



**NAUSET
YOUTH
ALLIANCE**

Positively Guiding Today's Youth
Into Tomorrow's World

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2022

THANK YOU!

Thank you to all the parents who volunteered to decorate their vehicles and to give out candy at Nauset Youth Alliance's Trunk or Treat event this past Friday. The night was a huge success and turnout surpassed all expectations. We look forward to repeating the event next year.

FRIENDSHIPS AND CLIQUES

As the title states, this month's letter is about childhood friendships and cliques. The topic is relevant as we have been working with students about what it means to be a good friend and the importance of inclusion. We are seeing the development of some cliques at the Eddy School, particularly among the girls, so I thought it important to share the following thoughts with parents.

Children need friends. Friends are a source of fun and companionship. Through their friendships, children learn about leading and following, arguing and making up, sharing and feeling empathy. Friendships offer many opportunities for growth, comfort, and fun. It is in the context of friendships that children learn how to understand and express emotions and ideas, resolve conflicts, tolerate frustration, increase their appreciation for diversity, acquire leadership and cooperation skills, and develop empathy and even humor. Having friends helps children feel happy, confident, and connected, but children are not born knowing how to make friends. They learn it.

Friendships in elementary school are more complicated than they were in preschool. Like everything else with children, friendship is developmental and looks different at different ages. To a first grader, a good friend is anyone they play with, particularly anyone they have a play date with. The friend does not need to be the same sex, while fifth and sixth grade children are, typically, most intimate with their same sex friends. Fred Frankel, author of *Good Friends Are Hard to Find*, offers a summary of the developmental stages and includes generalizations about the differences between female and male friendships. In



Important Dates

**School Closed on
Nov. 7th**
Professional Development

Nov. 11th



**School Closed on
Nov. 24th, 25th &
26th**
**Thanksgiving
Holiday**



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Kindergarten and First Grade, children will play with everyone. In 2nd and 3rd grade, boys and girls will avoid each other (“cooties”). Close friends begin to cooperate and adjust to each other’s actions and thoughts. In 4th grade, best friends begin to emerge. Close friends have common interests, likes and dislikes, similar abilities, compatible personalities. In 5th grade, boys hang around with a group of other boys with similar interests (sports, Pokeman, etc.). Girls will start sharing secrets with one another.

The topography of female friendships in grades K-8 is notoriously inhospitable terrain. A 2009 study by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) looked at what actually happens inside the brains of children in response to potential friendship opportunities. The results showed a significant difference in the way boys and girls respond to the anticipation of making a friend. Various areas of girls’ brains (areas associated with reward, hormone secretion, social learning, and subjective feelings) lit up with the prospect of a new friendship, while the boys’ brains showed almost no activity at all and even, in some cases, decreased activity. It’s safe to say there’s a lot going on for girls in the face of friendships.

Most parents associate girl conflicts with the middle school years. However, conduct known as “relational aggression” (what we think of as “mean girls” behavior) starts younger. This is the behavior we see when kids manipulate others through friendship withdrawal, silent treatment, and gossip.

A 2010 SUNY Buffalo study of girls ages 3-12 found that some girls understand relationally aggressive tactics as early as preschool. It also reports that girls associate these tactics with being a girl. In other words, they expect to handle conflict with relational aggression while boys associate physical aggression with being male. By fourth grade, we start seeing girl cliques forming.

Social conflict in elementary school is not new. In fact, conflict among classmates and friends is a normal part of childhood, and parents should not fear it. What is new is the social pressures girls face today and we are seeing social behaviors in elementary-age girls we used to see in middle school. Both biology and evolving cultural patterns are contributing to these changes through earlier physical maturity, exposure to media that portrays relational aggression, more marketing to younger girls, and more pressure to achieve.

So what is the difference between a friend group (“friendship”) and a clique? Groups of friends form based on shared interests, and members are free to socialize and hang out with others outside the group without worrying about being cast out. They may not do everything together – and that’s okay. Cliques sometimes form around common interests, but the social dynamics are very different. Cliques are usually tightly controlled by leaders who decide who is “in” and who is “out.” The kids in the clique do most things together. Someone who has a friend outside the clique may face rejection or ridicule.

Members of the clique usually follow the leader’s rules, whether it is wearing particular clothes or doing certain activities. Cliques usually involve lots of rules – implied or clearly stated – and

intense pressure to follow them. Kids may be pressured to take risks and get involved with gossip, teasing, and putting others down with negative comments about their looks and activities. It's unfortunate that social drama starts so early. Without warning, there are cliques, friendship groups, and unwritten rules and expectations. How can parents help? As kids navigate friendships and cliques, there's plenty parents can do to offer support.

Listen: This means undivided attention (put down the device!) given to your child *without a response*. Give visual clues that you are listening and use verbal phrases such as “hmmm”, “I see”, or “Wow!”

Ask questions: These questions should be open-ended, exploratory questions that will help you learn more about the situation. “How did you feel when she said that?”, “what happened next?”, or “what were you hoping would happen?” Avoid “interviewing for pain”. If you greet your child every day after school by asking, “was anyone mean to you today?” your child is going to come up with something to report. Use an open-ended question, “how was school?”.

Empathize: Find an emotion or a way to let your child know that you are listening. “That must have felt horrible!” or “how sad your best friend would say that.” Listen without judging or offering advice. Remember, empathizing isn't about leading questions that imply she was wronged. It's important to keep your own indignation in check.

