecture 1 explains how parents can be "emotion coaches," fostering children's emotional intelligence by teaching them to understand and cope with feelings. The lecture offers strategies for preventing intense emotional meltdowns, and provides age-related guidelines for responding to the complex emotional lives of children.

Childhood seems like a time of carefree joy, but children can become overwhelmed with worry and fear. Lecture 2 explains how parents can offer a combination of deep compassion and gentle urging to help children learn to cope with anxiety, tolerate uncertainty, and move beyond their fears.

Lecture 3 addresses how to respond constructively to a child's anger. It describes the processes within a family that intensify anger problems and offers positive discipline strategies to help children develop healthy communication and problem-solving skills.

In Lecture 4, we turn to the issue of self-esteem. The lecture lays out significant developmental changes in children's self-concepts and describes how parents can help their children build authentic self-esteem.

Lecture 5 focuses on ways to help children move beyond self-interest to develop genuine empathy for others. Empathy is the foundation of close relationships and a key force behind caring behavior. This lecture explains how to address children’s empathy blind spots and how sex roles can affect the expression of empathy.

In Lecture 6, we consider children’s happiness. Happiness sets the stage for positive development by prompting exploration, promoting effective coping skills, and encouraging healthy relationships. This lecture considers three aspects of the well-lived life identified by philosophers and psychologists—pleasure, engagement, and meaning—and what these look like from a child’s perspective.

The second six lectures focus on cultivating healthy social skills and friendships. Lecture 7 describes the nature of children’s friendships at different ages—from the exuberant but self-centered friendships of preschoolers, to the “secret clubs” of older elementary school children, to the intimate friendships of teens. You’ll come away with the understanding that certain types of negative social behavior are developmentally “normal,” and you’ll learn strategies to help your child make friends.

In Lecture 8, we take a look at play, which is central to the growth and maintenance of children’s friendships; successful play, however, is surprisingly complex and difficult to master. We consider three forms of play that are common on playgrounds: pretend play, rough-and-tumble play, and games with rules. We also explore ways you can help your child be a good sport about winning and losing.

Arguments, misunderstandings, or hurt feelings are an inevitable part of close relationships. Whether friendships succeed or not often depends on how children handle conflicts. In Lecture 9, we examine ways that children of different ages deal with making up and breaking up with friends.

In elementary school and beyond, children become increasingly aware of how other kids view them, which can raise concerns about belonging, status, popularity, and rejection. In Lecture 10, we examine ways to help children

cope with some of the harsher aspects of peer group culture, such as gossip and cliques.

Sometimes, a child's efforts to achieve popularity cross the line into bullying. In Lecture 11, we explore what to do if your child is bullied—or if your child is bullying someone else. We also distinguish between bullying and ordinary meanness.

Finally, in Lecture 12, we consider friendships in the digital age. The Internet and social and electronic media are changing how kids play and how they communicate. We look at three forms of digital interaction that have parallel behaviors in the real world but also differ in significant ways from face-to-face interaction: video game playing, cyberbullying, and “Facebook depression.” ■

# Developing Your Child's Emotional Intelligence

## Lecture 1

**H**ow parents respond to their children's emotions, how parents deal with their own emotions, and the general emotional climate in the home all influence how children deal with their feelings. There is some debate among researchers about how best to measure emotional intelligence and the skills related to it. Most agree that emotional intelligence involves the ability to understand and respond adaptively to emotional experiences in ourselves and others. The foundation for emotional intelligence is emotion regulation—being able to understand, influence, and appropriately communicate emotional experiences. This lecture will focus on the emotional lives of children and the pivotal role that parents can play in promoting emotional intelligence.

### Emotion Regulation

- Emotion regulation can be difficult for children. Some children are generally intense, and others are anxious, prone to anger, or susceptible to hurt feelings. These children have to work harder to learn to manage their emotions.
- Sometimes it's not children's innate qualities that make emotion regulation difficult but, rather, their developmental stage or life circumstances. Toddlers tend to live lives full of emotional drama. The early teenage years are another developmental period that can be highly charged. Major family stressors, such as moving, divorce, or unemployment, can also have a significant impact on children's feelings.
- In one sense, being able to feel deeply means being fully alive. But it's not healthy for children to be constantly buffeted by their feelings. Living with highly intense kids can be difficult for parents and siblings, as well. Outside the home, having trouble managing emotions can cause social problems. When children are experiencing intense emotions, parents not only need to appreciate

their capacity to feel deeply but also help them develop the skills they need to manage their feelings.

### **Emotion Dismissing and Coaching**

- John Gottman and his colleagues at the University of Washington identified two main styles parents use in handling emotions: emotion dismissing and emotion coaching.
- Emotion-dismissing parents want to protect their children—and themselves—from negative emotions. Their way of dealing with negative feelings is to simply get past them, as if they were obstacles or inconveniences.
- Emotion-coaching parents have a different orientation toward emotions. When their children are upset, they view the occasion as an opportunity for closeness and communication. They ask respectful questions about the feelings and discuss how to handle them. The key feature of emotion coaching is a combination of acknowledging children’s feelings and focusing on how to cope with those feelings.
- Gottman and his colleagues found that parents who were more proficient in emotion coaching when their children were 5 years old had children who maintained a superior academic record, were more effective at self-soothing, got along better with their peers, and even had improved physical health up to three years later.
- For most of us, emotion coaching is not an automatic response; in fact, we tend to fall back on the patterns that we learned growing up. The emotional climate from our own childhood is the starting point for how we react to our own children, but we can learn to respond in more effective ways.

### **Emotional Flooding**

- When children—or even older kids and teens—are having a meltdown, they are in a state researchers call “emotionally flooded.” In this state, a person is emotionally aroused, and his

or her heart rate is 10 or more beats per minute above resting. When we are in an emotionally flooded state, we cannot process new information, understand someone else's perspective, or solve problems. Basically, we can't think.

- If you are in an emotionally flooded state, you will not be able to perform emotion coaching. And if your child is emotionally flooded, he or she will not be able to take in any of your helpful questions, comments, or suggestions. Your job at that point is to get the thinking brain back online. Step away from the situation, if you can.
- Sometimes, it's best to wait out your child's meltdown. This can take a surprisingly long time—sometimes 20 minutes or more for the physiological responses to return to resting. Often, the best solution to a meltdown is prevention. If you notice a pattern in your child's emotional behavior, think beforehand about what you can do to prevent the situation from deteriorating.



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**Often, the root of a meltdown is a tired, hungry, or physically ill child.**

### Stages in Emotion Coaching

- The first stage of emotion coaching involves reflecting your child's feelings. You can say, "You're feeling angry"; "You're worried about the game"; "It bothers you that he did that." Parents are not interpreting here; they are describing and reflecting feelings.
- Reflection is powerful, because it defines children's feelings in words and makes them more understandable and manageable. It also lightens the child's burden, because it seems as if the parent

is carrying some of the load. As adults, we tend to want to skip this first stage and go right to the solution. Unless the problem is something trivial, that approach is not effective.

- The second stage of emotion coaching focuses on problem solving and coping techniques. You can ask, “What could you do?” or “What might help?” Avoid asking such questions as “Did you ...?” or “Why did you ...?” because those sound like accusations.

### **Developmental Changes in Coping with Emotions**

- As children get older, their emotional lives become increasingly complex, and their coping strategies expand dramatically. They move from being reliant on parents to being able to marshal support from a broader social network. Increasingly, they use sophisticated thinking to manage their emotions and solve their own problems.
- Babies are born with the ability to experience and express emotions, but their capacity to manage these emotions is limited. Their main way of dealing with feelings is to cry and get help from adult caregivers.
- Toddlers experience many strong emotions as they try to figure out the world and run it at the same time. By 18 months, children start to have a stable sense of self, and they have strong ideas about what they want. Their new sense of self also means that they’re capable of experiencing self-conscious emotions, such as pride and embarrassment.

### **Circle of Security**

- Psychologists Kent Hoffman, Glen Cooper, and their colleagues offer a valuable description of the role of parents in helping children cope with emotions during the toddler years: the circle of security.
- Within the circle of security, we as parents act as a secure base to support children’s exploration and provide a safe haven, offering comfort and protection when our children return to us for soothing.

- We need to be aware of when our children want to move away from us and when they want to return to us, and we should follow their needs whenever possible. But we also need to take charge whenever necessary. We take over when children are emotionally overwhelmed and to prevent them from hurting themselves or others.

### **Putting Feelings into Words**

- Preschool children dealing with emotions begin to use defense mechanisms, which are unconscious coping strategies that push feelings out of awareness. Unlike toddlers, preschoolers can experience mixed emotions, such as being sad and angry at the same time. The most significant development in the preschool years is children's ability to have simple conversations about their feelings. Putting feelings into words enables children to communicate their needs more clearly, which means that they are less likely to resort to aggression.
- By elementary school, children can talk about emotional experiences in fairly sophisticated ways. They are also much better at calming themselves because they know how to use cognitive coping strategies, such as distraction or self-talk.
- At this stage, children also become better at hiding their feelings. The ability to hide feelings can sometimes help social interactions go more smoothly, but it also means that parents may need to look below the surface to see what's going on emotionally.

### **How Parents Can Help**

- Elementary school children experience a host of emotions as they try to figure out where they fit in their peer groups. Because these children care so much about peer relationships, an important way that parents can support their efforts to cope with emotions is to help them imagine other people's perspectives. Parents can also suggest deliberate coping strategies, such as taking a break to calm down.

- Teens sometimes resort to risky ways of dealing with feelings, such as drinking or using drugs, cutting themselves, or engaging in early sexual activity; thus, parents should try to equip their children with emotion regulation skills *before* they reach this vulnerable period. Teens increasingly rely on friends for emotional support, especially for family problems, but their parents' support and advice still matter. Studies show that teens who come from families that express emotions in healthy ways and solve problems constructively are more likely to use healthy coping strategies.
- Emotion coaching involves deliberate efforts to help children learn about dealing with feelings. But our kids also learn a great deal indirectly, from the emotional climate in our homes. Emotions are contagious. Therefore, an important step in helping our children learn to cope with their emotions is to effectively cope with our own.
- We, as parents, can try to make the home a place that feels warm and safe for our kids. We can choose to speak to family members with at least as much kindness as we would show to a stranger. When we notice, listen, and respond in caring and constructive ways to our children's feelings, we help them develop emotional intelligence.

### Suggested Reading

Aldwin and Werner, "Developmental Studies in Coping."

Baker, *No More Meltdowns*.

Barish, *Pride and Joy*.

Gottman and DeClaire, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*.

Katz, Maliken, and Stettler, "Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy."

Kennedy-Moore and Lowenthal, *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids*.

Powell et al., *The Circle of Security Intervention*.

Shapiro and White, *Mindful Discipline*.

Siegel and Bryson, *The Whole Brain Child*.

Southam-Gerow, *Emotion Regulation in Children*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What did you learn from your parents or family about how to cope with emotions?
2. Think of a recent time that your child was feeling very emotional. How did you respond? Was your response helpful, or can you think of a more effective way you could have responded?

# Anxiety—The Way Out Is Through

## Lecture 2

**W**e tend to think of childhood as a time of carefree joy. However, children can become overwhelmed by fear and anxiety. Children's fears and anxiety tend to grow along with their imaginations. Although fear helps us focus on threats and avoid danger, sometimes anxiety responses to a perceived threat are more intense, pervasive, and enduring than the situation warrants. The good news is that anxiety is quite treatable. In this lecture, we'll focus on some practical ways that we, as parents, can help our children cope with anxiety. The way out of anxiety is through it. When we teach our children to minimize avoidance and develop coping skills, we help them internalize the message "I can be brave."

### **Security: A Foundation for Autonomy**

- To help kids cope with anxiety, we need to do more than respond to crises; instead, we should lay some groundwork before those crisis moments. Research by Donna Pincus at Boston University and her colleagues involves training parents of anxious kids to connect with them in an attentive but nondemanding way. Just five minutes a day of this type of interaction can have a profound impact.
- For children ages 8 and under, Pincus recommends gathering a few noncompetitive toys, such as crayons, dolls, or building blocks. Then, for five minutes, a parent pays 100 percent attention to the child, without asking questions, criticizing, or giving instructions. This is surprisingly hard to do, even for such a short period of time, but this kind of nondemanding interaction allows your child to direct the activity without tension or worry, which creates a warm and relaxed atmosphere.
- Think of the acronym PRIDE: *P*raise appropriate behavior, *R*eflect the child's comments, *I*mitate the child's actions, *D*escribe what the child is doing, and *E*xpress enthusiasm. Robert Waller of the University of Tennessee observed children in first through third

grades with their mothers and found that the most important predictor of how much the kids enjoyed the play sessions was the degree to which the parents mirrored the kids' behavior with their own words or actions.

- A general clinical principle is that security is the foundation for autonomy. In other words, children need to feel safe before they can handle taking risks. Having some nondemanding but connected time with parents is good for any child; however, for anxious children, it can be especially comforting, and it lays the groundwork of security for the harder work of facing fears.
- When kids are anxious, they avoid anything connected to that anxiety. Unfortunately, although running away from frightening situations may give immediate and temporary relief, it also makes the anxiety grow. Instead of encouraging a child's desire to escape or avoid anxiety, parents need to help them learn to tolerate it. What anxious kids need from parents is a combination of deep compassion and gentle urging to move past their fears.

### **Physical Symptoms of Anxiety**

- Anxious children often find the physical symptoms of anxiety—racing heart, clammy hands, wobbly legs, knot in the stomach—alarming, but these symptoms are a natural response of the body to a perceived threat. Sometimes, just learning that these symptoms are normal and transient can be helpful for kids.
- Physiologically, humans cannot maintain a high-arousal state for very long. The most intense part of an emotional reaction lasts only minutes or even seconds. Even in full-blown panic attacks, the worst is generally over within 10 minutes. If kids just wait it out, the physical response part of an anxiety reaction will recede.
- Sometimes it helps children to understand that the physical symptoms of anxiety are actually helpful. Imagine a baseball player. If he's holding the bat limply, he won't get a good hit. If he's clutching the bat too tightly, he won't get a good hit. But at

a medium level of attention, he's primed and ready to knock the ball out of the park. Research routinely shows that performance is optimal at moderate levels of anxiety.

