

Our Friendship Rules

Peggy Moss and Dee Dee Tardif

Illustrated by Alissa Imre Geis

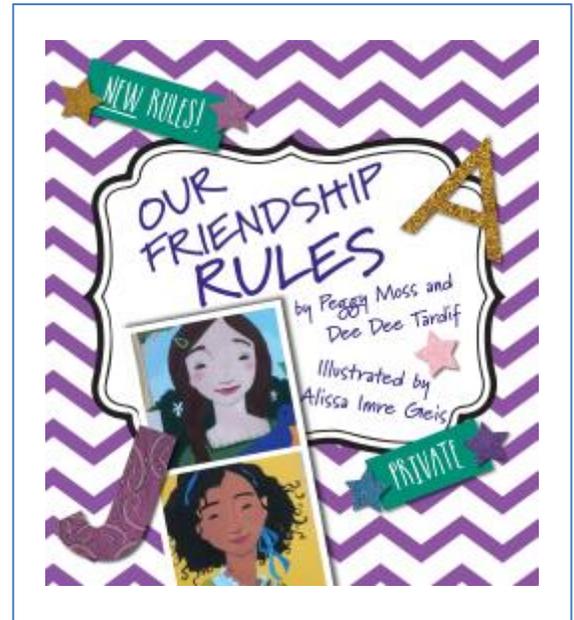
Paperback, \$8.95

ISBN 978-0-88448-596-4

9 x 10, 36 pages, color illustrations

Picture Book/Fiction

Children/Character Education Grades 2-6



Summary

Dazzled by the glamour of a new girl at school, Alexandra is willing to do anything to get to be her friend—including betray the secrets of her best friend, Jenny. When she realizes what she has done, Alexandra decides to make things right.

Our Friendship Rules will lead to discussions about

- Discuss what it means to be a friend, and why friends matter.
- Discuss what it means to bully (three forms of bullying are physical, verbal, and emotional).
- Discuss if it is possible to live in a bully-free community, and what it would feel like to be there. (Ask children to imagine going to a school where no one puts anyone down, where no one talks behind backs or whispers. What would the school look like? How would you feel?)
- Brainstorm some of your own friendship rules with your kids and come up with classroom "rules" together.
- Speculate about how Alexandra and Jenny can include Rolinda in their circle of friends and help Rolinda feel comfortable being part of a group that is accepting of lots of different kids.

Before You Read

Background

If you are a parent, be sure that your child understands that he or she deserves to be with people who respect him or her. Explain that if a "friend" doesn't act like a good friend, it's okay to walk away. Your child doesn't have to be good friends with every child in the school. (She should, however, treat every kid with respect.)

One of the hardest things for anyone to do—kids or adults—is speak up to a bully, someone who is spreading a rumor or telling a joke about another friend. It's hard, but it's worth it. Talk to your students about how they would feel if NOBODY tried to stop a rumor about them, or NOBODY tried to include them.

Access Prior Knowledge

- Increasingly we understand the importance of peer relationships for children. It may be helpful to think of making friends as just another skill to be learned in the process of growing up.
- Discuss the following quote by Eleanor Roosevelt; "No one can make you feel inferior without your permission."

After You Read

Activity

Just for Kids

- Write some friendship rules of your own. Start with really specific things. Remember that Jenny and Alexandra started with "Don't make a puppet out of your best friend's shirt. . . ." You can even put those rules on a wall, and remind yourself to be the best friend you can be.
- Bring a speaker to your school, church, or homeschool community or start an anti-bullying campaign. For instance, Peggy Moss, author of *Our Friendship Rules* and *Say Something*, or Rachel Simmons, the author of *Odd Girl Out: The Culture of Hidden Aggression in Girls*, both do speaking tours.
- REMEMBER-EVERYBODY has the right to feel safe and comfortable in school, and EVERYONE likes to have a friend. YOU can make your school a friendlier place.

Are You a Good Friend?

Here are some of the things that Jenny and I think make really good friends. What do you think about each of these?

- Good friends are friends 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, not just when it's convenient or there's nobody "better" to play with.
- Good friends let you play with other friends, and even have fun. They don't try to pick your friends for you, or make fun of you because you like someone who they don't particularly like.

