



Our Middle School ParentNet meeting of this school year was held in the Farmhouse on November 13, 2018. We had a great discussion on the topic of inclusion and relational inclusion.

Challenges with inclusion and relational aggression

Situations:

My daughter (from another school) mentioned that she was excluded from her circle of friends for not watching rated-R movies/TV shows that they were watching and was asked to leave the lunch room table as she was not able to participate in their conversations.

My son mentioned that he didn't feel included in his friends' group as his friends are very competitive and academically accelerated—they were taking several AP courses, and were experts in writing papers. He felt he couldn't measure up. Another form of exclusion came from not doing the activities his friends did. For example, he enjoyed camping and fishing with his fellow boy scouts while his classmates were playing video games and doing other activities.

My son suffered from being too loyal to his friend, who ended up betraying his trust by breaking into his phone.

My son had to change schools very often due to work related home moves, which made it difficult for him to form long lasting relationships.

As parents, how can we help kids deal with such issues?

Discussion:

Be a circulating drifter: One parent suggested that kids, especially in middle school, tend to drift away from others because of interests they take on. It is important for every child, as a result, to not put all eggs in the same basket and be friends across different groups.

Stay true to yourself: Real friends ought to like you for who you are, not what they want you to be. For example, being a good tuba player could set your child apart from others, but it should be in a good way. Encourage your child to continue working on their interests/hobbies and ignore the drama others create around inclusion/exclusion from groups. That way, even if school is a chaos, your child can still stay anchored.

Be clear about your boundaries: Kids often don't realize what their boundaries with others need to be. What is common sense to one may not be to the other, and it is important to assert what is acceptable vs what is not. While one child may think that breaking into their friend's account and using their Instagram photographs may be acceptable, your child may not think so. Asserting the boundaries consequently becomes key to not just maintain friendship, but also to ensure that it does not develop into relational aggression.

Stay positive about your child's abilities: As much as school environment itself can be stressful and kids can feel excluded based on abilities, just remind your kids that all children have different strengths, that kids progress at different rates, celebrate their strengths, and don't shy away from hard tasks even if it takes longer than it would for others.

Adapt to transient friendships: One parent remarked that her work-related travel made it hard for her son to have lasting friendships. Her suggestion was to remind her son that much like seasons, friendships are transient as well. Some friendships will last independent of time and distance apart,



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and others won't – and that is okay. Kids should learn to form friendships and adapt based on situations.