

Guess Who Isn't Coming to the Party?

Christian school educators and parents agree that the most effective schooling occurs when the school and the parents work together to achieve agreed-upon ends in the lives of children and when both engage their areas of responsibility. It is this kind of unity that communicates so effectively to students just how important a given matter is. A ridiculous example of failure in this arena would be a case when Teacher gives a homework assignment, but Mom or Dad deems it ridiculous and informs Teacher, "My child will not be doing this stupid assignment!" It does not require a rocket scientist to recognize the great damage done and the horrible message conveyed to Student.

Thankfully, in the Christian school, such incidents are rare. Oh, there might be conflicting views regarding an assignment, but engaged, caring parents are vested in their children's education, and they most often seek to work through this kind of conflict in effective ways.

I would like to pursue, however, a reality: one far more subtle and certainly not ridiculous. This reality is unbelievably painful—but it occurs just far enough below the surface that too often only the most observant catch it—and only the most sensitive deal with it appropriately.

It is common for students enrolled in the Christian school to start school together and then progress through the grades as a group, a unit, or in the ultranegative a clique. Often each ensuing year of this progress through the grades creates little

if any change in the names and faces. Although problems can occur even at the earliest grades, the more serious will often manifest themselves in the middle and upper grades. In its simplest form, the problem begins when a new student arrives and cannot "break in." The initial hurting becomes even more painful as private social activities take place and time after time the new kid is not invited. The student is not necessarily disliked; he or she is simply not part of the family. Generally these situations occur "below the radar," that is, out of the jurisdiction and maybe even the knowledge of teachers.

This problem creates a great opportunity for you to come alongside, supporting and strengthening your student's character development. You can become engaged in the

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invitation and inclusion process. Are those birthday parties and other parent-sponsored social events inclusive? The whole matter may seem a nonissue—that is, unless your child is the one excluded. It is painful for the child—and it is painful for you as a caring, loving parent.

You greatly contribute to the process of nurturing Christlike character in your children when you join with your school in the effort. Reaching out and caring for others is not just about feeding the hungry or meeting the needs of the poor; it includes embracing the outsider and extending friendship. Your participation and support are vital in this often subtle but clearly painful experience that too many students endure. All it takes for you to help is a renewed effort to pay attention at the early stages of social planning and gently but firmly lead your children in the opportunity to include rather than exclude.



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