

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**Recently, my friend Susan started hanging out with some of the really popular kids in our high school. At first, it didn't matter to me, but lately, she never has any time to spend with me. She says she can't do something with me because she's too busy, but then I see her out with her new friends. We used to eat lunch together, now we don't. I'm not exactly unpopular, but I'm just not up there in the same class as her new friends. We've been best friends since the second grade, and I feel sad and miss her. I'm starting to hate going to school because Susan snubs me in the hall. Do you have any ideas about what I can say to her?**

-- Angela

Dear Angela,

I can sense the hurt and disappointment in your letter, and I don't blame you for feeling sad. It's normal to expect loyalty from our friends, and when we don't get it, it's natural to feel hurt and betrayed.

Unfortunately, high school society is a tribal place – and often a cruel one. Most schools are overrun with subcultures and social classes: jocks, pompoms, preps, surfers, geeks, drama freaks, metalbangers, goth, fobs, and science club nerds. In a recent study of four California high schools, researchers found that high school students identified more than twenty-five different subcultural groups according to ethnic backgrounds, musical preferences, interests in computers, cars, theatre, and so forth.

It's natural for groups of people to congregate because of common interests or circumstances, but cliques have a disturbing ability to provide privilege and power to their members, while causing exclusion and isolation for everyone else. Everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging, and this is particularly important during adolescence. For a young person – actually for anyone -- it can be devastating to feel left out, alienated, or cast into a low rung of the social hierarchy.

First, be certain that you've done nothing to alienate Susan. It doesn't appear that you have, but spend a little time asking yourself, "Have I done anything that has hurt Susan's feelings?" Talk with her. And do this outside of the school setting. Be honest; tell her what you've told me in your letter. At the very least, this conversation – if she is willing to have it – will allow you to get your feelings off your chest. It may even bring Susan to her senses. She may reflect on what she is doing to you – and, perhaps, other friends as well. In the best case, she will apologize for relinquishing your friendship in order to move up the social ladder. In the worst case, she will deny that anything has changed and will make excuses: that she really has just been very busy, or has some particular reason to have lunch with her new pals, instead of you. Her immediate reaction to the conversation may be defensive, but if you are clear, and speak from your heart, she will no doubt reflect on what you've said later.

It seems like Susan has been seduced into believing that being part of the elite "in crowd" is more important than your long-standing friendship. Perhaps she wasn't the good friend you thought she was all this time. Perhaps, she was more of a friend for a season or a reason, rather than one who is attached to your heart. Friends for a season or

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reason can appear to be close, but when the season or reason changes – poof! – the friendship disappears.

Let yourself grieve for the loss of this relationship – if that is how it turns out – and then move on. Find people who share your interests. Make new friends who have more mature expectations of friendship and are not shallow or social climbers. Make it a point to practice a love of diversity. Invite someone who is hanging around the edges of your social group to sit with you at lunch. Your hospitality and friendship can make all the difference to that person. Your painful experience has a silver lining: it has shown you how important it is to treat your friends with respect, and that lesson will serve you—and your friends—in the future.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).