

Why Other Children are Rejecting Your Child

by: Anthony Kane, MD Introduction Developing healthy peer relationships is critical for the normal development of a child. Peer relationships have been found to be an important predictor of positive adult adjustment and behavior. Difficulty in finding friends leads to feelings of low self-esteem and these feelings usually continue into adulthood. Children with poor social skills are at risk for delinquency, academic underachievement, and school drop out. Even though the inattentiveness, impulsiveness, and restlessness frequently persist into adult life, these problems are of less importance as the child gets older. Rather, the main difficulty ADHD patients encounter as they reach maturity is their inability to interact appropriately with others. ADHD children often lack the social skills that are essential to success in life. These children can be socially inept, and their lack of interpersonal skills may cause them a multitude of difficulties. In addition, positive relationships with friends in childhood provide a critical buffer against stress and help to protect against psychological and psychiatric problems. ADHD children lack these positive interactions and thus are at risk for a number of emotional problems. Probably 60% of ADHD children suffer from peer rejection. ADHD children are less often chosen by peers to be best friends, partners in activities, or seatmates. As the children grow older, their social problems seem to get worse. Their inappropriate behavior leads to further social rejection and exacerbates their inability to relate to others appropriately. Long term these children are more likely to have difficulty finding and maintaining successful careers. This is not surprising since social aptitude can make or break careers and relationships in the adult world. Causes of Poor Peer Relationships ADHD children are frequently disliked or neglected by their peers. It is difficult to determine all the factors that make a child unpopular, but children who frequently display aggressive or negative behavior tend to be rejected by their peers. Impulsivity and Aggression ADHD children tend to be more impulsive and aggressive than other children. Teachers observe that the social interactions of ADHD children more often involve fighting and interrupting others. These children are more intense than others and behave inappropriately in social contexts. For example, ADHD children are more likely to yell, run around and talk at unsuitable times. They also tend to want to dominate play, engage in off task behaviors and engage more in teasing and physical jostling of peers. This sets up a process of peer rejection. Academic Problems ADHD children often do not do well in school. Poor school performance by itself does not result in social rejection. However, the way the child responds to his academic difficulties can contribute to inappropriate social behavior. Children who cannot engage themselves with classroom work assignments often disrupt and irritate their peers. Inattention ADHD children have difficulty with sustained attention. Deficit in attention seems to be related to peer rejection independently of the aggressive, impulsive, and hyperactive behaviors of ADHD children. These children become bored more easily than other children. As a result, they are more likely to become disruptive in the classroom. ADHD children have difficulty in modulating their behavior and changing their conduct as the situation demands. They have apparent social-cognitive deficits that limit their ability to encode and recall rules of social cues. Children with ADHD pay less attention to others verbally in games and other activities. Many ADHD children are aware that they are socially inept. Children who are anxious or fearful about peer relations are unlikely to behave in an effective manner. These children withdraw from peer interactions and, in this way, limit their ability to gain acceptance and friendship. Children are rejected by peers when they appear to be different. Similarity fosters social acceptance. Because ADHD children do not learn social clues as well as other children, they tend to be viewed as strange. Bad Behavior One of the keys to your child's social success is proper behavior. If your ADHD or ODD child frequently misbehaves, it is your obligation as a parent to teach your child how to improve his behavior. If your child is aggressive or defiant, if he does not accept the authority of adults, or if he conducts himself in a such a way that children his age will view him as a behavior problem, then your child will have a difficult time making and maintaining friendships. The friends he will attract are other aggressive problem children, the type of child with whom which you would rather your child not associate. All children need friends. Behavior problem children have trouble making friends with others, so these children tend to congregate together. They reinforce each other's bad behavior. If you are an aware parent and you have control of your child you can put a stop to friendships with these children. However, you must have control of your child's behavior in order to help him to avoid the trap of bad friends. Conclusion Helping children with ADHD build close peer relationships is an important goal to focus on, and is one that often may be over looked. You, as a parent, have the ability to help your child accomplish this important social goal. You should make every effort to help your child in this area. His psychological health and his happiness, both now and in the future, are very much dependent upon how successful he is at making and maintaining childhood friendships. Anthony Kane, MD

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