ForeWord Reviews

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

**Why Good Kids Act Cruel: The Hidden Truth about the Pre-Teen Years**
Carl Pickhardt
Sourcebooks
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New and troubling behaviors are often a feature of early adolescence; parents and teachers need insight and practical advice to help guide pre-teens. Why Good Kids Act Cruel is a thoughtful examination of five specific types of behavior: teasing, exclusion, bullying, rumoring, and ganging up. These all take place within the larger context of social cruelty, which the author describes as "intentionally hurtful behavior that young people engage in because there is something of social value to be gained-to assert dominance or protect against attack or to establish standing." This book is a discussion of what each behavior entails, why it occurs, the potential damage it can cause in both the child who is acting out and the child who is the target, and the ways parents and school staff can help correct behavior and prevent some of its harm.

Carl Pickhardt, a psychologist in a private counseling practice, is the author of several books on child and young adult psychology including Stop the Screaming, The Future of Your Only Child, and The Connected Father. In this latest book, the author's expertise with dealing with adolescents is clear. A general chapter on the early adolescent experience is wonderfully insightful and will help many parents who struggle to understand the mystifying and often hurtful behavior of their middle school children. Practical examples and clear advice will help parents help children through this extremely difficult growing-up period. For example, Pickhardt lists eight "anchors for family influence," which include "completing homework, cleaning up one's room, doing household chores, joining family activities, contributing community service, saving money, developing proficiency, and relating to salient adults."

Adolescence is difficult. Insecurity and a lack of control over one's environment and even one's own body are the hallmarks of this stage, and according to the author, this is the primary reason for social cruelty. Parents, teachers, and other involved adults have a responsibility to teach and help guide youth through confusion and fear. Why Good Kids Act Cruel is an excellent resource for adults seeking to help children get through adolescence and become healthy, socially responsible adults. (January) Catherine Reed Thureson