### **Anxiety and Sleep**

- Anxiety can interfere with sleep, and lack of sleep definitely intensifies anxiety. It helps to reassure anxious kids that eventually, the body will take over and do what it needs to do—but maybe not tonight, maybe not even tomorrow night. As long as they get enough rest, which means lying quietly with their eyes closed, they will get enough sleep.
- Having some quiet time before they fall asleep gives children a chance to think about what is pleasurable and interesting. During this “twilight time,” kids can engage in remembering or planning fun times, inventing a story, or interacting with favorite characters in a book or movie.
- Parents lead the way in establishing good sleep habits. Kids are at their best when they go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends. Parents should create a calm, cozy, and predictable bedtime routine.
- Anxious children often want to discuss worrisome topics just before bed; however, this is not helpful. Problems seem more overwhelming when we're tired. If worries come up at night, have your child write them down and put them in a “worry box.” The two of you can talk about them in the morning or at the end of the week.

### **Discouraging Avoidance**

- Fear and anxiety generate three responses: flight, fight, or freeze. Avoiding anxiety-provoking situations is instinctual, but it's also the main contributor to the growth and continuation of anxiety. Parents can play a significant role here. In psychology, a concept called *social referencing* means taking cues from a trusted person



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**When a young child sees a dog for the first time, she looks to her parent to see whether she should be afraid; this is called social referencing.**

about how to respond in an unfamiliar situation. In other words, if the parent is relaxed, then it's easier for the child to relax.

- Every time we help our children escape or avoid a situation that makes them anxious, we encourage their escape response and make it harder for them to approach the situation in the future. Rather than focusing on avoiding anxiety, we need to orient children toward bravery. Importantly, being brave means more than simply not being afraid. Being brave means doing something even though we are afraid.
- Sometimes, we need to help kids figure out intermediate steps along the way to accomplish a goal. This is called developing an *exposure hierarchy*. Research by Eli Lebowitz at the Yale Child Study Center shows that having parents gradually cut down on how much they accommodate their children's fears can be an effective way to help anxious children. For example, in the case of a child who is afraid of being away from parents and repeatedly calls them at work, the

path forward is for the parents to gradually and lovingly cut down on how often they answer those calls.

- Parents have to do more than simply encourage children to enter feared situations. We also have to help them to be competent in those situations. For example, kids with social anxiety may need to learn appropriate ways of connecting with peers. Kids with test anxiety could benefit from learning effective study skills. Sometimes, however, all we need to do is step back to give our kids a chance to figure out troublesome situations for themselves.
- When our children are feeling anxious, it can be very tempting to rescue them. But if we leap in too quickly to solve problems that our children could solve themselves, we steal their opportunity to learn important coping skills. When we take a more backseat approach—expressing support, asking pertinent questions, and allowing the solutions to come from our children—we express our faith in their ability to grow, learn, and deal with whatever life throws at them.

### **Focus on Bravery**

- A critical target of intervention is the thoughts that trigger and accompany anxiety. When children vividly picture a terrible situation, it seems like a looming threat. They may even believe that thinking about it will somehow make it happen, and they begin to fear their own thoughts. The goal for parents is to help the child accept or alter anxious thoughts rather than avoid them.
- An effective strategy is to have children conduct experiments to prove to themselves that thoughts are never dangerous. Likewise, children should understand that they are in charge of their imaginations. If a frightening thought arises, they can change the picture. With older kids, teaching them to put the phrase “I’m having the thought that” in front of a frightening idea can help them get an observer’s perspective on that thought.
- Have children recognize the voice of anxiety in their heads. With young children, you can give it a silly name, such as Rupert or

Griselda, and talk about how the anxiety voice is trying to boss them around. Once kids recognize that anxiety is talking, they can evaluate what it's saying by asking themselves several questions: How bad would it be if this happened? How likely is it to happen? Could I, or should I, do something about it?

- Children can also learn to talk to themselves internally in ways that encourage bravery. Anxiety pushes us to seek guarantees that we will never have negative experiences. Because life is always unpredictable, coping with anxiety means ultimately learning to tolerate uncertainty and moving forward with courage despite our fears. The way out of anxiety is through it. When we teach our children to minimize avoidance and develop coping skills, we help them internalize the message “I can be brave.”

### Suggested Reading

Chansky, *Freeing Your Child from Anxiety*.

Cohen, *The Opposite of Worry*.

Pincus, *Growing Up Brave*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How have you encouraged your child to be brave in the face of anxiety-provoking situations?
2. What do you do to encourage good sleep habits for your child?

# How Kids Manage Anger—Positive Discipline

## Lecture 3

**A**nger erupts when we perceive that we are obstructed, threatened, or wronged—or when we feel hurt, frightened, overwhelmed, or ashamed. Anger also has a positive side; it can motivate us to take action. This lecture focuses on how we can respond constructively to our children’s anger and help them learn to manage and communicate that anger. Angry kids don’t require harsh punishment; they need more connection. When we use positive discipline strategies, such as minimizing anger triggers, catching kids being good, and helping them develop communication and problem-solving skills, we model kindness and respect, and we make it easier for our kids to deal with anger.

### Connection and Communication

- Harsh punishment can make a situation with an angry child much worse; and certain behaviors within a family can intensify anger problems. Gerald Patterson and his colleagues at the Oregon Social Learning Center found a coercive cycle in which the parent and the child try to pressure each other by being as antagonistic as possible. One person’s anger is met with even more anger from the other, and they go back and forth, growing ever more enraged ... until someone finally relents. Over time, the parent and the child learn to skip the preliminaries and go straight to explosive anger.
- Meeting our children’s anger with our own anger is like throwing gasoline on a fire. We know from observational research involving married couples that partners in healthy relationships offer five positive comments for every one negative comment. In couples headed for divorce, the numbers of positive and negative comments are about even.
- An effective strategy to end the vicious cycle of anger is to spend 15 minutes of “special time” together each day. During special time, the parent avoids asking questions, giving directions, or correcting



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**A coercive cycle of anger makes both children and parents miserable and can be a precursor to delinquency.**

the child. The child gets to be in charge, and the parent's role is to be an appreciative participant or observer in the child's play.

- The basis of our authority with our children is our connection with them. Spending nondemanding, enjoyable time together helps strengthen and repair this attachment, and it lays the groundwork for positive change.

### **Catching Children Being Good**

- Another important step in helping anger-prone children is to identify their anger triggers. Take note of what happens just before your child becomes angry or frustrated. Sometimes, kids' anger arises from feeling overwhelmed because they're tired, hungry, or sick. Often, a request or a "no" from a parent can trigger anger. Parents should also be aware of what happens immediately after their kids get angry and teach them better ways to respond.
- Staying calm when children are angry is easier said than done, but if we want our kids to learn to manage their tempers, we need to set a good example for them. Psychologists tell their clients, "The

second you start yelling, you are no longer a parent; you've just given away all of your authority." Scolding and lecturing our children can actually encourage misbehavior.

- It is helpful to create opportunities for kids to receive positive responses. When you catch your child being good, describe what you see. Talk specifically about what the child did, then point out why it's a positive development. For example, if your child finishes his homework before you get home from work, you could say, "You did your math and reading on your own. You're getting good at managing your time!"

### **Point Systems: Pros and Cons**

- A commonly recommended approach to helping angry kids is to set up a "behavior mod" point system to reward good behavior. The Kazdin method, developed by Alan Kazdin at Yale University, is an empirically validated example of this approach. The key element in this method involves "rewarding the positive opposite behavior." Kids earn points when they perform desirable behaviors, which they can then turn in for privileges or prizes.
- Using a point system to reward desirable behaviors is vastly better than engaging in a vicious cycle of coercion, and it's an easy way to train parents to markedly increase positive interactions with their kids. The Kazdin method emphasizes the importance of catching kids being good.
- Some experts do not recommend point systems, however. They don't believe close relationships should be about keeping track of points. Point systems can also lead to an unattractive bargaining attitude in kids.
- Point systems are about external control, but some people want more than obedience from kids. Children should learn to communicate clearly and respectfully, understand other people's perspectives, and be able to solve problems. They should do the right thing even when parents or other adults are not around.

## Collaborative Problem Solving

- Harvard psychologist Ross Greene has developed a promising solution to children's anger, called *collaborative problem solving*. Rather than focusing on rewards, Greene emphasizes helping children learn to tolerate frustration and become more flexible. His main premise is that our job as parents is to help angry kids develop the skills they need to communicate and collaborate. Greene notes that there are three ways that adults can respond to children's misbehavior, which he calls Plan A, Plan B, or Plan C.
  - Plan A involves imposing our adult will on the child, with no discussion or negotiation. Greene observes that Plan A is likely to trigger an explosion in anger-prone children; thus, it's rarely the right solution. We can't teach our children to be flexible by being inflexible ourselves.
  - The opposite of Plan A is Plan C, which involves eliminating all expectations from the child. Sometimes, this can be effective. For example, if your child always behaves badly when you take her to the grocery store, then you should probably stop taking her there for a while.
  - Greene recommends that parents use Plan B, which has three steps. Step 1 is to acknowledge and genuinely try to understand the child's reason for anger. Step 2 is to define the problem by presenting two concerns: the child's concern and yours. Step 3 is to invite the child to help solve the problem.
- Collaborative problem solving helps kids learn to articulate their concerns, consider other people's perspectives, and evaluate various solutions—skills that children will use throughout their lives. A side benefit for parents is that when we open a discussion by trying to understand the child's point of view, empathy can diffuse our anger.
- Although not every session of collaborative problem solving leads to resolution, simply attempting the process with openness and sincerity plants the seeds for a better way of solving problems. Solutions

that our children suggest are often better than what adults propose, because the kids are invested in having their solutions work.

### **Setting Limits**

- Another important skill for angry kids is the ability to self-soothe, or to calm themselves down. Emotion coaching can be helpful here. The goal is to acknowledge the child's feelings and teach coping strategies. Parents can also help young children learn to "use their words" when they're angry.
- Children can create a "calming box," filled with items that are pleasing to the senses, that they can open when they notice they're feeling frustrated. Possible items include favorite postcards, unlit scented candles, a music device, mints or gum, and soft fabrics or feathers. Children may need help recognizing when they are just starting to feel angry. Be sure to respond positively when your child manages to calm down.
- Children need us to set limits. Knowing that parents won't let them go too far gives them a sense of security. Sometimes, all we have to do is tell them that they've crossed the line. For example, with back talk, you can reflect the feelings behind the words. Say, for example, "You're feeling mad right now. You wanted me to buy that toy."
- If a child's behavior shows blatant disrespect, such as screaming or swearing, tell the child, in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "It's not OK to talk to me like that" or "You know how to talk to me if you want me to listen." Then turn away. Don't engage in a debate about disrespectful behavior.

### **Using Time-Outs**

- For kids ages 3 and older, a short time-out can be useful for temporarily stopping bad behavior and for giving kids and parents a chance to calm down. Although time-outs were originally devised under the assumption that children misbehave to get attention, it makes more sense to use them as a way to take a break from a heated situation and to prevent it from getting worse.

- If you choose to use time-outs with your child, use them sparingly. Practice ahead of time with your child, walking calmly to time-out, and plan with your child what he or she can do to calm down. Keep in mind that time-out doesn't teach kids what they *should* do. The real learning happens afterward, when we say, "OK, let's try again."
- Kids don't learn from suffering; they learn from doing something correctly. "Trying again" after a time-out could mean picking up where they left off, moving on to a new activity, or making amends for what went wrong. More generally, "trying again" means being able to calm themselves, communicate, and solve problems.
- Eliminating all anger is neither possible nor desirable. What's more, although anger can be destructive, it can also motivate us to change our circumstances for the better. The challenge is learning how to handle anger in healthy ways.

### Suggested Reading

Coyne, "Parenting from the Outside-In."

Davis and Keyser, *Becoming the Parent You Want to Be*.

Faber and Mazlish, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*.

Greene, *The Explosive Child*.

Kazdin, *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*.

Siegel and Bryson, *No-Drama Discipline*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What situations or circumstances tend to trigger your child's anger?
2. What do you think your child has learned by example from the way you manage your own temper?

# Building Authentic Self-Esteem

## Lecture 4

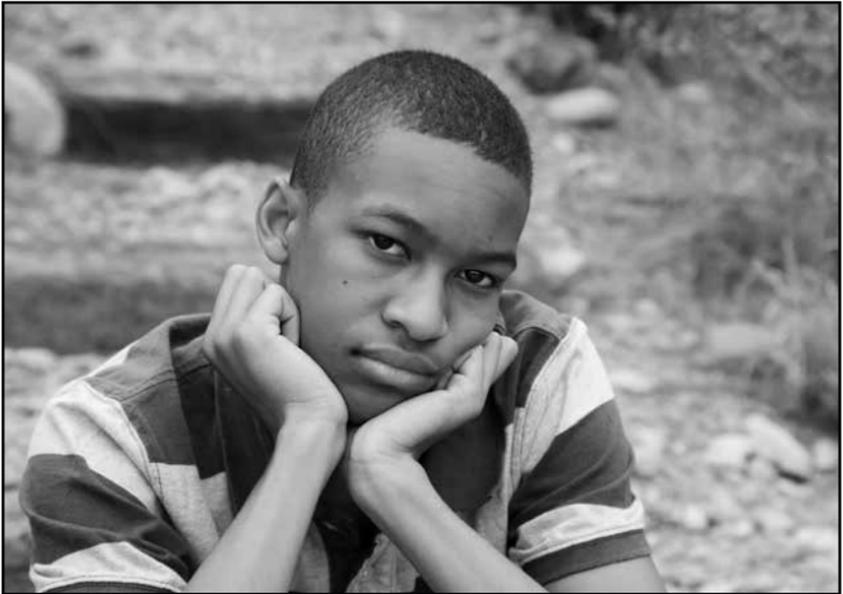
**S**elf-esteem involves our evaluation of how good or bad we feel about ourselves. Although it is easy to identify low self-esteem, it's more difficult to define healthy self-esteem. Logically, healthy self-esteem should arise from accurate self-appraisals, but research shows that it's normal to skew the truth a bit in the name of self-protection and self-enhancement. In this lecture, we'll examine the developmental backdrop for understanding children's self-esteem, describe the significant changes that occur in children's self-concepts, and explain how parents can support their children's self-esteem at each stage. Finally, we'll take an in-depth look at the core components of authentic self-esteem—feeling competent and feeling worthy—that are relevant for children of all ages.

