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# Dr. Mayer's Memo

Volume 15 No. 7

## The Social Life of Young People From Kindergarten thru High School (Please feel free to pass this on to parents)

My favorite time when speaking to groups is the question and answer period. In these sessions I always learn a great deal from the audience. These sessions also let me know about what areas parents and schools need more information. No matter what topic I am speaking on one area that always seems to need more explanation is the social development of young people.

Let me review how young people's social life grows. Keep in mind that these are very broad sketches made to fit this short space:

### Kindergarten: (and pre-school ages)

Social life is a new concept. Children are "forced" to cope with others their age for the first time. Neighborhood children and relatives don't have this same forced impact. At this age neighbor friends and relative friends are different than the fact that children have to now accommodate "strangers". This is not easy. As a result children act very selfish (narcissistic) everything is about ME and what they can get for themselves. Children's mentality has not developed enough for them to realize the needs and feelings of others. As such, techniques such as rationalizing with children this age about how they should think how their peers feel about this or that are useless. They need adults to say, "NO, you don't play like that." Or, "That was very good when you shared with Kathy." They need simple right-from-wrong instruction from adults not attempts at empathy they can't do.

### First and Second Grades:

Children begin to accept others. But this acceptance is based on a child's experience of the reality that another child's needs will come before theirs. So, children are still very primitive. This translates to: *if another child doesn't make me feel good, I have no use for them.* The younger the child, the more their BRAIN tells them that they are the center of the world. This is extremely important to keep in mind. When we (adults) try to change children's behavior using techniques that call for thinking about the well-being of others they just don't work. Teach social behavior by saying: NO.

(over please)



**At Birth a child is completely narcissistic (totally self centered). It must be for survival sake. Healthy social development is a slow process of moving away from this position of complete narcissism to one of being a social person. Adults need to be patient with this slow process and constantly lower your expectations. (not standards)**

### Third thru Fifth Grades:

Children form the first true bonds with other children and begin to actively delay their own needs and gratifications in order to please other children. This shows the brain's increasing ability to realize that they are not the only children in the world. It is at this age when statements, actions and feelings of other children really start to have an impact on children. Their feelings get hurt because of not getting what they want, and now because of being hurt by others and by the world at large for that matter. Teasing, bullying, name calling, yelling (and yelling by parents) begin to hurt emotionally in new ways. Be careful how you talk to children at these ages as the emotional hurt increases dramatically. Children will get hurt easily at these ages. They will now learn how to cope with this hurt.

### Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Grades:

Social life expands. Children's attention moves vigorously away from the home and family and other children become increasingly important at these ages. Interest in opposite sex relationships start in fifth grade and build in these grades. Thus, there is a lot going on socially in these grades. This is a very explosive time in the social life of young people. They will make many mistakes in how they handle social relationships because all of this is new and all of these social issues are hitting them all at once especially the addition of opposite sex interest and later in this age category the beginnings of dating and girl/boy pairings. Watch over the social choices young people make at these ages. Know what choices they are making. **DO NOT ALLOW UNSUPERVISED PARTIES OR OTHER SOCIAL GATHERINGS.** Begin to observe and question about drinking, drugs, smoking and even sexual activity.

### High School:

This time is a huge explosion in social life. Not only is the brain building more capacity to think of others, but the fact of making new friendships and being with people from different life experiences and cultures makes this time very stressful for the now teenager. Privacy, independence and separation from home/parents become very important issues. Young people begin this period with that ME FIRST and ONLY attitude and leave with the strong base of now starting to think of WE. The younger the teen, the more WE techniques will not work to change behavior.

### ***The War***

You may have noticed that I haven't rushed into print guidelines on how we should prepare our youth for this war in Iraq. In previous Memos (Vol. 3 No.s 5 & 6, Vol. 14 No.s 1&2) I took the lead in providing guidelines on to prepare students for the tensions of war. These tips have been adopted widely and there seems to be plenty of sources providing help in the general direction I first advised. Further, for a variety of reasons, students appear to be handling this war in a calm manner. For these reasons I have chosen not to discuss the war here. Call if you have concerns.

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**Read more of these concepts in Dr. Mayer's latest book on family life: *The 3 Week Family Fat Cure*.**

**This book is more than a fitness and health book, but has sections on better FAMILY DISCIPLINE, MOTIVATING YOUTH, improving FAMILY COMMUNICATION, and increasing FAMILY TOGETHERNESS. It contains much of his philosophy on being a healthy family.**

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