Ask how you can help: Rather than jumping in with a suggestion or picking up the phone to “fix it”, ask your child what they need from you. For example, “do you want to hear what I think?” or “Do you need help coming up with a solution?” If she says no, don't push it.

Validate a range of emotions: Girls need to know that all emotions, positive and negative, are normal and that “bad emotions” don't make you a bad person. Allowing your daughter's resentment to play out will help her calm down more quickly. Try something like, “wow, you're so mad.”

Brainstorm together: If your child wants to find a solution, works towards an answer together, rather than forcing her to do what you think is best. Role play scenarios and help your child find one that she feels comfortable trying.

Keep the conversation open: End the conversation with, “If you ever want to talk more about this, I'm here for you.”

There are also things you shouldn't do. These include:

Fix the problem yourself: It may seem easier to jump in and solve the problem for your child. However, your solution may make things worse. Empower your child to brainstorm, role play, and eventually handle the problem herself.

Assume your child is the victim: Your child may appear to be the one being picked on, but there may be more to the story. Use open ended questions to help your child tell you the rest of the story, “Ok, what did David do after you took the pencil...”

Ignore hurtful comments: If your child reports something hurtful, don’t brush it aside or tell them it’s nothing and to toughen up. Empathize with them, “that must have made you feel sad.” If your child is part of a clique and one of the kids teasing or rejecting others, it’s important to address that right away. With popular TV shows from talent contests to reality series glorifying rude behavior, it’s an uphill battle to promote kindness, respect, and compassion.

Discuss the role of power and control in friendships and try to get to the heart of why your child feels compelled to be in that position. Discuss who is in and who is out, what happens when kids are out (are they ignored, shunned, bullied?). Challenge your child to think and talk about whether they’re proud of the way they act in school.

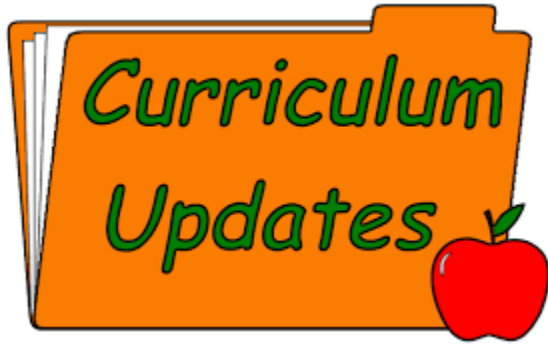
Finally, encourage healthy friendships. Talk to your child about *finding the right fit, not just fitting in*. Encourage your child to think about what they value and what they are interested in, and how these things fit in with the group. Ask questions like: What is the main reason you want to be part of the group? What are the compromises you have to make? Is it worth it? What would you do if the group leader insisted you act mean to other kids or do something you don’t want to do. When does it change from fun and joking around to teasing and bullying?

Help your child stick to their likes. If they want to drop something because it is deemed “uncool”, discuss ways to help resolve this. Encourage your child to participate in activities that they enjoy and that build their confidence.

Speak out and stand up. Encourage your child to not participate in anything that feels wrong, whether it’s a practical joke or talking about people behind their backs.

Have your child take responsibility for their own actions. Encourage sensitivity to others and not just going along with a group. Remind your child that a true friend respects their opinions, interests, and choices, no matter how different they are. Acknowledge that it can be difficult to stand out, but that ultimately, we are each responsible for what we say and do.

Finally, remember to provide the big-picture perspective too. As hard as friendship challenges and cliques might be to deal with now, things can change quickly. What’s more important is making true friends – people they can confide in, laugh with, and trust. And the real secret to being “popular” – in the truest sense of the word – is for them to be the kind of friend they’d like to have: respectful, fair, supportive, caring, trustworthy, and kind.



Stony Brook School

Our NYA students have had a great busy start to the school year. They created a kindness tree and each student added a leaf to the tree using their own words to describe kindness.

We have read stories and talked about all things in Autumn including leaves, apples, farms, scarecrows and pumpkins.

The kids painted trees with q-tips, created popsicle stick scarecrows, made leaf people, ghosts and decorated pumpkins.

But a favorite activity is our food art projects. These creative children have made graham cracker buses, pencils, pretzel trees, apple teeth, fox, hedgehog and owl crackers, pumpkin apple faces and monster teeth. The best part of their efforts is eating their masterpiece's!!

Eddy School

As students transition into the 3rd-5th grade setting, they are met with more responsibilities and choices. We accommodate that at NYA by giving a choice between 2 activities and a gym/field game, getting students input on future activities, and giving students the ability to prepare and serve snack to their peers. Snack helpers are chosen by the teacher preparing snack for the day to set up the snack table. On Friday, we host a baking activity. Students do all of the preparation, making, and serving; teachers still handle the heat!

Throughout the week, we focus our activities around general monthly themes, STEM, and Social Emotional Learning. STEM challenges such as bridges out of toothpicks, gumdrop platforms, and recycled boats have already been done this year. October focused on recycling. We taught recyclables vs trash with recycling relay. We created fashion out newspapers, hot wheel tracks out of cardboard tubes, and pumpkins from paper shreds. Some of our planned themes moving forward are self-care, holidays, and international foods. After school is a time when children learn how to navigate complicated social relationships. Through games like Capture the Flag that focus on team building or This or That to show similarities amongst peers, Eddy's NYA staff works to help your children grow into kind and empathetic individuals.

Early Release
Wed. Nov. 30th

NYA begins at 11 AM following early dismissal. If your child is attending NYA on that day, please be sure to send a lunch as food services will be closed