### A Deeper Understanding of Self-Esteem

- The 1970s and 1980s were the heyday of the self-esteem movement. Many people believed that bolstering children's self-esteem would make them happier and more successful and improve their relationships. Unsurprisingly, this simplistic approach to self-esteem was neither productive nor successful.
- In the 1990s, a research review by psychologist Roy Baumeister at Florida State University and his colleagues concluded that higher self-esteem does not enhance school performance, does not foster healthier relationships, and does not preclude kids from smoking, drinking, using drugs, or engaging in early sexual activity.
- Nevertheless, we know from longitudinal studies that low self-esteem can be a risk factor for depression and eating disorders. What we need is a deeper, more nuanced understanding of self-esteem.

## Developmental Stages of Self-Esteem

- Susan Harter at the University of Denver has done extensive research on the developmental progression of how children think about and evaluate themselves.
- Children ages 2 to 4 are in the stage that can be described as “look at me.” They tend to have unrealistically high self-esteem and are incapable of evaluating their skills in an objective way. To support children’s self-esteem during this stage, simply take delight in them. These little ones crave our approval, and we should give it freely. If we have to correct them, we can do it gently by redirecting them toward good behavior.
- Children ages 5 to 7 are in the “on my way” stage. They’re beginning to form an idea of themselves as proficient at certain activities, but they still can’t evaluate themselves realistically. During this stage, we can support children’s self-esteem by helping them master new skills and being enthusiastic about their progress.
- Things get more complicated around ages 8 to 10, during what can be called the “judging myself” stage. That’s when children become much more self-critical. For the first time, they can realistically compare themselves to others, and realizing that they’re not always the best at everything hurts their self-esteem. This is also the age at which we begin to see some defensiveness aimed at protecting self-esteem. To support children’s self-esteem during this stage, try to ease their harsh self-judgments.
- Ages 11 to 13 correspond to the “trying to look good” stage. Kids at this stage worry a great deal about what others—especially peers—think of them. Their overall self-esteem tends to be lower than that of younger children. Most young adolescents admit that they base the majority of their self-esteem on how they look. As parents, we can be an important voice countering some of the shallow values and unrealistic standards of popular culture.



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**Self-esteem tends to head downhill from preschool through high school, with noticeable drops around age 8 and during the early adolescent years.**

- Ages 14 to 16 involve the “trying to be myself” stage. This is a time of intense self-examination, and it’s generally a low point in overall self-esteem. Teens at this stage are preoccupied with wanting to discover the “real self.” They see themselves as complicated and often feel as if no one understands them—especially not their parents. Supporting children’s self-esteem at this stage means giving them room to experiment with different identities while remaining a steady presence in their lives.
- Around age 17, the painful self-reflection eases somewhat as teens become better able to integrate their contradictory qualities. Because older teens also have a clearer sense of what standards they want to embrace, their self-esteem is less dependent on other people’s evaluations. However, even these kids crave love and approval from their parents.

## Competence and Worthiness

- Christopher Mruk at Bowling Green State University offers a meaningful and useful perspective on self-esteem. He argues that authentic self-esteem involves two necessary components: feeling competent and feeling worthy.
- Feeling competent reflects our answer to the question “Am I capable?” Feeling competent involves our beliefs about whether we can accomplish our goals well enough to meet our own standards. Feeling worthy reflects our answer to the question “Am I a good and lovable person?” Feeling worthy goes beyond competence to encompass values and relationships.
- To have authentic self-esteem, we need both competence and worthiness. Without competence, self-esteem is simple wishful thinking. Without worthiness, competence feels empty. Our task as parents is to help our children cultivate each of these components of self-esteem.

## Fostering Competence

- With regard to competence, two realities stand out. First, false praise cannot create authentic self-esteem. A true sense of competence cannot be given; it must be earned. Second, to contribute to self-esteem, competence must be in an area that the person considers valuable. Competence and worthiness are interconnected in self-esteem: We want to be competent in worthy areas.
- To feel proud of themselves, children first need to see that their parents are proud of them. They then learn to predict what behaviors will make their parents proud, and eventually, around age 7 or 8, they internalize their parents’ standards.
- As they get older, children incorporate the reactions of additional people—teachers, peers, coaches—into the competence aspect of their self-esteem. However, we don’t ever relinquish our desire for our parents’ approval. Therefore, with our own children, we need to make sure that the bar for our approval is reachable for them.

- Sometimes, the best approach we can take for our kids is to allow them to struggle. It's natural to want to protect children from adversity, but if we rush to rescue them from problems that they could solve on their own, we steal their opportunity to develop competence. When our children struggle, we can empathize, guide, support, or even suggest, but we don't want to take over unnecessarily.

### **Parents as “Biased Biographers”**

- The way we praise our children can affect their willingness to persist. As an example, psychologists Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck gave fifth-graders problems from a nonverbal IQ test. They then praised one group for ability (“You must be smart”) and another group for effort (“You must have worked really hard”).
- When the researchers gave the two groups of children a set of more difficult problems, the kids praised for effort enjoyed those hard problems more than did the kids praised for ability. And when the researchers gave the children a third set of easy problems, the kids praised for ability did worse. Somehow, struggling with the difficult problems earlier had eroded their confidence. But the kids praised for effort did better on the third set; mastering the difficult problems allowed them to learn new problem-solving strategies.
- The researchers then took the study one step further. They told the children to share their experiences with children at other schools. They gave the kids a piece of paper with space to write a paragraph and a line at the bottom to record their score on the problems. Almost 40 percent of the children praised for ability inflated their scores, compared to only 13 percent of those praised for effort.
- What the study implies is that the meaning of performance is significant. If kids see their performance as stemming from their innate, unchangeable abilities and they do badly, then there's no point in persisting. But when children see their performance as stemming from effort, then doing badly doesn't have to be an end point. They can keep trying or try a different way—thereby building

up the competence aspects of their self-esteem. Dweck calls this having a *growth* mindset rather than a *fixed* mindset.

- Parents can support a growth mindset by being their children’s “biased biographers.” Look for times when your child struggled initially, then triumphed, and be ready to recite those stories when needed. Also, as parents, we should try to find opportunities that develop our child’s competence in areas that fit who our child is or wants to become.

### Parents as Gardeners, Not Sculptors

- The second component of self-esteem is worthiness, which is about values—beliefs about what is right and what is important. As parents, we communicate our values to our children in innumerable large and small ways.
- Sometimes, parents resort to comparisons to try to get their values across. But no child has ever been inspired to improve by being asked, “Why can’t you be more like her?” In fact, that question almost guarantees that the child will take an instant and intense dislike to the shining example.
- It’s even harder when the shining example is a figment of the parent’s imagination. We don’t get to say, “I’d like a child who is student council president, plays the flute, is on the varsity basketball team, and has a perfect grade point average.”
- Helping our children feel worthy and lovable ultimately comes down to recognizing that our role as parents is not to try to be sculptors, molding our children into a certain form. Instead, we should think of ourselves as gardeners, actively tending our children, watering and pruning as needed, but mostly being grateful for the opportunity to watch them bloom.

## Suggested Reading

Baumeister et al., “Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth.”

Dweck, *Mindset*.

Harter, *The Construction of the Self*.

Mruk, *Self-Esteem and Positive Psychology*.

Sachs, *The Good-Enough Child*.

## Questions to Consider

1. What did your parents do that was or wasn't helpful in building your self-esteem? How has this influenced the way you interact with your child?
2. As your child's “biased biographer,” what stories involving struggle followed by triumph can you tell?

# Teaching Kids to Care—The Roots of Empathy

## Lecture 5

**E**mpathy is an emotional resonance to another person's distress that motivates compassionate behavior. The most basic way to teach our children empathy is to display it ourselves. Children who have had warm and responsive parenting are much better equipped to respond with empathy to other people's distress. However, research—and our own experience—tells us that it's all too common for children to behave in uncaring ways. Learning to care is hard work. As parents, there's much we can do to help our children develop empathy; this lecture provides parents with research-based strategies that will help teach kids to care about others.

### Affective Resonance

- Empathy is the bedrock of close relationships and a key force behind compassionate behavior. It is a complicated concept that involves three interwoven strands of internal experience: affective resonance, perspective taking, and motivation for compassionate, or prosocial, behavior.
- Affective resonance is the most basic element of empathy. Observing another person's emotional response tends to generate "second-hand" emotional reactions. For example, we wince involuntarily when we see someone bang a thumb with a hammer; this is a preverbal, automatic reaction. Even babies who are only a few days old tend to cry when they hear another baby crying.
- If we spend time with someone who's feeling discouraged or irritable or excited, we tend to start behaving—and feeling—the same way. People tend to synchronize not only their behavioral signs of emotion but also their physiological responses. In one study, researchers caused mothers to feel stressed; then, when they reunited the mothers with their 1-year-old children, the children's heart rates increased to match their moms' heart rates, even though the children hadn't been exposed to the stressful situation.

- The cause of the affective resonance in people may be the mirror neuron system. Our brains seem to echo other people's emotions. Functional MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) studies show that we have similar patterns of brain activity when we *experience* an emotion ourselves and when we *witness* someone else experiencing that emotion.
- Affective resonance does not necessarily lead to empathetic behavior, however. Nancy Eisenberg at Arizona State University and her colleagues found that if young children's affective resonance is too intense, it can slip into personal distress. The implication for parents is that helping children learn how to manage their own emotions also builds a foundation for empathy. When kids aren't overwhelmed by their own feelings, they have room emotionally to care about others.

### **Perspective Taking**

- Perspective taking involves imagining how someone else feels. It is a skill that children develop only gradually, over many years.
- Babies 6 to 12 months old tend to react to other people's distress by seeking comfort for themselves. When a small child sees her friend in distress, she might start crying and reach for her father because she doesn't have the perspective-taking ability to recognize that it was the friend who got hurt, not her.
- Children between 1 and 2 years of age sometimes try to help others who are distressed, but they tend to comfort others the way they like to be comforted. A toddler who sees his mother looking sad might bring her his teddy bear. By 3 years, kids are better at responding in ways that the other person would find comforting.
- Children 4 years old can answer such questions as "What makes mommy feel sad?" Children age 5 can imagine the emotions of fictional characters; children 8 years old can grasp that people can have different feelings in the same situation. Tweens can imagine the feelings of people in circumstances they haven't encountered.

Adolescents can understand other people's ambivalence and infer feelings that people are trying hard to hide.

- An effective way to help children develop empathy is to give them a great deal of practice with perspective taking. We can accomplish this by talking with our children about feelings that come up in books, movies, or daily life. The aim is to help children cultivate an awareness and curiosity about people's inner lives.

### **Compassionate Motivation**

- Genuine empathy requires compassionate motivation, which is the desire to respond in caring ways to someone in distress.
- Research finds that in general, as children get older, they become more likely to comfort, share with, or help others. Blatant selfishness is more common among preschoolers than elementary school children. In experimental studies, 16-year-olds are more likely than younger teens to donate resources or help others in distress.
- Compassionate motivation doesn't flow automatically from affective resonance and perspective taking. These first two elements of empathy can alert us to others' needs, but then we consider whether or not we want to help. We also ask ourselves if we are capable of helping.
- For parents, an indirect but powerful way to help children develop compassionate motivation is to support their friendships. To maintain a friendship, children need to learn to recognize and respond warmly to a friend's feelings.

### **Empathy Training: Strategies for Parents**

- Three strategies for helping children develop empathy involve challenging empathy exceptions, giving kids a path forward when they behave in unkind ways, and supporting a child's identity as a caring person.

- It's all too easy for kids to decide that certain people don't "count" as deserving of empathy. Sometimes, it's that "weird" kid in school. Sometimes, it's a child of a different race, religion, or economic class. Too often, kids decide that siblings fall into the "empathy exceptions" category.
- In psychology experiments about empathy, researchers often direct participants "Imagine how *you* would feel if that happened to you." What works better with older kids, however, is to open with an excuse—such as "I'm sure you didn't mean to" or "You probably didn't realize." This communicates that you know the kids are good people with good intentions. What's more, if you provide an excuse, your child doesn't have to come up with one. That makes it more likely your child will be open to hearing what you have to say.
- For younger children, it may help to provide empathy training in the moment of conflict. For example, if a brother and sister are arguing, let each tell his or her side of the story while you listen and validate. Nothing constructive will happen until both children feel heard. Then ask each child in turn, "What can you do to help your brother (or sister) feel better?" This is a key question. The process then goes beyond quibbling about who did what or who's at fault. It's about encouraging kindness.
- Parents should give children a path forward when they behave in uncaring ways. When we see kids being unkind, our automatic response as adults is to call them on it. A better strategy is to help children get back on track with kind and compassionate behavior. Helping a child think through how to do the right thing is much more effective than punishment.
- Children also need to see themselves as caring people—to embrace empathy as part of their identities. Placing a strong value on empathy and wanting to be a caring person can motivate people to respond in compassionate ways.

