
How Cliques Make Kids Feel Left Out

One day Madison's teacher found her sitting alone at lunch, looking sad and upset. She could barely bite the peanut butter sandwich that she usually couldn't wait to eat. "What's the matter, Madison?" the teacher asked.

Later that afternoon, Trey was standing alone by the basketball court after school. Trey's mom asked him why he didn't go play with Zack and Steve, who were shooting hoops. He told his mom he just didn't feel like it, so they walked home.

But the truth was, Trey and Madison were facing the same problem: They both felt left out, and their feelings were hurt.

Madison was so sad that she didn't want to eat, and Trey was so mad that when he got home he slammed his bedroom door. Kids who were their friends yesterday weren't their friends today. What happened?

What Are Cliques?

Cliques are groups of friends, but not all groups of friends are cliques. The thing that makes a group a **clique** is that they leave some kids out on purpose. Usually one or two popular kids control who gets to be in the clique and who gets left out. Kids may act much differently than they did before they were part of the clique. They may even act differently today from how they were yesterday. It can be really confusing.

Everyone feels left out by friends once in a while. Friends are people just like us — they make mistakes and usually we can forgive them (after all, we make mistakes too!). Sometimes friends fight and make up again.

But sometimes kids form groups that they won't let other kids belong to. A clique is a group of kids who hang out together and won't let others join in. Sometimes kids in the clique are mean to kids they think are on the outside.

For instance, Trey and Steve always played basketball after school. But Zack started pushing Trey out of the group, and now even Steve was saying mean stuff to Trey. Same with Madison and Allie. They used to have sleepovers all the time, but now Cleo was hosting the sleepovers and she didn't invite Madison.

Kids might form cliques in elementary school or in middle school. Sometimes cliques are made of kids who share an interest in something, like sports or computer games or music. Sometimes the kids in them want to be popular or want to belong. They might say you can only join in if you wear certain clothes, or they might make you feel bad if your mom or dad can't afford the same stuff they can.

Both boys and girls have cliques, though people who study these groups say girl cliques may be more common. Girl cliques are often meaner and more hurtful in the way they treat girls who aren't in the group.

Feeling Left Out

If you are on the outside of a clique, it can make you frustrated and confused. Maybe someone who was your BFF last week was mean to you and wouldn't sit with you at lunch. It can make you feel like crying or just feel really angry or sad. You might feel lonely at lunch or after school, or even afraid if you feel that someone might pick on you or fight with you. You might be frustrated or upset because you don't know what to do. You might feel hurt because of the ways other kids keep you out.

Why Do Other Kids Join Cliques?

One of the hard things about cliques is if a person who was your friend joins one and starts treating you differently. Sometimes, the problem starts with an argument between the two of you. But other times you can find yourself on the outside of a clique even if nothing happened.

Sometimes you get left out because you look, act, or dress differently from the other kids. Or just because you're the "new kid" in class. Kids who get into cliques usually want to be popular and feel cool. Sometimes kids think that belonging to a clique will keep them from feeling left out. Some kids feel more powerful when they're mean to other people (like bullies).

Kids in cliques sometimes act differently than they would outside the group. They often go along with what the others are doing, even if they know it's not right — even if it means leaving out a friend.

Some kids might even feel bad about the way they treat other kids, but they can't figure out how to be cool and still be nice to the person who's not in the clique. This is no excuse, though. Plenty of kids manage to be nice to everyone — kids in and outside their closest group of friends — without being part of a clique.

Feeling Trapped in a Clique

Sometimes kids in cliques find that they don't really want to belong to it anymore. They don't want to leave others out and hurt people's feelings. Sometimes they realize they're missing out on being friends with great kids outside of the clique.

Some kids don't want to be bossed around by the rules of the clique and don't like that another kid is trying to be in charge of them. Being in a clique might mean that they have to give up some freedom and maybe even change the kind of people they are or what kind of music they like or clothes they want to wear.

Even if no one is being mean to you personally, you still might find it annoying if there are cliques you're not welcome to be part of. Or you might be part of a clique, but are getting tired of being bossed around or worried that your so-called friends will embarrass you or play a mean joke on you. Maybe someone said something mean about you or a friend of yours online. Be careful what you post and say online — and always walk away from online taunts.

As kids get older, they can outgrow the need to be part of a clique or feel more relaxed about who is "in" and who is "out." For some kids this takes a while. Most cliques have disappeared by the end of high school, making way for more fun and enjoyable friendship groups.

Who Can Help?

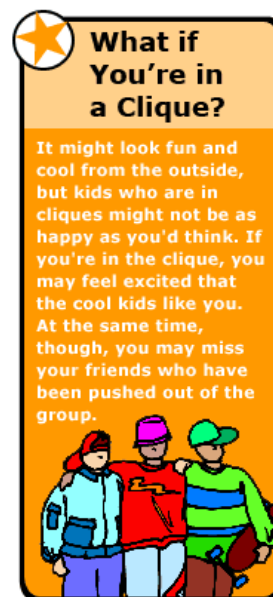
Parents, sisters and brothers, other family members, and teachers can help when someone is being left out or treated in a mean way. They might help by giving you advice on how to deal with mean kids. Sometimes they can teach kids that it isn't OK to treat others this way and show them ways to stop kids being mean to other kids.

If you or someone you know is being treated meanly or bullied by members of a clique, telling an adult is important. Adults can also help kids learn to play together, include each other, mend hurt feelings, and repair broken friendships. They can encourage kids to make friends and belong to a group without leaving others out. They can show kids how to be popular by treating everyone with respect and kindness.

What You Can Do

If cliques are upsetting you, what can you do?

- **Find friends.** If you find yourself left out of a certain group, focus on other friends. Hang out with kids who aren't part of a clique. Sometimes this means finding older or younger kids to hang out with, or making friends outside school. Sometimes it means being open to kids who look or act differently than you do.
- **Speak up.** If your group of friends has suddenly turned into a clique, speak up. It's OK to say that you want to invite others to hang out with you, too. Be prepared for the fact that the clique might go on without you. On the other hand, others might follow your lead and stop acting so clique-y. Most schools have counselors and policies to help cliques from getting out of hand — maybe you could become an advisor or advocate, or write about it in the school paper.
- **Invite a friend.** If you're on the outside of a clique and you want to be friends with someone who's in it, invite that person to do something with you. It might help if you can see your friend away from the other clique members. Maybe your mom or dad could arrange to have that friend visit at your house on the weekend. By spending time together, he or she might start realizing how silly it is not to hang out more often. But also be prepared for possible disappointment. Even if you have a great time together, your friend might still slip back into the clique when you're all back at school.
- **Don't take it out on yourself.** Some kids feel they should try to change themselves — and that's OK too. Maybe you want to get healthy and fit or learn to smile more and be less cranky



— it's great to work on yourself, but do it for you, not for anyone else. If some kids are mean to you because they think you don't fit in, don't let them make decisions about the kind of kid you are going to be. Decide for yourself and then get help to reach your goals. Ask a cool cousin or friend to help you revamp your wardrobe or get a new haircut. But only change yourself if it's something you want to do.

- **Look for friends everywhere.** The most popular and well-liked kids are the ones who are friendly to everyone. Do your best to let everyone feel welcome to talk to you. Look for chances to meet, talk with, and play with plenty of different kids. Is someone sitting alone at lunch? Why not ask her to sit at your table? Or maybe you noticed the kid standing outside the fence while you're playing basketball. It's time to invite him onto the court. Who knows — maybe the two of you will really click (which means to get along really well). Now that's a much better kind of click!

Note: All information is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.



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