

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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With Friends Like This...

Some Experts Believe 'Best Friends' Are Bad

By Paul Asay

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What Happened:

Back in the day, almost everyone had or wanted a best friend—someone who they could talk with, confide in and hang out every day, someone who was closer than almost anyone else in the world. That's still the preference of most: According to a recent study by Harris Interactive, 94 percent of youth ages 8 to 24 reported having at least one close friend.

With concerns about cliques and bullying growing by the day, some school and camp officials believe that such close friendships may be unhealthy; some adults actually try to separate youth who seem exceptionally close with each other.

"I think it is kids' preference to pair up and have that one best friend," Christine Laycob, director of counseling at a St. Louis-area day school, told *The New York Times*. "As adults—teachers and counselors—we try to encourage them not to do that. We try to talk to kids and work with them to get them to have big groups of friends and not be so possessive about friends."

Jay Jacobs, a camp counselor at Timber Lake Camp in Phoenicia, N.Y., says, "I don't think it's particularly healthy for a child to rely on one friend. If something goes awry, it can be devastating. It also limits a child's ability to explore other options in the world."

Some experts think steering children away from such tight friendships is a mistake. After all, it's through such friendships that we learn how to empathize, how to trust and how to interact with each other on a deep, emotional level. Even friendships that go bad can teach us lessons that'll help us better navigate future relationships.

"When a teacher is trying to tone down a best-friend culture, I would like to know why," says Dr. Michael Thompson, who wrote *Best Friends, Worst Enemies: Understanding the Social Lives of Children*. "Is it causing misery for the class? Is there one girl who does have friends but just can't bear the thought that she doesn't have as good a best friend as another? That to me is normal social pain. If you're mucking around too much in the lives of kids who are just experiencing normal social pain, you shouldn't be."

Talk About It:

Do you have a best friend? What makes him or her so close? Is it because you have a lot of fun together? Can you talk really well with one another? Share the same interests and morals? Can you have lots of “best friends”?

Have you ever been hurt by one of your close friends? What happened? How did you deal with it?

Do you think it’s good to have one best friend? Is it better to have a wider circle of acquaintances? Do you think it’s a good idea for adults to separate friends who hang out with each other all the time?

What the Bible Says:

“After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself” (1 Sam. 18:1).

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13).