## The Culture of Cruelty

- Sometimes circumstances interfere with kids’ embracing an identity as a compassionate person. On self-report measures of empathy, girls and women generally score higher than boys and men. But if we measure electrical activity in the brain or physiological responses in the body, there are no sex differences in the biological responses to empathy-inducing stimuli.
- In other words, although males experience affective resonance, they don’t recognize or admit it. One possible explanation is that boys may believe that empathy is not masculine. A number of authors have written about the “culture of cruelty” among boys.
- However, as Dacher Keltner at the University of California–Berkeley points out, “Compassion is anything but weak!” Empathy can inspire heroism, altruism, generosity, and teamwork. Boys are indisputably capable of being empathetic without being feminine. If your son has a man in his life whom he respects—one who is both strong and caring—this can help counter messages from the culture of cruelty.

## Opportunities for Compassion

- Because in some sense we are what we do, an effective way to foster a compassionate identity in both boys and girls is to give them opportunities to behave in compassionate ways. Performing service activities with friends or family members can help children feel connected to compassion.
- It’s important to acknowledge acts of compassion from children, even if you just say, “Thank you! That was a big help to me.” This acknowledgment helps children see the positive impact they can have on others.
- Every day the news is filled with ugliness—stories of greed, violence, and indifference to suffering. It’s easy to give in to hopelessness and cynicism. But Fred Rogers, who starred in the children’s television show *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, said,



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**Volunteering can help children become more competent helpers and, therefore, more willing to help.**

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

- Rogers explained that especially in times of disaster, it’s comforting to realize that there are many caring people in the world. In helping our children develop empathy, we encourage them to see themselves among those helpers.

### Suggested Reading

Dewar, “The Case for Teaching Empathy.”

Gordon, *Roots of Empathy*.

*Greater Good* (blog), “Hot to Help.”

*Greater Good* (blog), “What Is Empathy?”

Keltner, *Born to Be Good*.

Kindlon and Thompson, *Raising Cain*.

### Questions to Consider

1. When and to whom has your child responded in very caring ways?
2. Does your child have empathy blind spots? If so, how could you address these?
3. To what extent do you think peer culture or social norms interfere with your child's learning to be empathetic?

# What Makes Kids Happy?

## Lecture 6

**T**he deepest wish of most parents is that their children are happy. Although our children cannot be perpetually blissful—that’s simply not realistic—we do want them to be open to happiness and to believe that the good in their lives outweighs the bad. What’s more, happiness is not just a sign of well-being; it can actually lay the groundwork for other positive outcomes. In this lecture, we’ll discuss the attitudes and behaviors that contribute to happiness and explore three aspects of the well-lived life: pleasure, engagement, and meaning. We will emphasize that happiness is not something that we give our children; it is something that, with our guidance and support, they can create for themselves.

### The Power of Happiness

- Barbara Fredrickson at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill has developed the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. Laboratory studies demonstrate that inducing negative moods tends to narrow people’s focus, but inducing positive moods broadens people’s attention. Positive moods also encourage people to think more creatively and flexibly, and they become more open to new experiences and learning.
- Over time, short-term positive moods can lead to long-term benefits by prompting exploration, promoting effective coping skills, and fostering healthy relationships—in an upward spiral of well-being.
- Research reveals that most children are generally happy: In surveys, about 90 percent of children report feeling at least somewhat happy with their lives overall. Younger kids tend to be happier than older kids. In a global survey involving thousands of children, three-quarters of 6-year-olds reported feeling happy “most of the time,” but less than two-thirds of 12-year-olds felt that way.

## The Well-Lived Life

- As parents, we cannot make our children happy, but we can help them develop the skills and attitudes that are conducive to happiness. Martin Seligman at the University of Pennsylvania points to three aspects of the well-lived life identified by philosophers and psychologists: pleasure, engagement, and meaning.
- These three aspects are conceptually distinct and statistically separable, but in real life, they're often merged. Adults who report being most satisfied describe their lives as having high levels of all three dimensions. Therefore, it makes sense to help our children learn to cultivate and integrate pleasure, engagement, and meaning in consistent and lasting ways.

## Pleasure and Savoring

- To foster their children's happiness and increase pleasure, parents can help their children relish positive experiences. Fred Bryant at Loyola University has done extensive research on what he calls savoring—engaging in thoughts and actions that enhance and prolong positive feelings. Savoring can involve anticipating or remembering positive experiences, focusing intentionally on a current positive experience, or sharing positive feelings and experiences with others.
- Relishing food is an easy way for kids to learn about savoring. The next time your family has a favorite meal or a special treat, involve your kids in describing it and discussing the best ways to enjoy it.
- Reminiscing about happy events allows us to relive and extend our pleasure in them. After your family does something enjoyable together, ask your children what was the favorite part of the trip and what they liked most about that part. Be sure to share your reactions, too. These kinds of conversations help your child draw out the pleasure of positive experiences.
- You can also use photos or souvenirs to prompt discussions of happy memories. Encourage your child to create a vivid narrative

of the past by asking questions that highlight the sequence of events and the sensory details of the experience. Retelling favorite family stories is a special form of savoring that's not only enjoyable but also gives kids a sense of closeness and belonging.

- The greatest source of pleasure for most children is play, especially outdoor play. But too often, this gets pushed aside by our busy schedules. Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, coined the term “nature-deficit disorder” to call attention to what he believes are the symptoms of alienation from nature, including attention problems, obesity, anxiety, and depression.
- Simply being outdoors—with space to breathe and run and explore—seems to make everyone feel happier and more relaxed. We know from research with adults that even five minutes of “green exercise,” which means exercise in the presence of nature, can enhance mood.

### **Engagement and Flow**

- With children, it makes sense to think of engagement in terms of a willingness to discover, learn, and grow. Engagement means being deeply interested and fully involved in the world.
- A prime example of engagement is the concept of flow. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi at Claremont Graduate University originally developed this concept by watching artists at work. He noticed that while the artists were painting, they became completely absorbed in what they were doing. They lost track of time and were utterly unselfconscious because they were so immersed in the process of creating.
- Studying flow in many other groups of people, Csikszentmihalyi found that the more flow people have in their lives, the happier they are. Flow can be exhilarating, and it's profoundly satisfying.
- We are most likely to experience flow when the challenge of a task matches our abilities. Adults are more likely to experience flow at work than during leisure time at home. This doesn't mean that we

should work all the time, but it does mean that we should think about the kinds of activities that give us a sense of flow. It's important to explain to our kids this concept of flow—of losing ourselves in an engrossing and challenging activity—to prompt them to think about activities that will enable the experience.

### Antidotes to Perfectionism

- Sometimes, perfectionistic thinking can interfere with a child's engagement with challenging activities. Perfectionism is a complex issue. On the one hand, having high standards encourages us to excel. On the other hand, excessive perfectionism is linked to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and eating disorders. Perfectionism can also encourage procrastination and diminish creativity because it makes us afraid of mistakes.
- We can help our children break free of perfectionism by helping them learn to embrace struggle and tolerate mistakes. One way to accomplish this is to help children understand the process of learning: In life, there are some tasks we have mastered, and some skills we haven't acquired yet. The learning zone lies in between.
- Another antidote to perfectionism is curiosity. Todd Kashdan at George Mason University argues that curiosity is the central element of a fulfilling life. Curiosity can be deeply engaging. It pulls us toward challenge and exploration.



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**Parents can keep kids' curiosity alive by modeling; share new things you've learned with your child or wonder aloud about things that pique your interest.**

- Curiosity may even make kids smarter. A longitudinal study found that kids who were highly curious at age 3 ended up being substantially more intelligent than their peers at age 11. This difference was evident even when the researchers statistically controlled for initial levels of intelligence.

### **A Sense of Meaning**

- A sense of meaning involves feeling connected to something larger than the self. For children, this usually means relationships. An international survey asked children ages 6 and 12 to identify what made them “feel safe and happy.” Family was mentioned most frequently by far, followed by friends.
- One of the best ways to help your child develop meaningful relationships is by encouraging kindness. Research with college students consistently shows that performing acts of kindness makes people feel happy.
- Volunteering is an ideal way to add meaning to our lives, and it can lead to what is called the “helper’s high.” It simply feels good to know we’re contributing to our communities and making the world a better place. People who began volunteering as children are twice as likely to volunteer as adults.
- For many families, religion or spirituality is a significant source of meaning because it promotes a sense of connection to a community and to God. A study involving children ages 8 to 12 found that children’s sense of spirituality was strongly related to their happiness.

### **Capacity for Resilience**

- Resilience is crucially important for promoting children’s happiness. Resilience is our capacity to thrive despite adverse circumstances. Resilience can involve overcoming adversity, functioning well under challenging circumstances, or rebounding successfully after a traumatic experience.

- Ann Masten at the University of Minnesota calls resilience “ordinary magic” because—fortunately—resilience is common. Four decades of research covering adverse circumstances ranging from poverty to war to natural disasters has revealed several basic characteristics and circumstances that children require to overcome difficult situations.
  - Children need an intimate connection to at least one competent and caring adult. Community resources, such as skilled and knowledgeable teachers, compassionate friends, and safe neighborhoods, also promote resilience.
  - The innate qualities of the child are significant. Kids do better in tough situations when they have effective skills for problem solving, emotion regulation, and self-control.
  - Children can also face adversity better when they believe that life is meaningful and that they have the power to obtain what they want or need. Believing that there’s a spiritual dimension to the world that gives them hope is also beneficial.
- Masten emphasizes that when these basic internal and external resources are in place, children can flourish despite adversity. With appropriate support, children have an extraordinary capacity to conquer past difficulties and create happy lives.

### Suggested Reading

Carter, *Raising Happiness*.

Chansky, *Freeing Your Child from Negative Thinking*.

Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*.

Greenspon, *Freeing Our Families from Perfectionism*.

Kashdan, *Curious?*

Kennedy-Moore and Lowenthal, *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids*.

Martin, *Making People Happy*.

Masten, *Ordinary Magic*.

### Questions to Consider

1. What positive family experiences or events would your child enjoy savoring?
2. How have you tried to help your child develop a healthy perspective on achievement—one that embraces effort and healthy striving but doesn't involve perfectionism?
3. What family activities do you do, or could you do, to help your child find meaning through being connected to the broader world?

# How Children Make Friends

## Lecture 7

**F**riendships are crucial for children. Research has demonstrated that when children have close, reciprocal friends, they have higher self-esteem, feel less lonely, demonstrate a more positive attitude toward school, cope better with stress, and are less likely to be bullied. Friends can also help children learn important social skills, such as empathy and cooperation. As parents, we know that we cannot make friends for our kids, nor can we hasten social and emotional development. In this lecture, we'll focus on how children make friends, explain the developmental processes that affect friendship, and explore practical approaches that parents can take to support and encourage their children's ability to connect with peers.

### Developmental Changes

- Children's approaches to friendship vary depending on their age and stage of development. As children mature, they become better able to understand another person's perspective, which adds depth and meaning to their friendships.
- At a practical level, parents should understand the role that developmental changes have in children's friendships, because this understanding provides a context for interpreting social behavior. Understanding developmental changes makes us better equipped to respond in caring and helpful ways to our children's social challenges.

### Selman's Five Stages of Friendship

- Based on interviews with children of different ages, psychologist Robert Selman identified five levels, or stages, in children's friendships. Because children mature at different rates and because temperament can affect friendship formation, there is some age overlap and variability in the stages.

- Selman's first level can be characterized as the "I want it my way" stage of friendship, which corresponds to children ages 3 to 6. Children at this stage view friends as momentary playmates. Their friends tend to be those who live conveniently nearby and share similar activities. Children in the first stage like the idea of having friends, and they prefer some peers over others, but they are not reliable friends.
- The second level in Selman's framework, which corresponds to ages 5 to 9, is the "What's in it for me?" stage. At this level, children understand that friendship goes beyond the immediate activity, but they define friends as children who share their treats, save them a seat on the bus, or give them presents. They don't think much about what they themselves contribute to friendship.
- The third level is the "by the rules" stage of friendship, usually seen in children 6 to 12 years old. At this stage, children are able to consider a friend's perspective in addition to their own but not at the same time. They understand the importance of taking turns, and they're very concerned about fairness, but they expect favors in return.
- Selman's fourth level is the "caring and sharing" stage, which corresponds to ages 8 to 15. At this stage, friends help each other solve problems and confide personal thoughts and feelings. They know how to compromise, and they treat their friends kindly, without "keeping score," because they genuinely care about the other person's happiness.
- The fifth state of Selman's framework is "mature friendship," which corresponds to ages 12 and up. At this stage, children place a high value on emotional closeness with friends, and their friendships emphasize trust and support and remaining close despite separations. Children at this stage can accept and even appreciate differences between themselves and their friends and are less likely to feel threatened if their friends have other relationships.

## How Parents Can Help

- Whether they're toddlers, teens, or somewhere in between, kids want to have friends, but they may struggle with the process. A little help from parents can make a significant difference.
- As parents, when we offer guidance to children, especially in such a sensitive area as friendship, we need to use a gentle hand. If kids feel criticized or overwhelmed, they'll shut down and reject our suggestions. What's more, older kids and teens can feel excruciatingly self-conscious about their social behavior.
- Look for teachable moments, when your child isn't too upset to talk or listen. And take such lessons slowly. Let your child master one skill before working on another. It may be less threatening for your child to learn about friendship issues if you use other people as examples—a character from a book or movie, someone in the neighborhood, or a relative.
- There's no one right answer when it comes to perfecting social skills. Your children can have serious friends and silly friends, quiet friends and boisterous friends. Our job as parents is to work with, rather than against, our children's enduring characteristics. We want to treasure who they are but also help them grow in their own special ways.

## Openness to Friendship

- Research points to three key elements that underlie friendship formation at all ages: openness, similarity, and shared activities.
- Every friendship begins with some indication that two people are interested in becoming friends—an openness to friendship. A basic way to show openness is to greet potential friends. You may want to use role-play to help your child practice greeting people. Explain to your child that a friendly greeting involves making eye contact, smiling warmly, speaking loudly enough to be heard, and saying the other person's name.



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**It's impossible to overstate the importance of friendship for children.**

- Sincere compliments are another way to signal openness to friendship. Small kindnesses can effectively demonstrate liking, as well, such as lending a pencil to a classmate, saving someone a seat, carrying books, or sharing a lunch treat. Kindness tends to elicit kindness, and it's one of the best ways to begin a friendship.

