

My Child says: “Nobody likes me!”

by Expressionsintl

ANOTHER APPROACH

“Everyone hates me.” “I have trouble making friends.” These aren’t easy things for parents to hear. Your first instinct is to assure your child it’s not true. “As parents, what we want to say is, ‘That’s not true!’ because it’s painful for us to think that people hate our child, and it’s painful that our child thinks someone hates them. So we want to fix it; it’s a very strong impulse, but we have to hold ourselves back because if we do that, we inadvertently send the message that those feelings are bad, that maybe they can’t handle those feelings, and most importantly, it doesn’t give them the opportunity to develop coping skills.”

Instead of rushing to smooth things over when a child feels disliked, experts agree, parents should focus on teaching their child to help themselves.

1 LISTEN

Everyone has a bad day. A small slight can easily get blown out of proportion and lead your child to come home and declare that they haven’t a friend in the world. The first thing to do is listen. You want to understand if there’s a bigger pattern of your child being excluded, or if this is a one-time occurrence.

“By listening you can figure out if there’s a real problem, like bullying or something missing in your child’s social skills, that needs to be attended to.”

2 ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR CHILD’S FEELINGS

Starting with empathy is the most important thing. You say something like ‘Oh sweetie, I know you feel like everyone hates you, that’s really painful,’

When your child expresses to you that they’re feeling hurt or sad, validating that feeling and letting them experience it is an important practice for handling such feelings as she gets older. Have faith in your child’s ability to successfully weather the negative experiences in life, and she will learn to have that same faith in herself.

3 ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

After you’ve expressed empathy, asking your child questions, such as ‘Why do you think that?’ can help kids analyze the problem and arrive at their own solutions.

Ask a lot of questions to lead them through the thought process, so that they can own their own feeling of, ‘Oh, you know what? I don’t think that is really true. They weren’t really running away from me. There was another game and they didn’t see me.’ If they come to that conclusion on their own, they’re much more likely to believe it. Also it helps them understand how to go through that process on their own.

4 TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH EMPATHY

My daughter reported being teased about her way she dresses, I saw an opening to talk about the feelings of others. I asked my daughter, do you know other kids who have been teased? She thought about it and said, ‘Yes.’ I asked, ‘What does everybody else get teased about?’ One was teased for her big ears, another for something else... It was helpful for my daughter to realize she wasn’t alone in her experience of having been teased. “Then I could ask, ‘Now that you know how it feels, how do you think it feels for other people?’ ‘It wasn’t dismissing her. It was helping her realize what other people are feeling.”

5 LET YOUR CHILD LEAD IN FINDING A SOLUTION

Once you have identified what the problem is, whether it’s getting left out of an activity or someone’s hurtful words at the lunch table, ask your child what ideas they have for a solution.

Although your child might be looking to you to make the problem go away, this is an opportunity to show her that she’s capable of finding the answers herself. Ask your child, “Can you think of anything you can do to resolve this problem now? To prevent the problem in the future?”