THE ALTAMONT SCHOOL

# INSIGHTS ON ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

FROM YOUR STUDENT SUPPORT TEAM



## HELLO!

It is hard to believe it, but as October comes to a close, we are halfway through the first semester! These first few months of the school year may have brought smooth social sailing for students, or they may have hit some rocky patches. Middle and high school can be fraught with social challenges.

This month's newsletter focuses on helping your child navigate these inevitable social conflicts, feeling left out, and the shifting dynamics that can make these years so tough. Friendships matter more than ever during the tween and teen years, and there can be real pain when they get complicated. In the following pages, you'll find practical ways to start conversations at home, tips for helping your child respond to hurtful situations, and guidance on when it might be time to loop in the school. Please know that we are always here as a resource for you and your student.

*Lauren Garrett, Director of the Student Support Team and Counselor to the Upper School*

## AT A GLANCE


1) WELCOME & REMINDERS

2) HELPING YOUR CHILD NAVIGATE SOCIAL CONFLICT

3) IS IT CONFLICT? OR IS IT BULLYING?

4) TEACHING HEALTHY CONFLICT

5) FURTHER READING




## #WinAtSocial

You may recall our partnership with The Social Institute from the previous two years. TSI is an organization working to empower students, families, and educators to navigate their learning and well-being– including A.I., social media, and devices – in healthy ways.

**Follow this link to learn more and register your family for their Family Toolkit!**

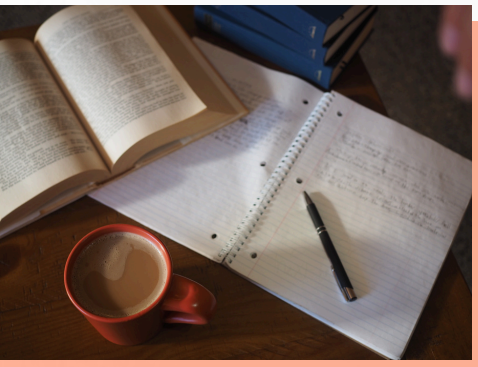


If you missed any of our previous newsletters, not to worry! They are all archived and easily accessible through the Altamont website.

Follow this link to explore:

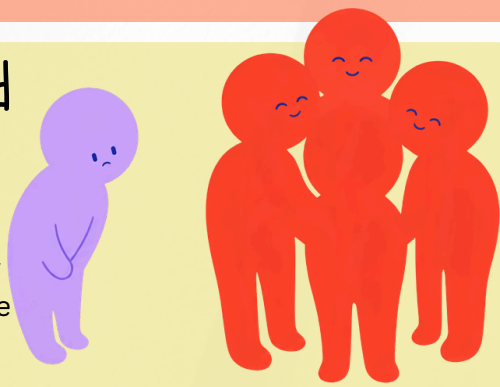
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# How to
## (help your teen)
# Navigate Social Conflict

## What can I do when my child feels left out?



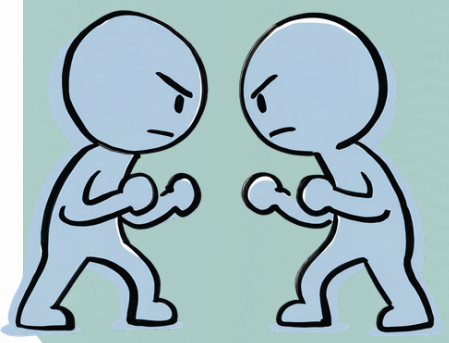
Our children's social conflict or exclusion often feels painful for us as well. It is only natural to not want to see your child hurting. How can you help them navigate these formative moments while also controlling your own hurt?

1. **Raise the idea that the conflict may be less personally targeted than it feels** - shifting friendships are a challenging, but very developmentally normal, part of tween and teen years. Often there are reasons that are not specific to your child. It can help to help them understand this.
2. **Try to stay neutral** about the child doing the excluding (even if you don't feel that way!) - there are natural ebbs and flows in friendships. Tyring to stay neutral allows the currently rocky friendship to find a way back to healthy.
3. **Focus on helping without fixing** - these moments can help our kids learn healthy coping skills that will serve them in future situations. If we rescue them, we rob them of the opportunity to build these skills. Additionally, sometimes the grown ups getting involved only makes things messier! Try saying "This really stinks. I'm so sorry. What do you think might help you feel better right now?"