### **Similarity**

- The second element in successful friendship formation is similarity. One of the most robust findings in research on children's friendships is that children tend to be friends with other children they perceive are similar to them. Kids are most likely to be friends with others of the same age, sex, and ethnicity; friends also tend to be more similar in terms of interests, social skills, popularity, and academic achievement.
- Children who don't understand the importance of similarity for starting friendships may subscribe to the "magnet theory" of friendships. They believe they have to be so wonderful that they

draw friends to them. But the magnet theory is wrong because fundamentally, friendship is a relationship between equals. Instead of trying to get other kids to admire them, children need to find common ground with potential friends.

- To help your child understand the importance of similarity, try this exercise: Draw two overlapping circles and say, “This circle is you. The other circle is another child. The part in the middle—the overlap—is where friendships grow. If you’re talking about something that’s outside the overlap, that’s true only of you and not the other child, and that has nothing to do with friendship.”

### **Shared Activities**

- The third element of friendship formation is shared activities. Kids make friends by pursuing interests together. Sometimes this involves organized, adult-led activities, such as after-school sports, clubs, or classes. These give children shared knowledge and experiences.
- But unstructured time together is especially important for building friendships, because it allows children more freedom to choose what they want to do and with whom they want to share their time. This can lead to more meaningful interactions that create strong connections.

### **Observe, Then Blend**

- Playground research reveals a specific way for a child to join in when other kids are playing: Observe, then blend. In other words, watch what the other kids are doing, then slide into the action without interrupting.
- As an example for your children, you can compare the process to merging onto a highway in a car. There are two ways in which this process can go wrong: One way is to hang back and just watch the cars go by, which means we never get to where we want to go. The other way is to barge in, without looking, which causes a crash.

- Research has demonstrated that children who are successful at joining group activities generally do not try to draw attention to themselves and do not interrupt the play. We also know that children are most likely to be successful at joining the play of an individual child or a group of four or more and that even well-liked children get rejected about one out of every four times they try to join in. If that happens, your child should walk away calmly and either approach a different group or try again with the same group later.
- You may want to go to a playground with your child to study the process together. Have your child observe the activity, then talk about it or even try different ways to blend in. This might involve standing in line to use the slide, retrieving a ball for some kids playing catch, running around to join a game of tag, getting extra supplies for a group doing a project, or waiting for a break in the action of a pickup game, then asking the losing team if they need another player.

### **Talk about Feelings and Friendship**

- As parents, we can support our children’s social development by trying to make our homes places where friendships can grow. We can have other kids over, and we can offer our children the coaching they need to make sure those play dates go smoothly.
- We can also talk to our children about feelings and relationships. Research tells us that parents who talk more about feelings tend to have children who are better able to understand other people’s perspectives. Gaining a broader, less self-centered perspective is what allows children to deepen their friendships.

### **Suggested Reading**

Bagwell and Schmidt, *Friendship in Childhood and Adolescence*.

Dewar, “Friendship in Children.”

———, “How to Help Kids Make Friends.”

Elman and Kennedy-Moore, *The Unwritten Rules of Friendship*.

Kennedy-Moore and Lowenthal, *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids*.

Rubin and Thompson, *The Friendship Factor*.

Wood, *Yardsticks*.

### Questions to Consider

1. At what level is your child in Selman's framework for friendship development?
2. What are some concrete examples of how you can talk about feelings with your child?

# Playing Well with Others

## Lecture 8

**P**lay is the foundation and language of childhood, and successful play is crucial for forming and maintaining friendships. In a study that asked preschoolers what they do with their friends, 75 percent said that they play together. And yet, in our busy, test-driven, technology-saturated world, many children have less opportunity for traditional forms of play than kids did a generation or two ago. In this lecture, we'll focus on how children play with their peers and what we, as parents, can do to support that play. We'll consider three forms of play that are common on playgrounds: pretend play, rough-and-tumble play, and games with rules.

### Pretend Play

- The earliest forms of pretend play appear around 12 months, when children use a toy object as if it were real. It's not until children are about 2 or older that they can act out short, simple scenarios with other children, such as going to the doctor or putting the baby to bed. During preschool, pretend play is a main focus. Children ages 3, 4, and 5 act out increasingly elaborate and prolonged pretend scenes with their peers. Past kindergarten, children are more likely to play games with rules, but they still engage in pretend play.
- Some education experts contend that pretend play can fuel cognitive, social, and emotional development in children. However, a meticulous review by Angeline Lillard and her colleagues at the University of Virginia, covering about 50 years' worth of research on pretend play, concluded that we do not have solid evidence that pretend play is a primary cause of *any* positive developmental outcomes.
- Still, pretend play can be significant and beneficial even if it does not directly cause positive development. Play can help children understand or cope with stressful or confusing events in their lives. Pretend play allows children to explore relationships, situations, or possibilities that matter to them. Popular themes in the pretend play

of young children include getting lost and being found, being small and being powerful, facing danger and being rescued, and dying and being reborn.

### Gender Differences in Play

- In pretend play, girls often pretend to be animals, fairies, or princesses, or they act out domestic scenes. Boys are more likely than girls to pretend to be superheroes or action characters, such as monsters, dinosaurs, knights, or ninjas, and they are more likely to engage in war play.
- Parents and experts have widely varying opinions about war play. Some argue that war play is just pretend and that most kids understand that. Given that we don't try to restrict girls' pretend play, we should not restrict boys' interests either. Others see war play as condoning violence and dehumanization, and they worry about someone getting hurt.
- A good guideline is probably not to purchase realistic toy weapons but not to forbid war play either. For the majority of kids who don't have problems with aggression, playing "the good guys versus the bad guys" is not harmful. Further, the idea of being strong and powerful is compelling to young boys.



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**Like drawings, pretend play can give us a glimpse into children's thoughts and feelings or wishes and concerns.**

### Rough-and-Tumble Play versus Real Fighting

- Rough-and-tumble play involves chasing, wrestling, and pretend fighting. It may involve taking on imaginary roles, such as pretending to be a superhero or a pirate. Like pretend play, rough-and-tumble play starts with toddlers and increases in the preschool

years, but it peaks later—in late elementary or middle school, rather than kindergarten.

- Rough-and-tumble play is quite common: About 60 percent of elementary school boys report that they engage in play fighting, and around 85 percent play chase. Girls are much less likely to engage in play fighting, but they enjoy playing chase. Although the majority of boys participate in rough-and-tumble play, it only comprises 1/10 of their free time. Some have argued that rough-and-tumble play is useful for venting feelings, but there is no empirical basis for this theory.
- It's important to note that rough-and-tumble play among young children does not involve real anger or aggression. There are significant differences between rough-and-tumble play and real fighting.
  - Rough-and-tumble play takes place between friends, and it starts with an invitation. Real fighting occurs between nonfriends, and it starts with a challenge, which the other boy has to accept or he risks losing face.
  - In rough-and-tumble play, kids are smiling, laughing, and having a good time; in real fights, they're frowning or crying. In rough-and-tumble play, the stronger partner holds back, the hits are far from full force, and partners take turns chasing or being on top of the heap. In real fights, kids are trying to hurt each other.
  - It's common for rough-and-tumble play to involve three or four children, but fights rarely involve more than two children. Also, kids usually continue playing together after rough-and-tumble play but not after a fight. If you have trouble distinguishing between real and pretend fighting, you may want to ask kids directly, "Is everyone having fun?" If not, the fight needs to stop.
- Fathers may play a key role in helping boys learn not to be too rough. There's also some intriguing research by neuroscientist

Jaak Panksepp showing that giving young, hyperactive rats ample opportunity to engage in play fighting helps them develop the ability to inhibit aggressive behavior.

- If your child has trouble in this area, it may help to practice rough-and-tumble play with a parent. But be sure that each practice session ends with the parent being gently but firmly dominant.

### Games with Rules

- Playground research shows that 7-year-olds spend about 10 percent of their free time playing games with rules, but 11-year-olds spend more than 40 percent of their time in this type of play. Such games have explicit, established rules, but these rules are sometimes variable. It's common for elementary school children to spend more time arguing about the rules of a game than actually playing the game.
- Games with rules often involve physical skill and the risk of losing—and that's where many kids get into trouble. They gloat when they win or cry when they lose. They cheat or loudly accuse other players of cheating. When the game is not going their way, they try to change the rules or just quit the game.
- Because children under 5 don't really understand the idea of rules, it doesn't make sense to focus on competition at this age. From about age 6 onward, however, games are an important part of children's play, so kids need to be able to cope with winning and losing. This is an emerging skill; many children can't manage good sportsmanship until about age 9 or 10.
- If you have a child who struggles in this area, you may want to work on building up his or her tolerance for competitive games. Start with short, beat-your-own-record games, such as marking on the sidewalk to see how far your child can jump. After that, you can try cooperative board games. The next step is kids-against-adults games, because a loss feels acceptable and a victory is especially sweet. You can take as many or as few of these steps as your child needs to learn that winning and losing are temporary and tolerable.

## **Implicit Rules**

- In games, there are explicit rules, but there are also implicit rules, such as choosing fair teams and not quitting in the middle of the game. In rough-and-tumble play, the implicit rules are not to hit too hard, to choose a friend rather than a nonfriend, and to smile and laugh to show that you're not serious.
- In pretend play, the implicit rules are mostly about contributing to the narrative: Choose a role that fits with your friend's role, respond to what your friend does, and act in ways that your character would act. To play well with others, children need to be able to discern and follow both explicit and implicit rules.
- Israeli psychologist Shlomo Ariel worked with anthropologist Irene Sever to document the mini-legal systems that children devise to govern their play. These include "laws" governing who leads, who's allowed to participate, and who has rights to which toys and play territories.
- But children's rules don't necessarily match adults' rules. Experts on children's folklore tell us that there have always been subversive themes in children's play. This brings up a paradox: On the one hand, children need to follow rules so that their play can proceed smoothly. On the other hand, play—like creativity—involves stepping outside the rules of conventional interaction.

## **The Dark Side of Child's Play**

- In all three forms of play—pretend play, rough-and-tumble play, and games with rules—there are elements of a dark side: themes of danger, dominance, and aggression. Adults often try to stamp these out.
- But anyone who has spent time with children knows that they are not always little angels. They can be casually cruel, deliberately destructive, or terrifyingly risky in the face of physical danger. Although sometimes we need to step in and put some limits on children's play, we want to do this as little as possible.

- Too much adult involvement can drain away the autonomy and spontaneity that are a critical part of children's play.
  - For instance, Edward Deci and his colleagues at the University of Rochester videotaped mothers and their children ages 6 and 7 playing with building toys. They found that when mothers made a higher percentage of controlling remarks during play, their children were less interested in playing with those toys when their moms left the room.
  - In other words, when adults take over too much, kids shut down. The most important rule of play is: Have fun.

### Suggested Reading

Dunn, *Children's Friendships*.

Kennedy-Moore, "Imaginary Friends."

Kennedy-Moore and Lowenthal, *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids*.

Lillard et al., "The Impact of Pretend Play on Children's Development."

Smith, *Children and Play*.

Sobel, *Everybody Wins*.

### Questions to Consider

1. Which do you think is harder for kids—cooperation or competition?
2. How do you think our busy lifestyles affect children's ability to play? How were things different a generation or two ago?

# Making Up and Breaking Up with Friends

## Lecture 9

**B**FFs, or best friends forever, is the ideal when it comes to children's friendships, but research—and life experience—tell us that life doesn't always work out that way. Sometimes, children's friendships end in anger; more often, friends just drift apart. Although the end of a friendship is often distressing, it can give children an opportunity to focus on deepening other relationships. Occasionally, friendships end because of factors outside the children's control. But there's one aspect within children's control that can have a significant impact on friendship longevity: how they handle conflict. In this lecture, we explore the nature of children's conflicts with friends and provide strategies parents can use to help their children resolve conflicts.

### Best Friends

- Some experts insist that children should not have best friends. They argue that keeping friendships light spares kids the heartache that comes when close relationships end. But that position ignores an important values issue: Discouraging best friendships tells kids that shallow relationships are preferable.
- Rather than banning best friends, parents should help children understand that they can have many different types of friends—some of them close, some of them more casual. Having multiple friends and multiple circles of friends, gives children more options for weathering the ups and downs of a particular relationship.

### Conflicts with Friends

- Conflicts with friends are extremely common among children. Observational studies of preschool and young elementary school friends have demonstrated that kids average just under three conflicts an hour. Friends actually have more conflicts than nonfriends, mainly because they spend more time together. But

friends' conflicts are usually less intense and more likely to be resolved satisfactorily.

- Fortunately, conflicts between young children tend to be very short: One study found that 92 percent of preschoolers' arguments have fewer than 10 back-and-forth exchanges, and 66 percent are over in 4 or fewer exchanges. Conflicts between children in elementary school focus less on objects and more on social behavior. By the teen years, arguments are mostly about relationship issues.
- Not only do conflict topics become more elaborate as kids get older, but the conflicts themselves often last longer. With school-age children and teens, hurt feelings can go on for days or even months.

### **Gender Differences in Friendship Conflict**

- Being disappointed by friends may be especially hard on girls. Psychologists Julie MacEvoy and Steve Asher presented fourth- and fifth-graders with vignettes involving violations of friendship expectations. Usually, when researchers give children vignettes about minor conflicts, girls do better at choosing problem solving, while boys advocate more aggressive strategies focused on getting their way or getting even.
- But with these friendship violation vignettes, girls were equal to boys in endorsing revenge and aggression. Compared to boys, girls interpreted friendship violations much more harshly. Girls also reported that they would be much more upset by these conflicts. MacEvoy and Asher speculate that although both boys and girls expect their friends to be sympathetic to them, girls may set the bar higher for deciding whether a friend is meeting those expectations.

### **Conflict Resolution Strategies by Age**

- A meta-analysis conducted by Brett Laursen and his colleagues at Florida Atlantic University found that children's conflict resolution strategies change with age.



