



# Cedarwood School

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## Understanding the Social Lives of Children

**Children need friendships** - friendship nourishes the soul of a child. **Friendships help define us.** Through the lens of a chosen friend, we see ourselves and become ourselves, having friends matters.

Friendship quality, not exclusivity is what matters. Children don't need a dozen close friends, or one incredibly close friend and they don't need to be the most popular kid in class. They just need good-enough peer relationships and a minimum level of acceptance by the group. Without some friendship children are psychologically at risk.



Wherever children gather, complex group dynamics begin to pick up strength; whether or not a storm builds, it has power in a child's life. There are many wonderful moments in school, but schools are not always easy spaces. Schools provide opportunities to see children at work, struggling to develop skills, meeting adult demands, avoiding schoolwork, loving their friends, hating their enemies, and ultimately developing a sense of self in a broader context.

All parents experience emotion observing their children's social lives, there is no escaping it. Parents beam with pleasure at their child's successes and writhe with anguish over their failures. Being a parent means feeling helpless a lot of the time, there is no area in which a parent feels more powerless to make a significant difference than about the child's social life.



Parents must negotiate the paradox they are presented with when watching their child negotiate social terrain. Most of the time we may be helpless to change a child's social destiny, particularly when a group's perception of him or her is set. Yet at the same time, **there is a lot that parents can do to teach their children social skills and support their friendships.**



Understanding what is happening to your child and what has happened to you in your childhood can help you help your children. **Understanding brings perspective.** When you can acknowledge the social power and pain in your child's life, and bear the weight of it without overreacting or fixing it for them, they will feel supported. Ultimately, sharing your sense of perspective with your child through your steadiness, will benefit him/her enormously.

Understanding the social lives of children can guide adults to positive action, it can relieve your bewilderment and your fury, even if it cannot always produce an effective strategy for intervening. Parents' childhood painful memories interfere strongly with their wisdom in helping their children in this area.

Parents often either overreact to a child's social difficulty or don't react strongly enough and don't do all they need to for their child. **We need to listen sympathetically, stay confident, provide opportunities for our children to connect with others.** It is important to remember that the power of our early attachments, make our children feel adequate.

If your child cannot negotiate the complex social currents of the group of which she is a part, you may want to hand her the skills to do it. **We cannot step in and fix things because children must learn to do that for themselves.** Children often fear that their parent's interventions make matters worse, we must respect and equip them.

Conflict in relationships is inevitable, adults are often surprised or confused by the level of conflict that arises in friendships. **One of the best things about friendships is the ability to air conflict and resolve differences which help them learn how to solve problems together.**



*A friend is someone you fight with, but it's not forever.*

