



FRENEMIES

How to deal with friends-turned-enemies

BY SR. PATRICIA M. MCCORMACK, IHM, EdD

RECENTLY A STUDENT TAUGHT ME A NEW TERM (*frenemy*) for a timeless concept (*bully*). Frenemy behavior is bullying with an emotional twist. The bully used to be a friend of the victim but withdraws from the friendship with no explanation and cruelly tries to turn other students against the victim. A frenemy is a friend-turned-enemy, a Judas of sorts.

Frenemies try to damage their former friends' sense of social position and rob them of self-confidence and social acceptance.

Frenemies practice what psychologists call "relational aggression." Their weapons are exclusion, gossip, the silent treatment, and belittling. They attempt to freeze out the former friend from their established social group. Frenemy behavior makes it challenging for other students to welcome the victim for fear of having the same hurt dished out to them.

Frenemies and *bullies* share similar characteristics, motives, and behaviors. They suffer from poor self-esteem and a hunger for power. They retaliate against innocent



victims out of anger, frustration, jealousy, or a desire to win the respect of bystanders.

Though their behavior is wrong, they need prayer and guidance because they themselves are hurting. One of the four basic human needs are not being met. Unconsciously they act out in an attempt to feed their unmet need.

When your needs are being met (see sidebar), you do not bother others or hurt others or take offense at others. But when one of those needs is out of whack, you do not feel good about yourself, and you make negative choices.

Victims are targeted because of their grades, appearance, or achievement and success. In

Your Order of Needs

SECURITY or self-confidence

AUTONOMY or self-control, power, and independence

INITIATIVE or responsibility and organization

INDUSTRY or competence

comparison, the frenemy or bully feels inadequate.

By their silence or comments, *bystanders* add power to the bully; they ignore injustice, which only contributes to the abusive behavior.

Student Questions

- If you are too scared to stand up to a bully, what other ways can you help the situation?
- Have you ever been a bystander before? After reading this article, what might you have done differently?
- Were there any tips in the final paragraph that especially relate to your life?
- What are some reasons a frenemy or bully might need your prayers?
- Why might someone become a frenemy?

I suspect that every middle-school student has witnessed the frenemy dynamic play out at some point. Jesus calls you to be a *disciple* — a person who puts love into action, stands up for peers,

Though your heart may break, if you are the victim, keep calm.

speaks out against injustice and cruel acts, and will not condone or tolerate cruel behavior. You might lack the courage to go public, but you can assist by making eye contact with the victim that communicates understanding, inviting the victim to your lunch table, or changing the topic of conversation.

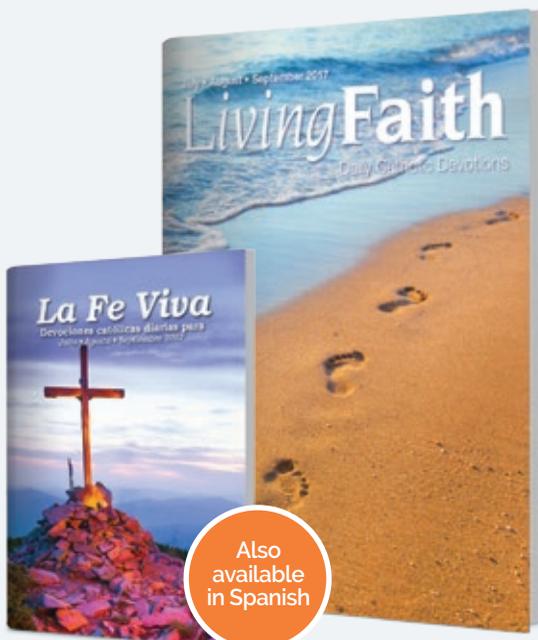
Though your heart may break, if you are the victim, keep calm.

Act confidently but not arrogantly, and smile at life. Stand tall, make eye contact, address the bully by name, state your position calmly and respectfully, and then walk away. Develop new interests and new friends. Join activities and sports. Make a new life for yourself.

Pray a personalized Our Father for your frenemy! Say: “*Tara’s Father who are in heaven, hallowed be your name in Tara. Your kingdom come in Tara. Your will be done in Tara ...*” God will grant you the grace of seeing Tara the way he sees her. And you will actually grow in compassion for her and be more grateful for being the person that you are! **T**

Send your questions and suggestions to SR. PAT at DrPatMcCormack@aol.com.

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