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**The transition to middle or high school can be a particularly vulnerable time for friendships because young people are thrown into new and larger social environments.**

- Children between 2 and 10 years old are most likely to resolve conflicts with peers through coercion, which means that one child forces the other child to concede. Adolescents between 11 and 18 years old resolve conflicts mainly through disengagement, which means withdrawing or dropping the conflict, without actually solving it. They would rather leave issues unresolved than risk ending a friendship. It's not until young adulthood, ages 19 to 25, that negotiation becomes the predominant way that people resolve conflicts.

### **Tattling as Emotion Regulation**

- A common conflict resolution strategy among younger children is tattling. Observations of preschool children conducted by Gordon Ingram at Queen's University—Belfast found that girls and boys tattled about the same amount, with an average of more than one episode of tattling per child per day. The range of behavior showed

some children not tattling at all, and some tattling on average more than six times per day.

- The reason that young children tattle so much is ... it works. A total of 70 percent of tattles elicited either acknowledgment or support from an adult, and only 6 percent of tattles resulted in a reprimand for the tattler.
- Tattling can also serve as an intermediate step in emotion regulation, when children have enough self-control not to hit a frustrating peer, but they cannot quite manage to negotiate effectively. Ingram found that tattling rarely resulted in punishment of the misbehaving child, but the children doing the tattling seemed to be satisfied that the adult heard and understood their concerns.

### **Post-Conflict Reconciliation**

- Meta-analysis and tattling research do not generally show what happens after a conflict. But animal studies conducted by Frans de Waal at Emory University found that primates often show post-conflict reconciliation behavior. This kind of reconciliation behavior is noted in about 30 different primate species, as well as hyenas, dolphins, and goats. From a survival perspective, for animals living in groups, post-conflict reconciliation helps restore significant relationships that were disrupted by aggression.
- De Waal, along with his colleague Peter Verbeek, then wondered if young children also show post-conflict reconciliation behaviors. Observing preschoolers during free play over several months, the researchers found that about one-fifth of children's conflicts were resolved immediately, with the children continuing to play together. This was especially likely if one of the children gave an apology, a hug, or an offer to share.

### **How Parents Can Help**

- A number of strategies can help parents deal with a situation in which their child is in a conflict with a friend. Some children are

prone to arguing because they are very focused on being right. If this sounds like your child, you may want to help him or her understand that explaining, listening, and compromising elicit more positive responses than just insisting. It's usually better to lose an argument than to lose a friend.

- Keep in mind that children's feelings and relationships can change rapidly. This week, your son might tell you that he "hates Stuart's guts," but next week, he and Stuart may return to being best friends. You might stay up late worrying about the dramatic, tearful argument that your daughter had with her best friend, but when you ask her about it the next day, she might dismiss the whole event: "Oh, we're fine."
- Sometimes conflicts are just part of learning to be in a relationship. What's more, the vast majority of conflicts between children are settled—in one way or another—by the children themselves. Unless the conflict involves real bullying, parents should not get directly involved. Do not allow a conflict between children to spread to a conflict between adults in different families; that is a recipe for disaster.
- Although you cannot solve friendship conflicts for your child, you can offer some support and guidance. When kids are feeling hurt by a friend, it's tempting for them to lash out and try to hurt the friend. But retaliation is likely to escalate the conflict and should be discouraged.
- When your child is calm enough to think things through, you may be able to offer some benign explanations for the friend's misbehavior. If the problem is something that happens repeatedly, children may want to let the friend know—in a respectful way—what's bothering them. Perhaps the friend doesn't even realize that there was a problem. Help your child phrase the complaint in terms of a personal reaction to a specific behavior.

## Forgiveness and Apology

- A crucial way to move past conflict is through forgiveness. Sometimes, when a friend has wronged us, we need to speak up, but other times, we just need to let it go. This does not mean that we pretend that the offense didn't happen. It does mean contemplating the friend with an open heart and treating the friend the way we'd like to be treated. Forgiveness doesn't have to involve a formal declaration; it's an internal decision. It is a leap of faith and an act of compassion.
- Following are some guidelines to foster forgiveness:
  - If it only happened once, and it's unlikely ever to happen again, let it go.
  - If it wasn't deliberate, let it go.
  - If it happened more than a month ago, definitely let it go.
- The reverse side of forgiveness is apology. A sincere apology is one of the fastest and most reliable ways to move past conflict. And according to the indispensable Dear Abby, "The person who is least wrong should apologize first!"
- If the friendship was successful before the conflict, the child should keep the door open to reuniting somewhere down the road. Often, all that friends need to get past a conflict is some time for tempers to cool and to reconnect through a kind gesture or a shared activity.

### Suggested Reading

Borba, *Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me*.

Corsaro, "Preadolescent Peer Cultures."

Elman and Kennedy-Moore, *The Unwritten Rules of Friendship*.

Kennedy-Moore, "Can Boys and Girls Be Friends?"

Laursen and Pursell, "Conflict in Peer Relationships."

Thompson, Grace, and Cohen, *Best Friends, Worst Enemies*.

Verbeek, Hartup, and Collins, "Conflict Management in Children and Adolescents."

### Questions to Consider

1. Does your child have a best friend? What benefits does he or she seem to derive from that relationship?
2. Are certain kinds of conflict harder for children to manage?

# Belonging, Status, Popularity, and Rejection

## Lecture 10

To understand the social world of children, we need to examine not only their one-on-one friendships but also their social standing within the broader peer group. Starting in elementary school, children begin to think about how other children view them. That is when concerns about belonging, status, popularity, and rejection begin to intensify. In this lecture, we'll explore peer group status among children and present practical ways that parents can help their children cope with the harsher aspects of peer group culture. Parents can be a voice that counters a manipulative focus on status and power in favor of authentic relationships.

### Gossip

- The activity that fuels peer reputations is gossip. Research has demonstrated that gossip—defined as talking to someone about a third person—is extremely common. It makes up about two-thirds of naturally occurring conversations, and men and women do it about the same amount. What's more, not just young people gossip; there is plenty of evidence of gossip in the workplace.
- Although gossip can be malicious, it's often spread with no intention to hurt. For children, it can serve an important social function. Gossip can reinforce group norms, and it can create a sense of intimacy. Children—and adults—are much more likely to gossip with friends than with acquaintances.
- Kristina McDonald and her colleagues at Duke University recorded fourth-graders having conversations with close friends. On average, during the 15-minute conversations, the girls engaged in 36 instances of gossip, involving 25 different people.
- The vast majority of the gossip recorded in the Duke study was not malicious. More than half the comments simply conveyed information; another quarter were for entertainment; and only

7 percent were aggressive remarks that could hurt someone's reputation or relationships.

- Parents should make sure that their children understand that they can hurt someone badly through gossip. Repeating a story that might not be true or—worse—making up a story is just plain vicious. Reputations can be ruined quickly, and they are difficult to repair afterward.

## **Reputation**

- One way that researchers have studied the impact of reputation is by asking children to identify the three kids they like best and the three kids they like least. Researchers then summarize these likability ratings to determine the reputation, or sociometric status, of individual children.
- Children with average reputations do not stand out in any particular way. Well-liked children tend to be friendly, cooperative, and kind. They can be assertive when they need to be, but they are not disruptive. Controversial kids, who receive numerous likes and dislikes, tend to be aggressive rule breakers, but they can also take on leadership roles. Neglected children, who are neither particularly liked nor disliked by their peers, are not very outgoing, but they are also not lonely, and they're usually well-liked by teachers.
- The children who concern us most are the rejected ones, who are widely disliked by their peers. Compared to other children, rejected children are more likely to drop out of school, become delinquents, and suffer from serious psychological problems.

## **Four Types of Rejected Children**

- Researchers find four main groups of rejected children: angry kids, withdrawn kids, out-of-sync kids, and highly emotional kids.
- Many rejected children are very aggressive and prone to angry outbursts. Because peers are likely to find these outbursts annoying

or frightening, they avoid these children. Angry kids need help learning to handle conflicts and manage negative emotions.

- Withdrawn children are anxious. They hold themselves apart from their peers and do not show or respond to friendly gestures. These kids need support, guidance, and practice to become more competent and comfortable in social situations.
- Out-of-sync kids may have interests or habits that their peers consider odd or babyish.
- Highly emotional kids are prone to crying, which is disconcerting to peers. Even more important, children who spend time crying spend less time playing, learning, talking, and interacting with others.



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### Repeated Rejection

- If you think your child is generally disliked by peers, try to address the behaviors contributing to this reputation. Otherwise, your child might keep re-creating negative outcomes with new people.
- Psychologists John Coie and Janis Kupersmidt of Duke University identified rejected fourth-grade boys and placed them in new playgroups with boys who were either classmates or strangers. The playgroups met once a week for six weeks. Within three sessions, the boys who were disliked by their classmates became similarly disliked by the unfamiliar kids in their new playgroups.
- Repeated rejection is crushing for children; thus, in addition to working on behaviors that tend to push peers away, it's also

**Unless there's a physical injury involved, from about first grade on, children pay a social cost for crying in front of peers.**

important to give your child opportunities for a fresh start in situations that work with, rather than against, his or her natural tendencies. If your child is active, these opportunities may involve sports. If your child is on the shy side, music or theater might fit the bill. Volunteer activities can also be an outlet for your child to interact in positive ways.

## **Popularity**

- In 1998, psychologists Jennifer Parkhurst and Andrea Hopmeyer at the University of Illinois asked a question that took reputation research in a whole new direction: “Who are the most popular children in your class?”
- Surprisingly, they found that seventh- and eighth-graders nominated by their peers as very popular were not necessarily well-liked. Instead, the popular children tended to be controversial—meaning many kids liked them and many kids disliked them. Other researchers have found that only 9 percent of popular children are well-liked.
- Popular children are likely to act friendly, but they show higher-than-average levels of aggression. Popular kids use aggression strategically to hurt rivals and enhance their own social power.

## **Cliques**

- Not only individual children but groups of children—or cliques—also have reputations. A clique is a friendship group of about three to nine kids. Clique members tend to have similar activities, attitudes, and interests, and they have their own norms about how to behave. Cliques serve as an intermediate step toward developing an independent identity.
- Some adults think that cliques are negative influences because they involve exclusivity. However, cliques are an unavoidable part of children’s increasing emphasis on intimacy in friendship.

- A study by psychologists Patricia Adler and Peter Adler found that by fourth or fifth grade, both boys and girls organize themselves into cliques.
  - At the top of this hierarchy, roughly one-third of students belong to the dominant, popular clique. This clique generally has one or two leaders, who strategically dole out attention to favored members and ignore less-favored members.
  - Below the popular group is the “wannabe” group, which consists of about 10 percent of students. These kids hang around the edges of the popular group.
  - Next in the hierarchy are the middle-status cliques, which include 50 percent of students. These are smaller, independent friendship groups. Popular clique members look down on these children, but—frankly—that’s where you want your child to be because the emphasis here is on genuine friendship rather than status.
  - At the bottom of the peer group hierarchy are 5–10 percent of students who do not belong to any clique and are socially isolated. These children are very much at risk of bullying because they have no one to protect them.
- Although cliques are a major aspect of children’s social relationships in late elementary and middle school, in high school, there’s a trend toward degrouping. The boundaries between cliques ease, and many teens report that they belong to several cliques or none. Compared to younger kids, older teens place a greater emphasis on being unique individuals, rather than conforming to peer norms, and they generally care more about having intimate relationships rather than fitting into a group.

### **The Myth of Peer Pressure**

- Many parents worry about peer pressure associated with cliques. There’s plenty of research showing that preadolescents and teens are more likely to make poor choices—from bullying, to substance

abuse, to neglecting their schoolwork—if they spend time with friends who engage in these pursuits. It is unclear, however, whether kids influence one other in negative ways or whether kids with similar inclinations are simply drawn to one other.

- A review of the research on peer influence concluded that peer pressure is a myth. It's actually very rare for peers to try to compel someone else. When friends influence friends, they do it in more subtle ways, rather than through forceful pressure. They laugh about, approve, or encourage certain behaviors. They may also model those behaviors or offer persuasive arguments. If your child has conscientious friends, they are likely to have a positive influence.

### **Strategies for Parents**

- If a child is concerned about cliques at school, it's crucial that parents respond in a caring way. At the same time, parents should not overreact. The drama surrounding peer groups can be alarming or compelling to children; parents can help maintain a balanced outlook.
- Just as there are ethical and responsible ways to run a business, there are ethical and responsible ways to relate to peers. Parents should not get caught up in their children's pursuit of popularity. When children feel buffeted by the pull of popularity, status, and group norms, parents can help them keep life in perspective by reminding them of the importance of real friendship.

### **Suggested Reading**

Adler and Adler, *Peer Power*.

Asher and McDonald, "The Behavioral Basis of Acceptance, Rejection, and Popularity."

Asher, Rose, and Gabriel, "Peer Rejection in Everyday Life."

Frankel, *Friends Forever*.

Ingram, "From Hitting to Tattling to Gossip."

Kennedy-Moore, "Is Your Child Inviting Rejection?"

McDonald et al., "Gossip, Friendship, and Sociometric Status."

### Questions to Consider

1. To what category of sociometric status does your child belong?
2. How can you help your children see the importance of real friendship when they are attracted to joining the "popular" group of kids?

# Teasing and Bullying

## Lecture 11

**W**e've all heard of children who have suffered physical or emotional abuse from their peers and read frightening stories where bullying leads to suicide or violent retaliation. Being the target of bullying can lead to anxiety, depression, and poor self-esteem, and the effects can last into adulthood. What's more, the long-term consequences of bullying are often as bad or even worse for the bullies. Bullying is a serious and complicated problem. In this lecture, we'll take a nuanced view of aggression between children that's informed by research. We'll also suggest approaches for parents to help their children respond to or prevent bullying.