Learn more about these suggestions by listening to Michelle Icard on Dr. Lisa Damour's podcast: *How Your Kid's Exclusion Hurts You Too*

## It is Conflict? Or is it Bullying?

In her New York Times article, Dr. Lisa Damour explains, "When our child suffers a social injury, it's easy to conclude that he or she has been bullied. While this may be the case, experts suggest that the term 'bullying' is best reserved for repeated, one-way aggression against someone who cannot defend him or herself effectively. The remaining, more prevalent type of social friction — the give and take of interpersonal strife — should be considered to be conflict, not bullying." It is important to correctly understand the differences in order to respond in the right way. If you have a New York Times subscription, read more of Dr. Damour's advice on this issue here.



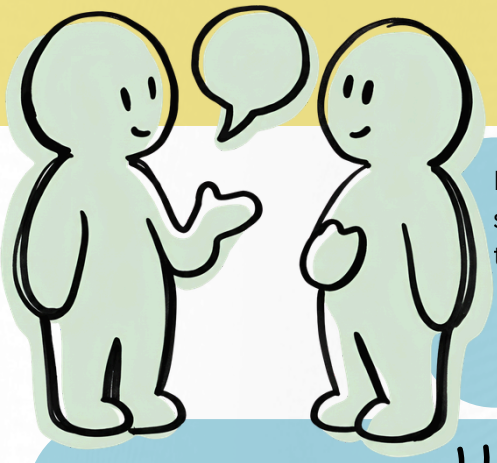
| | Normal conflict | Bullying |
|---|---|---|
| Power | Roughly equal; both can push back or walk away | One side has more power; the target can't stop it |
| Frequency | One incident or a short flare-up | Repeated, or likely to repeat |
| Intent | Hurt is a side effect of a real dispute or a mistake/misunderstanding | Hurt is the goal: humiliate, exclude, control |
| Fault | Both contribute and often feel bad after | One-sided; little remorse |
| Resolution | Can be talked out or cooled off | Talking fails or makes it worse |
| Your move | Coach: listen, rehearse what to say, let them handle it | Step in; save screenshots, report to the school in writing, follow up |

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## Teaching Healthy Conflict

**Conflict is a part of being in relationship with others. Your child *will* encounter conflict in their adult lives, and it will serve them to understand how to engage in healthy ways, as well as how to care for themselves in the midst of the conflict.**

1. Encourage your child to take a step back first - rather than responding immediately to the given conflict, encourage your child to take a break, breathe, and reflect.
2. Discuss with your child, are they a **bulldozer** (rolling over everyone else's opinions or emotions), **doormat** (allowing themselves to be walked over), **doormat with spikes** (seemingly being run over but with a cost to the aggressor), or **pillar** (standing up for themselves while respecting others) when they are confronted with conflict?
3. **Keep arguments and conversations offline** - arguments online allow others to weigh in and eliminate the ability to understand tone or body language.
4. Help your child consider the **perspective and experinece** of others involved - even when we do not understand or agree with the other side of the conflict, it will help in resolution to consider it.
5. Weigh the **costs and benefits of engaging -** not engaging does not make your child a doormat! It might mean that they are rising above or choosing to not be a part of the given conflict.



## It's Not All Bad!

Remember that there is positive growth that happens through conflict. Even though it is hard to see your child struggling, if you can support them and help them learn to resolve the conflict in a healthy manner, there is a massive amount of (very necessary) development that is happening at the same time.

(Of course, it is also important to note that this growth occurs through conflict *not* bullying.)

1. Emotional Understanding - of self and others
2. Empathy
3. Perspective taking
4. Self-Control
5. Relationship building and navigation skills

If you are concerned about a social dynamic your child is a part of, or need help supporting your child in navigating conflicts, don't be afraid to reach out! We are here to help!

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Kate Smith - Middle School Counselor - ksmith@altamontschool.org
JoVanka Ward - Director of Community Life - jward@altamontschool.org
or your child's advisor!

## Helpful Further Reading

Lisa Damour's expertise was a main source of research for this newsletter. Explore her resources here.
Middle School Makeover by Michelle Icard
Mental Health Center: Conflict Resolution for Kids
Helping Teen Girls Navigate Social Conflict
Conflict Resolution for Teens
Understanding Bullying vs. Conflict

As always we encourage you to explore the resources provided in Win @ Social's Family Toolkit, available to all our families: Family Toolkit