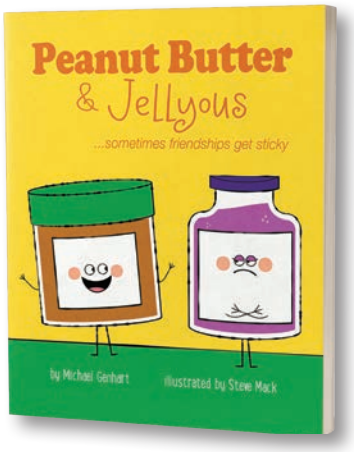
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

# Help Kids Navigate Jealousy in Friendships




*Peanut Butter & Jellyous...sometimes friendships get sticky*, by Michael Genhart, PhD, is a playful story about dealing with jealous feelings in a friendship when two kids are best friends and new friends enter the mix.

Coming up with suitable solutions and coping skills when facing jealous feelings is important. Parents and educators can help children with these complex and sometimes painful feelings. This adapted excerpt from the Note to Parents, Caregivers, and Educators provides insights and strategies to help kids learn to manage jealousy.

## What Is Jealousy?

Jealousy and envy are normal human emotions. And though the terms are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Envy involves two people while jealousy involves a third person. With **envy** you feel that you are lacking something that someone else has, and you want that thing. It could be a skill, like running fast; a characteristic, like height; or a possession, such as a toy.

With **jealousy** you feel a kind of threat that you could lose something or someone to another person. Your child might fear that their best friend likes another child better than them, and fear being replaced. Jealousy also often emerges in family situations like the arrival of a new baby, an older sibling getting attention for achievements, or a parent dating following a divorce. In each case a young child can fear losing time, attention, and love.

## Signs of Jealousy

When a child is feeling jealousy, it may not always be obvious. It can sometimes be hidden in a child's behavior. For example, your child might:

- complain of "tummy aches" or other physical symptoms,
- feel helpless and easily give up on things when normally they would not,
- withdraw from a friendship, become less available to a friend, or be less supportive of a friend, particularly if that friend has experienced something positive,
- start to be quite critical of a friend or even talk about that friend in ugly ways to other children,
- exaggerate happiness about a friendship or become very cautious, warning their friend to "be careful" of their new friend.

More obvious indicators of jealousy include:

- overt anger and aggression expressed toward a friend or the "new" friend,
- bullying, teasing, or being mean to the target of jealousy,
- revenge-seeking or sabotaging behavior (e.g., telling lies about others to bring them down or about oneself just to be liked best),
- clingy, possessive, and demanding overtures toward the best friend so as to not let that child wander off to other friends.

## What You Can Do to Help

Here are some ways you can help your child learn to cope with their feelings of jealousy. (For a more complete list, see the entire Note at the end of *Peanut Butter & Jellyous.*)

### Make time to talk

Listen to your child talk about their fears without taking over the conversation or rushing in to solve the problem.

### Show empathy

Show that you understand your child's feelings. For example, you can say something like, "I see why you feel upset about not being included in Susan's party. She's new to your class and is spending a lot of time with your friend."

### Model compassion

If your child is on the receiving end of jealous feelings, check in with them if they are in any way contributing to the friend's jealousy. Some children are in a hurry to show off their own successes and don't realize that this behavior could trigger jealousy in someone else. Consider with your child whether their friend might be having a hard time or is in a tough spot. Acknowledge that this friend must be really hurting to have said ugly words. This show of empathy is very hard to do!

### Make room for many different friendships

Host inclusive events and activities with several friends together but also make time for best friends to continue to have their time together and strengthen these ties.

### Encourage a positive self-image

What are your child's positive skills, abilities, and characteristics? Periodically take stock of these with your child. Remind them how they contribute to friendships in beneficial ways and what they do that makes their friendships successful. Help them to remember to be proud of these successful friendships!

If your child continues to have problems with jealous feelings or dealing with a friend who is expressing jealousy, it might be time to seek professional guidance. Having a therapist to talk these matters out with can help. Play therapy or talk therapy (depending on the age of the child) can help elicit underlying feelings connected to jealousy. Find a therapist near you with the APA therapist locator.

*Peanut Butter & Jellyous* is part of the Books for Nourishing Friendships series by Dr. Genhart. Check out two other titles, *Cake & I Scream...being bossy isn't sweet* and *Mac & Geeeez!...being real is what it's all about* for more insights into successful friendships.


### This Article's Author

**Michael Genhart, PhD**, is a licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in San Francisco and Mill Valley, California. He lives with his family in Marin County. He received his BA in psychology from the University of California, San Diego and his PhD in clinical and community psychology from the University of Maryland, College Park.

He is the author of several picture books including: *Ouch! Moments: When Words Are Used in Hurtful Ways* (2016), *So Many Smarts!* (2017), *Mac & Geeeez!* (2017), *Cake & I Scream*! (2017), and *I See You* (2017), all from Magination Press, as well as *Yes We Are!* (Little Pickle Press, 2018).


## Peanut Butter & Jellyous...sometimes friendships get sticky

Peanut Butter and Jelly. Jelly and Peanut Butter. They are ALWAYS together! But when Peanut Butter starts hanging out with other friends, Jelly flips her lid. Find out how these two best friends learn to stick together... while making room for new friends!

Includes a Note to Parents, Caregivers, and Educators.

Check out Peanut Butter and Jellyous here: **www.apa.org/pubs/magination/441B212**