

Cliques in Schools: A word of advice by Bill Sanders

Why do special cliques have to exist in our school?

It hurts to feel left out. No one likes to feel as if she were "on the outside, looking in." No guy wants to feel he could never be part of the team or liked by the best-looking girls in the class.

But believe it or not, there are some positive reasons why you have certain groups in your school.

1. Part of it is normal, healthy, and necessary. When people who share interests get together, they can form better friendships. If you hate baseball, you'd never feel comfortable on the team; people who can't stand chess don't really want to be in the chess club, and chances are they don't have many friends on the chess team, because they have different interests. It's the same way with other groups of people.

2. No one can have lots and lots of intimate friends. Building friendships takes time and effort. About the largest number of close friends you could have would be four, and at times you may only have one. But when you have four friends, you may not be as close to any of them as you'll be to that one.

Though you can know lots of people and care for them, you can't become truly close with twenty or thirty people at once. No one has the energy or time to nurture so many deep relationships.

So limiting friendships is not *all* bad, if it causes better relationships based on common interests and goals.

Groups can become negative, however, when they have the wrong attitude about their limitedness.

No group should:

1. Put down other people. Not everyone shares the same interests; just because they're not in the group is no reason to label others *bad*.

2. Look out for only their own benefit. Such groups become self-destructive. Nothing lasts long when it has only its own good at heart.

3. Ridicule others because of some "lack." What makes any one group the best measure of people? No one has the right to gossip, be mean, or make fun of someone else who is less attractive or smart. No clique should make a person who is "different" pay for the rest of his life.

People may want to be part of groups that do these things, but you can do better for yourself. Set yourself a higher standard.

How do you relate to groups in your school? Ask yourself:

1. Am I a member of a clique? If so, how do the people in it influence you? How do you influence them? Are the morals they have good for you? I talk with many kids who became involved with drugs or partying because "the group was doing it." They didn't have the courage to stand up for themselves. Don't let yourself fall into that trap.

2. Am I feeling left out? Perhaps you feel as if you don't belong: to the right group. Do you want to be friends with a certain clique because of their status? If so, you could spend your life searching for the "right" group. Instead of looking at the outside, you need to discover friends who show they are honest, sincere, have a sense of humor, and are easy to get along with.

3. Do I reach out to new people? Never assume you will not like someone new. She could end up being your next best friend or a lifelong pal. Give people a chance. If you were in her place you'd want a fair opportunity.

Occasionally you will find someone who just never fits in. No matter what you do, he may remain beyond your group, but at least offer him the opportunity to become a friend. Give a person a chance, or he may remain isolated and hurt.

4. Am I avoiding the pettiness of some groups? Compassion and kindness are lost arts in today's world. You may have received unkind treatment from other people, but that doesn't mean you have to join in their naughty reindeer games.

You may never change every group in your school, but you can start with yourself and encourage your friends to develop these attitudes. Everyone in the school will never be close to you, but you'll probably have some good friends.