Friends broaden our children’s horizons, share their joys and secrets, and accompany them on their journeys into ever wider worlds. But friends can also gossip and betray, tease and exclude. Children can cause untold suffering, not only for their peers but for parents as well. In this wise and insightful book, psychologist Michael Thompson, Ph.D., and children’s book author Catherine O’Neill Grace, illuminate the crucial and often hidden role that friendship plays in the lives of children from birth through adolescence.

Drawing on fascinating new research as well as their own extensive experience in schools, Thompson and Grace demonstrate that children’s friendships begin early—in infancy—and run exceptionally deep in intensity and loyalty. As children grow, their friendships become more complex and layered but also more emotionally fraught, marked by both extraordinary intimacy and bewildering cruelty. As parents, we watch, and often live through vicariously, the tumult that our children experience as they encounter the “cool” crowd, shifting alliances, bullies, and disloyal best friends.

Best Friends, Worst Enemies brings to life the drama of childhood relationships, guiding parents to a deeper understanding of the motives and meanings of social behavior. Here you will find penetrating discussions of the difference between friendship and popularity, how boys
and girls deal in unique ways with intimacy and commitment, whether all kids need a best friend, why cliques form and what you can do about them.

Filled with anecdotes that ring amazingly true to life, Best Friends, Worst Enemies probes the magic and the heartbreak that all children experience with their friends. Parents, teachers, counselors—indeed anyone who cares about children—will find this an eye-opening and wonderfully affirming book.

My Personal Review:
Alice Miller (author of The Drama of the Gifted Child and Breaking Down the Walls of Silence) has long emphasized that if we are serious about solving society's problems, we must focus on how we treat children---as individual families and as a cultural. This book is an excellent contribution toward that end. From thought-provoking observations to practical suggestions about solutions, Best Friends, Worst Enemies is an effective education about social problems that begin in childhood, but do not end in childhood. One point the authors make that interests me greatly is that when one child is being bullied by others, the majority of children witnessing the abuse will either do nothing to intervene or they will join in with the bullying. If you think that is not a reflection of the society in which we live, think again. As a psychotherapist and author (Embracing Fear, HarperSanFrancisco) who emphasizes personal responsibility and facing fears head on, I hope that more than just parents and educators will read this book. I think there is something here for us all to think about --- no, to do something about.

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