### Bullying

- Researchers have a specific definition of bullying: It involves deliberate, aggressive acts targeting a particular individual repeatedly over time—and it entails a power difference between the bully and the target.
- Bullying can be physical or verbal. Relational bullying involves spreading rumors or convincing other kids to exclude someone. Cyberbullying takes place online.
- The term *bullying* can be overused, however. As an example, let's say that Anna calls her classmate Zoe a "big, fat meanie." Anna's teacher accuses Anna of bullying. Although calling someone names is malicious and Anna obviously needs to learn better ways to resolve conflicts and handle frustration, this is not bullying. There is no power difference between Anna and Zoe. Anna's act is ordinary meanness.
- When we fail to distinguish between bullying and ordinary meanness, we dilute the significance of the very serious cases of peer abuse.

## Ordinary Meanness

- Children engage in ordinary meanness on a regular basis. Researcher Debra Pepler at York University and her colleagues recorded the playground behavior of children whose teachers had identified them as either aggressive or nonaggressive. On average, the aggressive children performed mean behaviors about every 2 minutes. The nonaggressive children, however, averaged a mean behavior every 3 minutes.
- Physically aggressive acts occurred every 7 minutes for the aggressive kids and every 11 minutes for the nonaggressive kids. Verbal attacks happened on average every 17 minutes with the aggressive kids and every 49 minutes with the nonaggressive kids. That seems like a great deal of aggression.
- Research suggests that inevitably, at some point, some other child will be mean to yours. And, at some point, your child will do or say something mean to another child. As parents, then, we have two challenges:
  - We need to help our children learn to cope with ordinary meanness so that it is less likely to escalate into full-fledged bullying.
  - We need to help our children learn to behave in caring and considerate ways.

## Antidote to Bullying

- The best antidote to bullying is friendship. Children who have a best friend are less likely to be bullied. Simply standing near a friend makes a child less of a target for meanness. Having caring friends can also minimize the emotional impact of bullying, and having different groups of friends gives children more social options.
- Several studies have found that having a warm and supportive family can minimize the negative effects of being bullied. As parents, you should not overreact in cases of ordinary meanness.



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**When your child is upset because another child is being mean, first offer a hug and a caring ear.**

Be sympathetic, but also be gently confident that with appropriate support, your child will be able to cope.

- If your child is the target of meanness or bullying, try to figure out exactly what happened. Your child may not have the full story. Psychologist Michael Thompson has a wonderful line to describe how children view conflict with their peers: “It all started when she hit me back!” It’s much easier to see what other people did wrong than to recognize our own contribution to a problem.
- Once you know what’s going on, you can help your child figure out how to respond. In the case of true bullying, where the meanness involves a real power difference, you probably need to involve school officials to keep your child safe. Do this discreetly to avoid having your child labeled as a tattletale.

- But you also want to think of strategies your child can use to avoid or cope with being the target of meanness. Standing near a teacher is often a useful strategy, as is having a plan for coping with malicious words or actions.

### **Mean Girls**

- Research tells us that girls are more likely to engage in relational aggression, which means spreading rumors or excluding someone, rather than physical aggression. But findings are mixed about whether girls or boys do more relational aggression overall.
- Relational bullying can be particularly upsetting for girls—perhaps because girls place a high value on intimate friendships.
- Sometimes girl meanness takes the form of a group of girls excluding another girl. In certain cases, the best option is to look for other friends. Girl meanness shifts into the realm of bullying if the girls used to be her friends, and now one or two are actively urging the other girls to reject her.

### **Teasing**

- The most common form of victimization in elementary school is teasing. Most kids get teased at some point, but research shows that the kids who are consistently picked on tend to be the ones who have the biggest emotional reactions.
- Parents can help their children plan calm responses to teasing. These responses don't have to be witty or clever. That's why the classic "I know you are, but what am I?" is still around. "So what?" is another effective generic response, as are "Thanks for noticing!" and "Whatever!" Having a ready response can feel enormously empowering for children.

### **Reactive Aggression**

- If you suspect your child is being mean or bullying others, ask yourself whether some stressor at home is contributing to your child's aggressive behavior and whether you can do something to

cut down on that stress. Harsh parenting styles, intense arguments between parents, and other major family problems can contribute to bullying.

- Psychologists distinguish between two main forms of aggression. Reactive aggression is very emotional—a child feels frustrated and lashes out. Proactive aggression is cooler and calculated to achieve social power.
- Research demonstrates that children who engage in reactive aggression tend to assume that others' actions are due to deliberate meanness, which makes them feel angry. They also think that being aggressive is an appropriate and effective way to deal with social problems.
- Children who are prone to reactive aggression can benefit from learning to notice early signs of their own anger, when it's easier to calm down. They can also learn to communicate in assertive rather than aggressive ways. These children tend to be impulsive and emotional rather than cruel, and parents should help them be more aware of other people's feelings and the impact of their actions on others.

### **Bi-Strategic Controllers**

- Proactive aggression is much harder to address because—unfortunately—it works. Patricia Hawley at the University of Kansas and her colleagues studied children who manage to be both very kind and very aggressive—especially to their friends—and who balance these two strategies in a way that enhances their social dominance.
- Hawley calls these children “bi-strategic controllers.” They're very good at understanding other people's perspectives, but they also lie, cheat, argue, and manipulate, and they are among the most aggressive children on the playground. They operate with Machiavellian self-interest, wielding both friendliness and meanness to get what they want.

- To counter bullying, some school-wide initiatives have focused on creating caring communities. Because peers are present in about 85 percent of bullying incidents, these programs encourage children to speak up to protect more vulnerable students or at least not to encourage bullying. Such programs cut down bullying by about 20 percent in the United States; however, bi-strategic kids seem to be very good at “working the system.”

### What Parents Can Do

- To help bi-strategic controllers, parents can use approaches aimed at an individual level. An effective strategy is to target rationalizations. Research shows that bullies tend to explain away the significance of their meanness by minimizing how bad it is, by comparing it to worse behavior, or by blaming the victim.
- Children may have a blind spot when it comes to understanding bullying. Psychologist Brent Harger found that fifth-graders maintained a false dichotomy between bullies and nonbullies. They assumed that bullies were always mean, and because they themselves weren’t always mean, they couldn’t possibly be bullies. They dismissed anti-bullying messages in their schools as “not relevant for them.”
- Another strategy for helping bi-strategic kids is to channel their need for power in a healthy direction. Encouraging them to work for a cause they care about could give them an opportunity to use their leadership skills for the greater good. We cannot help children move forward by convincing them of their badness.
- When someone criticizes us, we instinctively justify and defend. Therefore, an effective tool for helping bi-strategic kids—or any misbehaving child—is to offer “soft criticisms.”
  - With a soft criticism, you skirt the defense mechanisms because you start by offering an excuse that indicates you believe that the child’s intentions were good. You address the core goodness within the child.

- You might say something like “I’m sure you didn’t intend to” or “I realize it was an accident.” You can follow this up with “What could you do now to help your friend feel better?” or “What plan can we come up with to make sure this doesn’t happen again?”

## Suggested Reading

Coloroso, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*.

Crick and Dodge, “A Review and Reformulation of Social Information-Processing Mechanisms.”

Hanes, “Top Five Bullying Myths.”

Hawley, Little, and Card, “The Allure of a Mean Friend.”

Pepler, Craig, and Roberts, “Observations of Aggressive and Nonaggressive Children.”

Wachtel, “The Language of Becoming.”

## Questions to Consider

1. Does your child display any behaviors that make him or her a target for bullying?
2. How does your own experience with meanness or bullying affect your responses to your child’s peer difficulties?

# Growing Up Social in the Digital Age

## Lecture 12

Children today are digital natives. Cell phones and the Internet allow children immediate and continual access to their peers; video games offer kids entertaining and engrossing ways to play; and social media sites provide a high level of public exposure. In our final lecture, we'll look at three forms of children's digital interaction that have parallel behaviors in the real world but that differ in significant ways from face-to-face interaction: video game playing, cyberbullying, and "Facebook depression."

### Online Risks and "E-Maturity"

- Most research on the effects of digital communication involves teenagers, but younger children are increasingly found online. Nine out of 10 elementary school children in developed countries have access to the Internet at home.
- Martin Valecke at Ghent University and his colleagues argue that children often lack the "e-maturity" necessary to manage online risks. They found that 86 percent of children were involved in unsafe Internet use—exposed to privacy risks related to personal information, contact risks related to cyberbullying or talking to strangers online, and content risks related to inappropriate information.
- A U.S. national survey of children ages 10 to 17 found that 1 in 4 children had been exposed to unwanted sexual images on the Internet, and one-fourth of those were upset by what they saw. A Belgian study found that 40 percent of children between 10 and 12 years old had encountered shocking violent, sexual, or racial material online.
- *Sexting* refers to sending or receiving a text message containing a nude image. A 2009 survey by the Pew Research Center found that 15 percent of teens owning a cell phone had received a sexting

image from someone they knew, and 4 percent admitted to sending such images of themselves. Once that image is on the Internet, the sender has no control over where it is forwarded, displayed, or sold.

### **Helping Kids Navigate the Digital World**

- Online communication can supplement and support real-life conversations, but it cannot replace or replicate face-to-face interactions. A study by Roy Pea and his colleagues at Stanford University found that girls who spent more time watching videos, communicating online, and multitasking through media had lower social and emotional well-being. In contrast, girls who spent more time having face-to-face conversations were more likely to see themselves as “normal” and socially successful.
- Parents have an important role to play in helping their children navigate the digital world. We need to warn them about possible dangers and teach them how to respond when—not if—they encounter upsetting or inappropriate material online. We also need to help them keep electronic communication in perspective and to find a healthy balance in their social lives that leans heavily toward face-to-face interaction with family and friends. By all means, tell your children, “No texting at the dinner table.”
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than two hours of total screen time per day. This guideline can be difficult to enforce, however. Kids often need online access to do their homework, and they can be resourceful in getting around parental restrictions on Internet use.

### **Violent Video Games**

- A common complaint from parents is that their children, particularly boys, want to do nothing but play video games. Many parents are also concerned that their children are attracted to violent games.
- Video games are entertaining and engrossing and can be an enjoyable way to connect with friends, either online or in person. But video game play is also different from real-world play in

important ways. Kids playing video games don't look at each other while playing, and unlike pretend play or rough-and-tumble play, the game is created by the adults who programmed it, rather than coming from the imagination of a child.

- A Kaiser Family Foundation report notes that children ages 8 to 18 spend, on average, 1.5 hours per day playing video and computer games. What's more, children often play games that are intended for older players—games that have a rating of “Mature” and that have sexual and violent themes and strong language.
- An impressive amount of research has found that violent video games contribute to aggression. A meta-analysis determined that spending more time playing violent video games is linked to more aggressive thoughts, feelings, and actions, as well as less empathy, but the size of these effects is small.



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Some experts believe that it is the constant excitement, rewards from scoring points, and advancement to higher levels that make video games so compelling.

## **Rules and Time Limits on Video Game Play**

- The Kaiser Family Foundation found that only about one-third of families have rules limiting how much time children can spend playing video games. However, parental limits generally help reduce the time children spend on electronic media—by an average of nearly three hours a day.
- The best time for parents to set rules is *before* children have access to a technology. Explain to your child why you’re making the rules and, if possible, offer your child some say in what the rules are or how they’ll be enforced.
- It’s often simpler to ban video games completely during certain periods. Your rule might be no video games on school nights. If you decide to have a time limit of an hour a day, for example, a timer can help.
- Before buying video games or letting your child buy them, research and read the reviews. If your child’s video game playing is too difficult to control, you may want to consult a mental health professional. There may be social or emotional issues contributing to your child’s fixation on video games.

## **Cyberbullying**

- Another common concern of parents is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying involves using electronic communication to intimidate and harass someone, including sending malicious e-mails or text messages, posting humiliating photos, or broadcasting embarrassing information.
- Cyberbullying is less common than real-life bullying; however, because cyberbullying is highly public and easily spread, it can be devastating. Cyberbullying is often anonymous, leaving kids wondering who’s attacking them and why.
- As with traditional bullying, parents should give kids specific guidance about what kind of behavior is not acceptable online. For

example, children should never forward a bullying message, never pretend to be someone else online, and never spread malicious rumors online.

- Cyberbullying often has a sexual theme. In interviews of children in fifth and eighth grades, Faye Mishna and her colleagues at the University of Toronto found that girls are sometimes pressured by boys to flash intimate body parts while online.
- In a similar vein, sometimes young girls post videos of themselves online, asking strangers, “Am I pretty?” Although the girls may be trying to get an opinion about their appearance, what they receive instead is malicious cruelty. Parents should warn children not to seek connection with anonymous strangers; it sets them up for victimization.

### **Countering Cyberbullying: “Stop, Block, and Tell”**

- A crucial message for your children is that there is absolutely no privacy in digital communication. Any electronic message or image can be captured and shared, and it will live forever online. Tell your children: “Do not post or send anything electronically that you wouldn’t want broadcast over the morning announcements to your entire school.”
- Parents should also give their children specific instructions about what to do if they encounter cyberbullying. As with traditional bullying, targets of cyberbullying often don’t tell adults what’s happening—partly because they don’t believe telling adults would be helpful and partly because they fear that their parents will overreact and take away their access to digital communication.
- An effective strategy for parents to teach their kids is “Stop, Block, and Tell.” *Stop* means calm down and avoid doing anything rash; *Block* further messages from the bully; and *Tell* a trusted adult.

## **“Facebook Depression”**

- “Facebook depression” is *not* a recognized or valid mental disorder, but the term has become popular because it reflects a common experience: Even though social media sites are designed to create connections, sometimes people feel worse after spending time there.
- Research suggests two reasons for this phenomenon. First, social media sites can trigger negative social comparisons. Research with college students shows that more intense Facebook use predicts increased loneliness and declines in life satisfaction over time.
- A second reason is that social media can lead to misery through fear of missing out. Andrew Przybylski at the University of Essex and his colleagues define this as a “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent.”
- Being preoccupied with either popularity or social media status ultimately misses the point of social relationships, however. When we compare ourselves to others, we’re not fully engaged. We’re standing back, watching ourselves in a metaphorical mirror and judging.
- It’s important to keep Facebook and other sites like it in perspective. “Friending” someone is not the same as being a friend.

