

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My second grader sometimes comes home from school very sad... saying that he has no friends. What can I do? It breaks my heart to see him this way.

ANSWER: One the most effective ways that God shapes us parents into his image is through the love relationship we have with our children. **Seize this event as an opportunity** for you as well as for your son to grow more dependent on the Savior. I believe that God uses heartbreaking events with **our** children in order to help us understand the love he feels for us, **His** children. There is immense value in embracing the risk of love and involving ourselves deeply in the lives of our children. We want to spare them the kind of heart-pain your son is experiencing now. But, we must believe that God can use such heart-pain to mold them and us into the image of Christ. Before you decide what to do...

1. **Empathize**, but don't fall apart. Your son needs your strength. He needs to see hope in you.
2. Don't try to remove this hurt from him too quickly. This is a **teachable time** for him.
3. Understand the parts of your own life story that have to do with loneliness. Don't somehow transfer the sadness you experienced to him.
4. Understand your son's individual temperament, and how it might be a significant factor in his loneliness. Also realize that a longing for love (friendship) is one of the three deep motivational needs of a child's soul (i.e. love, security, and purpose).
5. Determine whether he feels he has no friends all the time, or just periodically.
6. Determine whether he has a history of loneliness, or if this lack of friends is something new (the product of a painful event). Determine whether he has been capable of sustaining friendships before.
7. Determine whether he has the **necessary social skills** to make and keep friends. (Second graders, especially boys, often lack such skills.)

8. Determine if his lack of friends is due to some physical attribute (i.e. lack of coordination, small size, etc.).

9. Determine how he handles this situation. (Does he withdraw? Get angry at his peers? Try to impress others? Try to "buy" friendships?)

Once you have gathered this information... **with the help of his father**, try the following:

1. Have an initial heart-to-heart talk with him about the situation. Many such talks should be part of your relationship with him.

2. Make this situation a part of your ongoing prayers with him.

3. Teach **socialization/friendship skills**. You might wish to investigate a Peer Socialization Group especially designed to help kids learn the social skills that don't seem to come naturally to many children.

4. Find a small peer group where he really "clicks" and succeeds. (Scouts, youth group, peer socialization groups, etc.).

5. Work on his athletic skills. Have him join a recreational sports team.

6. **With his input**, invite some boys over to your home. Help him to formulate an activity plan for while they are there.

7. Through these things, weave the **godly** purpose of friendship: Friends are not as much here for us as we are here to live out the Gospel to everyone else.

8. Encourage your son to remember and use the awareness he has about loneliness **to become an empathic and loving friend** (to have friends, be a friend). Watch that he does not use his hurt as future justification to hurt others or withdraw.

Nothing hurts like watching our children hurt. Can you love him enough to let God use this hurt as an opportunity to shape your son into the image of Christ? If you can, God will certainly use you in the process.

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