

## She's Soooo Popular!

What are the true ingredients to popularity, and how can we help our kids survive to graduate high school?

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As parents and teachers, we all recall the desire to be popular in school, the ache to be noticed and to be liked by other kids. As children grow, their social place in their group of peers can become more defined. Researchers have spent time talking with children of all ages about their friendships and observing social behavior firsthand. We have learned much about what real popularity is and isn't.

Two Kinds of Popular:

1. **Popular-prosocial**—These children are kind to everyone. They help others with writing down homework assignments, pick up stray papers and tend to greet all peers with warmth and sensitivity. These kids are typically good students and have a good deal of social competence. Other children rate them high in likeability and see them as fair-minded.
2. **Popular-antisocial**—This is a smaller subset of “popular”. These kids are admired for their skill in manipulating social situations. They may bully and exclude other children and are simultaneously admired and feared. Boys and girls in this group may be athletic and physically well-developed. They try to enhance their social status by defying authority or by stirring up conflict with peers, leading adults to intervene on their devious behavior. As these kids grow, their peers grow tired of their mean-spirited antics, often rejecting them in high school or young adult life.

We would obviously like our children to be the first kind of popular, which is the truest kind of popular. Fortunately, we can benefit from research in educating our children about social skills. Please share these findings with your children all their lives:

- A. It turns out that manners really do matter. Truly popular kids are polite and respectful to others.
- B. Kids trust children who know how to keep secrets.
- C. Kids who try their best to make good grades are seen as good models.
- D. Popular kids find something to like in every person and don't exclude people based on appearance.

### Popularity at any cost

It is important to impress on our children that popularity is something that is not more important than having true friends and having fun in childhood. Some children become obsessed with being accepted by all peers, and this is not generally a healthy goal. Children with such obsessive focus will do anything to capture attention and admiration, sometimes teasing others to be *in* with the popular antisocial kids or trying drugs and alcohol to attain status with older peers.

### Share Your Wisdom

Looking beyond childhood. Your experiences can be instructive with your child, as long as they are not tinged with a bitterness that suggests it is useless to reach out to others. Many parents explain their own childhood desires to be popular and the fruitless quest that it became in school. Kids CAN understand that popularity in childhood is not the same thing as popularity in adulthood. You can share that as humans age, their skills in all areas improve, making it easier to shine as an adult. Many adults feel a sense of acceptance from adult peers that they never found as children, thereby smoothing some of the pains of childhood. For us adults, acceptance by our chosen friends becomes more important than our overall popularity rating.

#### When Should We Shine the Most?

Many adults look back on their childhood as a time of awkwardness and painful self-doubt. That is okay! How sad it is to look back on a life where your most shining moments were in the first 2 decades of life. In other words, when we think about being popular in school, how valuable is it really to reach our peak in grade school? However, it *is* valuable to reach our peak in our adult years, where we can make the most change in our own lives and the lives of others.