## **Advice for Parents**

- Wait until your children are in high school before letting them have social media profiles. Handling social media is easier if they are past the worst of the middle school herd mentality. Also, if your child is young enough to have a bedtime, his or her electronic media need a bedtime, too. Don’t let your kids text message all night.
- Talk to your children about valuing authentic relationships. Parents can be role models in this by scheduling play dates for their kids or inviting another family over for pizza and game night. Parents should also make a point of connecting with their children in meaningful ways. Sometimes that means just spending time with them and not being distracted by the to-do list.

- A theme throughout these lectures is that kindness is the key to friendship. Genuinely caring about others is what enables children to build friendships, to be good sports, and to move past conflicts. In the end, even in the digital age, relationships all come down to the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would like to be treated.

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Anderson et al., “Violent Video Game Effects.”

Ferguson, “*Blazing Angels* or *Resident Evil*?”

Gentile and Bushman, “Reassessing Media Violence Effects.”

Osit, *Generation Text*.

Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts, *Generation M2*.

### Questions to Consider

1. How can you, or do you, limit the amount of screen time your child has?
2. Do you think it’s possible to have friends that you have never met in person?

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Hanes, S. “Top Five Bullying Myths: What You Don’t Know About Bullying.” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 12, 2012. <http://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/Family/2012/0912/Top-5-bullying-myths-What-you-don-t-know-about-bullying/Bullies-lash-out-because-they-have-low-self-esteem>. Hanes puts to rest five myths about bullying, including the belief that bullies have low self-esteem and that zero-tolerance policies are effective in combating bullying.

Harter, S. *The Construction of the Self: Developmental and Sociocultural Foundations*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Guilford Press, 2012. Harter’s research provides compelling descriptions of the developmental sequence involved in how children think about and evaluate themselves.

Hawley, P. H., T. D. Little, and N. A. Card. “The Allure of a Mean Friend: Relationship Quality and Processes of Adolescents with Prosocial Skills.” *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 31 (2007): 170–180. Hawley and her colleagues describe research on “bi-strategic controllers,” who dole out meanness and kindness in strategic ways to enhance their own social power.

Ingram, G. P. D. “From Hitting to Tattling to Gossip: An Evolutionary Rationale for the Development of Indirect Aggression.” *Evolutionary Psychology* 10 (2012): 1–42. Ingram contends that kids become less physically aggressive when they engage in indirect forms of aggression, such as tattling and gossip.

Kashdan, T. B. *Curious? Discover the Missing Ingredient to a Fulfilling Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 2010. This book describes positive psychology research and offers thought-provoking exercises to explain how curiosity can contribute to a meaningful life.

Katz, L. F., A. C. Maliken, and N. M. Stettler. “Parental Meta-Emotion Philosophy: A Review of Research and Theoretical Framework.” *Child Development Perspectives* 6 (2012): 417–422. This article summarizes recent research on the benefits of emotion coaching.

Kazdin, A. E. *The Kazdin Method for Parenting the Defiant Child*. New York: Mariner Books, 2009. This book explains how to use a reward system to encourage children to behave in positive ways.

Keltner, D. *Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2009. Keltner’s book draws from cross-cultural research and evolutionary theory to examine the importance of positive emotions such as love, compassion, and awe, as well as positive emotional expressions, such as smiling and laughter. Keltner contends that altruism is one of our deepest instincts.

Kennedy-Moore, E. *Growing Friendships* (blog). [www.psychologytoday.com/blog/Growing-Friendships](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/Growing-Friendships). Sample posts include:

Kennedy-Moore, E. "Can Boys and Girls Be Friends?" *Growing Friendships* (blog), August 11, 2011. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/growing-friendships/201108/can-boys-and-girls-be-friends>.

———. "Imaginary Friends." *Growing Friendships* (blog), January 31, 2013. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/growing-friendships/201301/imaginary-friends>.

———. "Is Your Child Inviting Rejection?" *Growing Friendships* (blog), October 18, 2011. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/growing-friendships/201110/is-your-child-inviting-rejection>.

Kennedy-Moore, E., and M. S. Lowenthal. *Smart Parenting for Smart Kids: Nurturing Your Child's True Potential*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011. This book explains how parents can help children develop the social and emotional skills they need to become capable, confident, and caring people. Chapters include "Tempering Perfectionism," "Building Connection," "Handling Cooperation and Competition," and "Finding Joy."

Kennedy-Moore, E., and J. C. Watson. *Expressing Emotion: Myths, Realities, and Therapeutic Strategies*. New York: Guilford Press, 1999. This book, targeted to mental health professionals, reviews and synthesizes extensive research showing that whether or not emotional expression is healthy depends on what is expressed, to whom, and how.

Kindlon, D., and M. Thompson. *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2000. Kindlon and Thompson explore research and record vivid stories about the challenges facing boys in a "culture of cruelty."

Laursen, B., and G. Pursell. "Conflict in Peer Relationships." In *Handbook of Peer Interactions, Relationships, and Groups*, edited by K. H. Rubin, W. M. Bukowski, and B. Laursen, pp. 267–286. New York: Guilford Press,

2011. This chapter for professionals, which covers extensive research about children's conflicts, describes developmental shifts as well as individual differences in coping strategies and causes of peer conflict.

Lillard, A. S., M. D. Lerner, E. J. Hopkins, R. A. Dore, E. D. Smith, and C. M. Palmquist. "The Impact of Pretend Play on Children's Development: A Review of the Evidence." *Psychological Bulletin* 139 (2013): 1–34. Lillard and her colleagues review 50 years of research on pretend play, and conclude that it does *not* cause self-regulation, early language, social skills, or other positive developmental outcomes. However, play matters even if it doesn't always result in learning; it is a crucial aspect of children's friendships.

Martin, P. *Making People Happy*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2006. This thought-provoking book focuses on happiness across the life span. Presenting the research in an engaging way, Martin explains how parenting and education affect children's happiness.

Masten, A. *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development*. New York: Guilford Press, 2014. Masten has spent her career studying the key protective factors that children need to survive and thrive under very difficult circumstances, including poverty, disaster, and trauma. This book for professionals is a thorough review of research on resilience.

McDonald, K. L., M. Putallaz, C. L. Grimes, J. B. Kupersmidt, and J. D. Coie. "Gossip, Friendship, and Sociometric Status." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 53 (2007): 381–411. McDonald and her colleagues found an extremely high rate of gossip among fourth-grade girls; but the majority of that gossip was not malicious.

Mruk, C. *Self-Esteem and Positive Psychology: Research, Theory, and Practice*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Springer, 2013. A thorough and insightful review of research on self-esteem coupled with evidence-based clinical practices.

Osit, M. *Generation Text: Raising Well-Adjusted Kids in an Age of Instant Everything*. New York: AMACOM, 2008. Osit describes the conflicts over technology that he observes in his clinical practice and discusses relevant

research. The book offers practical ways parents can use balance, early intervention, and monitoring to minimize problems.

Pepler, D. J., W. M. Craig, and W. L. Roberts. "Observations of Aggressive and Nonaggressive Children on the School Playground." *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 44 (1998): 55–76. Pepler and her colleagues find that unkind acts are very common on the playground for both teacher-nominated aggressive kids and teacher-nominated nonaggressive kids.

Pincus, D. *Growing Up Brave: Expert Strategies for Helping Your Child Overcome Fear, Stress, and Anxiety*. New York: Little, Brown, 2012. Pincus provides a step-by-step guide for parents who want to help their children build up confidence and win their struggles with anxiety. This book also describes the PRIDE method for enhancing children's sense of security.

Powell, B., G. Cooper, K. Hoffman, and B. Marvin. *The Circle of Security Intervention: Enhancing Attachment in Early Parent–Child Relationships*. New York: Guilford Press, 2013. A beautiful metaphor and an established, research-based approach to helping parents become more attuned and responsive to children ages 5 and under.

Rideout, V., U. Foehr, and D. Roberts. *Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds*. Menlo Park, CA: Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010. <http://kff.org/other/event/generation-m2-media-in-the-lives-of/>. Data from a large, nationally representative survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation show that 8- to 18-year-olds are spending more than 7.5 hours a day using entertainment media.

Rubin, K., and A. Thompson. *The Friendship Factor: Helping Our Children Navigate Their Social World—and Why It Matters for Their Success*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003. Rubin has conducted decades of research on children's peer relationships. This book offers research-based descriptions and tips for parents about how friendships change with age, social status, and the struggles of socially withdrawn or aggressive children.

Sachs, B. E. *The Good-Enough Child*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001. Sachs explores how we can recognize and let go of our wish for perfect children

(without abdicating our responsibility to set limits and offer guidance), in order to create more authentic relationships with them.

Shapiro, S., and C. White. *Mindful Discipline: A Loving Approach to Setting Limits and Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger, 2014. This compassionate and inspiring book helps parents learn to manage their own emotional states in order to respond effectively to their children.

Siegel, D. J., and T. P. Bryson. *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York: Bantam Books, 2014. Drawing from the field of interpersonal neuropsychology, this book offers practical advice for handling common discipline situations.

———. *The Whole Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York: Bantam Books, 2012. This book draws upon recent research on interpersonal neuropsychology and integrates it with useful principles to help parents respond constructively to children's emotions.

Smith, P. K. *Children and Play: Understanding Children's Worlds*. Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. This professional reference offers a coherent summary of research on many aspects of play, including pretend play, rough-and-tumble play, and gender differences in play.

Sobel, J. *Everybody Wins: 393 Non-Competitive Games for Young Children*. New York: Walker Books, 1984. Sobel's book on cooperative games is an easy-to-use guide with clear instructions and recommended ages. These games are enjoyable for any child, but they're especially important for kids who are still learning to be good sports.

Southam-Gerow, M. A. *Emotion Regulation in Children: A Practitioner's Guide*. New York: Guilford Press, 2011. This book for professionals offers a comprehensive approach to developing emotion-regulation skills for children and teens. It addresses essential components, such as skills pertaining to

emotion awareness, emotion understanding, expression, and dealing with specific emotions.

Thompson, M., C. Grace, and L. J. Cohen. *Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2002. Thompson and his colleagues explore the development of friendship, best friendships, social cruelty, and reconciling after conflicts. The book is drawn from research and offers practical suggestions about how parents can act as “lifeguards” in their children’s social lives.

Verbeek, P., W. W. Hartup, and W. A. Collins. “Conflict Management in Children and Adolescents.” In *Natural Conflict Resolution*, edited by F. Aureli and F. B. M. De Waal, pp. 54–53. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2000. This chapter describes relevant research on how children resolve conflicts with peers and parents, including findings about post-conflict resolution; and it explains how parents can mediate rather than arbitrate children’s disagreements.

Wachtel, E. F. “The Language of Becoming: Helping Children Change How They Think About Themselves.” *Family Process* 40 (2001): 369–384. Wachtel’s concept of the “language of becoming” is beautiful, powerful, and affirming to children.

Wood, C. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4–14*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Turners Falls, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children, 2007. This is a useful quick-reference guide to child development that presents charts describing typical physical, social, language, and cognitive growth patterns.

### **Books for Children: Emotions**

Cain, J. *The Way I Feel*. Seattle: Parenting Press, 2000. [ages 3–8]

Curtis, J. L., and L. Cornell. *Today I Feel Silly: & Other Moods that Make My Day*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. [ages 4–8; illustrated]

Cuyler, M., and A. Howard. *100<sup>th</sup> Day Worries*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006. [ages 5–8]

DiOrio, R., and E. Wheeler. *What Does It Mean to Be Present?* Belvedere, CA: Little Pickle Press, 2010. [ages 4–7; illustrated]

Huebner, D. *What to Do When You Grumble Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Negativity*. Washington, DC: Magination Press, 2006. [ages 8 and up]

———. *What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety*. Washington, DC: Magination Press, 2005. [ages 8 and up]

———. *What to Do When Your Temper Flares: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Problems with Anger*. Washington, DC: Magination Press, 2007. [ages 8 and up]

Kennedy-Moore, E., and M. Katayama. *What About Me? 12 Ways to Get Your Parents' Attention (Without Hitting Your Sister)*. Seattle: Parenting Press, 2005. [ages 3–8; illustrated]

Madison, L. *The Feelings Book: The Care and Keeping of Your Emotions*. Revised. Middletown, WI: American Girl, 2013. [ages 8 and up]

Mayer, M. *There's a Nightmare in My Closet*. New York: Puffin Books, 1992. [ages 3–5]

Reynolds, P. H. *Ish*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2004. [ages 5–18]

Vail, R., and Y. Heo. *Sometimes I'm Bombaloo*. New York: Scholastic, 2005. [ages 4–8; illustrated]

## **Books for Children: Friendships and Social Skills**

Brown, L. K., and M. Brown. *How to Be a Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and Keeping Them*. New York: Little, Brown, 2001. [ages 4–8; illustrated]

Carson, N. *How to Lose All Your Friends*. New York: Picture Puffins, 1997. [ages 3–5]

Cooper, S. *Speak Up and Get Along!: Learn the Mighty Might, Thought Chop, and More Tools to Make Friends, Stop Teasing, and Feel Good About Yourself*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 2005. [ages 8–12]

Criswell, P. K., and A. Martini. *A Smart Girl's Guide: Friendship Troubles*. Revised. Middletown, WI: American Girl, 2013. [ages 8 and up; illustrated]

Criswell, P. K., and S. Peterson. *Friends: Making Them & Keeping Them*. Middletown, WI: American Girl, 2006. [ages 7 and up; illustrated]

Jessum, J. E. *Diary of a Social Detective: Real-Life Tales of Mystery, Intrigue and Interpersonal Adventure*. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing, 2011. [ages 9 and up]

Monson, D. *Enemy Pie*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000. [ages 5–9]

Romain, T. *Cliques, Phonies, & Other Baloney*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 1998. [ages 8–13]