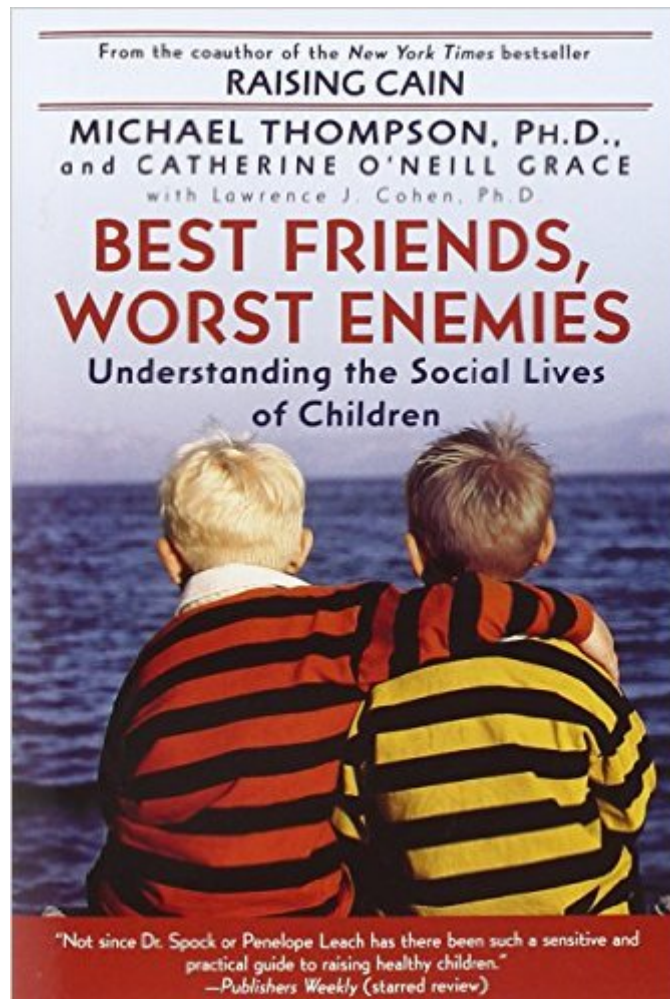


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Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding The Social Lives Of Children



Synopsis

Friends broaden our children's horizons, share their joys and secrets, and accompany them on their journeys into ever wider worlds. But friends can also gossip and betray, tease and exclude. Children can cause untold suffering, not only for their peers but for parents as well. In this wise and insightful book, psychologist Michael Thompson, Ph.D., and children's book author Catherine O'Neill Grace, illuminate the crucial and often hidden role that friendship plays in the lives of children from birth through adolescence. Drawing on fascinating new research as well as their own extensive experience in schools, Thompson and Grace demonstrate that children's friendships begin early "in infancy" and run exceptionally deep in intensity and loyalty. As children grow, their friendships become more complex and layered but also more emotionally fraught, marked by both extraordinary intimacy and bewildering cruelty. As parents, we watch, and often live through vicariously, the tumult that our children experience as they encounter the "cool" crowd, shifting alliances, bullies, and disloyal best friends. *Best Friends, Worst Enemies* brings to life the drama of childhood relationships, guiding parents to a deeper understanding of the motives and meanings of social behavior. Here you will find penetrating discussions of the difference between friendship and popularity, how boys and girls deal in unique ways with intimacy and commitment, whether all kids need a best friend, why cliques form and what you can do about them. Filled with anecdotes that ring amazingly true to life, *Best Friends, Worst Enemies* probes the magic and the heartbreak that all children experience with their friends. Parents, teachers, counselors "indeed anyone who cares about children" will find this an eye-opening and wonderfully affirming book. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book deserves many more than five stars for its careful, thoughtful, and detailed look at how children develop their social lives. Like all remarkable books, it will extend your understanding beyond your personal life experiences and provide simple, common sense guidelines for achieving outstanding results. If you only read one book this year about improving the social life of your child, make it this one! Every book I read about the psychological problems of youngsters focuses on the forms of social exclusion and bullying that typically occur in schools and neighborhoods. Best Friends, Worst Enemies takes that as the starting point, explains what causes the social exclusion and bullying, and details what schools and parents can do to eliminate it. Social connection between children begins at a younger age than most people believe. The book details videotaped studies of infants watching and connecting with each other. Then, step-by-step, the authors show you how social interaction develops from those early months through to dating. I was particularly impressed by the conceptual description of youngsters being assigned a place versus the in group (in or out, and high or low status in that role). Although I could not articulate it, that certainly captures my recollection of those painful teenage years. The use of animal studies is persuasive for the ways that humans often behave. I found myself chuckling over the descriptions of Alpha male and Queen Bee female behaviors. The best part of the book is that it points out that exclusion is bad for those who do it, as well as for those who suffer from it. So all parents and all youngsters should be concerned. The book avoids being too technical about psychological concepts.

This book has been a help in understanding my five-year-old's peer relationships, and is thought-provoking even for non-parents. I found the book well-organized and well-written. It helps make sense of children's behavior in terms of their needs for "connection, recognition, and power." It points out that children balance these three needs. Soon after reading this book, my son provided a stunningly concrete example of this. He and his friend had drawn chalk "tornado spinners" on the driveway. My son said, "My tornado spinner is more powerful than yours, because it's bigger." The other boy quietly said, "I'm not sure if I want to be friends with you any more." My son said, "OK, OK, they're the same power." The need for connection had won over the need for power and recognition. There are some helpful hints to be gleaned from the book as well. Here's one I related to. Often, if a child has a problem at school with another child one day, the parent will tend to ask

the child on the following day, "So, how did it go with Johnny today?" Your child, meanwhile, had forgotten all about the problem, but your comment provokes a "come to think of it..." reaction, causing the child to continue to dredge up negatives. The book divides children into "accepted," "rejected," and "neglected" types, to describe how their peers treat them. I fell squarely into the "neglected" category, which I think explains my lack of understanding of the "need to belong" that so many people feel -- I wasn't really "in the game." The authors mention a fascinating psychological experiment dealing with the need to belong. The subject was put into a group of people, and all were supposed to look at several pairs of lines and tell which was the longer line: A or B.

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