- A good friend says, "I'm frustrated/angry/upset with you," and tells you why. A good friend doesn't tell Mitch who tells Sally who tells Fred that you are mad.
- A good friend says, "You've got a piece of toilet paper stuck in your hair." (A good friend does NOT stand up in class and yell, "Hey look at that toilet paper in his hair. He looks like Big Bird!")
- A good friend doesn't spread rumors, about you or anybody else.
- A good friend doesn't try to change you, but accepts you the way you are. Better than that, a good friend actually LIKES you the way you are-imperfect and goofy and quiet and loud and YOU!
- A good friend remembers that anybody can be a good friend. It just takes work.
- A good friend tells you the truth, even when you don't want to hear it. (For example, she might say that wearing your sister's shoes isn't very smart or that it's more important to be able to walk than it is to look cool. Ouch.)

So you have a good friend. And then, like me, you blow it. You hurt your friend's feelings, make up a story, or decide for a week that you never really liked her anyway. Maybe, if you really, really mess up, you tell a secret about your friend that you promised you would never tell anybody. Well, guess what? I know a little bit about that. If you mess up, try this:

- Really think about what you've done. Try to figure out how your friend feels, and why. If you're not sure, ask your friend, and listen to the answer.
- Recognize that you made a mistake, and think hard about what it is that you did wrong, and then, when you've got it all figured out, say you're sorry. And mean it.
- Be patient. Hurt feelings aren't so different from scrapes and cuts. They take a while to heal. But they do heal. Honest.
- Take a deep breath. Sounds weird, right? I know. But it also kind of works. Just before you scream, "I'm glad I hurt your feelings and I can't stand the way you play checkers," suck in some air and let it out slowly. Then consider saying instead, "I need some time to think about this."
- And if your friend makes a mistake, think of it the way my friend Jenny did: Try to solve the problem. Starting with your friend. Say, "You hurt my feelings. . . ."
- If the situation is too hard-either because you feel excluded or too sad to try to join the group or you know someone else who does-tell an adult who you trust, and ask that person for help. Instead of saying, "We're fighting." Or "He's being mean." Consider saying, "Alex and I need help working out a problem." That way that adult knows you aren't ratting someone out, you're trying to solve a problem.

Helping Other Kids

And here are some things you can do if you see OTHER kids messing up their friendships and hurting people:

- If you know someone who is being excluded by a group that you are in, OPEN THE DOOR. Show that you won't play along. Say, "Hey, Jo, can I sit with you at lunch today?"
- Know that if you play with friends who leave Jo out on Tuesday, they might leave YOU out on Wednesday. Don't play that game.

- STOP the rumor. People tell rumors to get attention and fit in, and when you listen and repeat the rumor, you are spreading the rumor like a fire around the school. Someone is going to get burned. Today it might not be you, but tomorrow . . . Here's what you can do to STOP a rumor:
 - Say, "That doesn't sound right," or "That's not true."
 - Say, "Why are you telling me this?"
 - Say, "He's a friend of mine."
 - Say something GOOD about the target of the rumor (be like a wet blanket on a wild-fire rumor). Say, "Jo is a great soccer player."

Here's the problem: You might end up being the one left out or talked about. So I bet you wonder why it makes sense to stick up for someone. Well, here are some thoughts on that:

- Because it'll almost certainly help someone.
- Because you can make exclusion and rumor-making uncool. Most bullies are seeking peer approval and control over others. But if nobody joins in, both the approval and the control are lost.
- Because exclusion could happen to you. And if you are suddenly on the outs with your group, you would want someone to speak up for you. When you speak up, you kids how it's done. Then they can do it for you.

For Further Discussion

- What if someone breaks your friendship rules?
- How does forgiveness play a part in a strong community?

Further Reading

Say Something, also by Peggy Moss (Tilbury House, 2004)

The main character in *Say Something* realizes that by not speaking up to either stop a bully or reach out to the bullied kid, she is just as much a part of the bullying.

Internet Resources

You may find the following Internet resources helpful as your students continue to explore the topic of the book.

The Bully Project

The BULLY Project is the social action campaign inspired by the award-winning film BULLY

<http://www.thebullyproject.com>

PACERKidsAgainstBullying

A creative, innovative and educational website designed for elementary school students to learn about bullying prevention, engage in activities and be inspired to take action

<http://www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org/kab/>

StopBullying

Information from various government agencies on what bullying is, what cyberbullying is, who is at risk, and how you can prevent and respond to bullying

<http://www.stopbullying.gov>