



1. YOUR SOCIAL WORLD

-Caution! Construction zone-

Are you socially accepted? Do you hang out with the popular crowd, emos, nerds, jocks, punks or _____ (yep, fill it in)? Or maybe you'd rather not put a label on your crowd. After all, just who decides what is **cool** or who is **popular**? Do you own the "right" clothes? Do you care? Does mom drive a "cool" car? Does she **embarrass** you? (Do you sometimes

feel like her job is to embarrass you?)

Are your friendships occupying most of your time? Are you having trouble with your friends? Do you compare yourself to others? If you can relate to any of these questions, welcome to the teen years, you are socially on your way....

CHAPTER ROAD MAP

DIRECTIONS: This chapter is about some important elements of **your social life**. (As if you need us to tell you that you have some major social changes going on right now.) Just for fun, we are asking you to imagine that you are **a construction worker** setting out to build your social world. You will need a great toolbox in order to build a solid and reliable foundation.

1. Two tools helpful when establishing a solid social world include:

- Your compassion and your empathy.

2. Your social foundation will affect:

- Your best friends.
- Your crushes.
- The amount of peer pressure you experience.

In each of these areas, you will discover two things: what you are actively building FOR yourself, and, **the effect** that your construction will have on YOU. You create your social world and your social world, in turn, creates YOU. (Another cycle! Are you surprised? We seriously hope not!)

FINAL DESTINATION: What is your role in your social world? This chapter intends to help you put all the pieces together: to figure out what to build and where to live. (Your neighborhood is your circle of friends!)

Check Under Your Hood:

How do you define a friend? _____



What does being a good friend mean to you?

List as many adjectives as you can to describe the kind of friends you like - to think of your three closest friends and to think of their qualities might be helpful.

List as many adjectives as you can to describe the type of friend you would like to be. What do you offer your friends?

YOUR TOOLS FOR CREATING A POSITIVE SOCIAL FOUNDATION

-Empathy and compassion-

Of course you have **tools**! Your tool box has been filling up as you've been reading this book. However, we would like to introduce two new personal power-tools at your disposal: **Empathy and compassion.**

Empathy is when you can relate to what another person is feeling because you are able to put yourself in his or her shoes.

How are they linked? When you have **empathy** and **compassion** for another person, your ability to relate to his/her misfortune (empathy) combined with your desire to help (compassion) may propel you into action. You may offer help to that person.

Since you have a higher level of **cognition** (thinking) now, you actually have the fantastic and forever useful ability to understand another person's **point of view**. This capacity for **empathy** enables you to step inside someone else's shoes for a moment and see what **his or her life** is like. Do you remember in elementary school that whenever someone said something about him or herself, your immediate **reaction** was to say how it **related to you** and your life? Here's an example:

Compassion is a feeling of deep sympathy for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to lessen the suffering.

First child: "I have the biggest bruise on my ankle."

Second child: "No way, the bruise on my knee is far bigger."

Third child: "Well the bruise on my elbow is going to be bigger than both of those, but you just can't see it yet."

Whereas now, you might respond, “Ouch, that’s gonna hurt” (**empathy**) and maybe you would offer some ice (**compassion**). **Do you see the difference?** Can you see how empathy and compassion are positive social skills?



PIT STOP: Ask yourself: Do I feel compassion at times for other people? **yes/no**

Think of a time you felt compassion for someone. What happened? What did you do about it?

Consider the following scenarios and try to imagine what the person in the story might be feeling (**empathy**):

Maggie, a new girl, gets on the bus, and shyly looks for an open seat. Hardly anyone notices her and if they do, it is only to put their books down on the seat next to them so that Maggie will be less likely to sit there.

Maggie

feels _____

If you were Maggie, you would like it

if _____

Every month your English teacher requires that each person read out loud to the class a short excerpt from a book. John, a usually loud football player, has a stutter when he speaks in public and you can see his face turning red each month as kids snicker underneath their breath at John.

John

feels _____

If you were John, you might like it

if _____

Sidney sits on the bench during most of your team’s soccer games. The coach hardly ever puts Sidney in and your teammates all know that Sidney is really not as good as the rest of the players.

Sidney

feels _____

If you were Sidney, you would like someone

to _____

The more you are able to step out of your own shoes, and to step into someone else’s, the more emotional understanding (**empathy**) you will have. This will aid you in your social life. How? This **greater emotional awareness** will help you to



choose more compassionate responses: responses that are more in keeping not only with who you wish to be but in keeping **friends**. The **regular practice** (habit) of **empathy** and **compassion** is a tool for

building better relationships.

On his way out of school, Steve saw Jason fall on the playground. Jason is really shy and, having just taken a major spill in front of a popular group of guys, must have been a bit embarrassed. As Steve imagined the pain Jason had to feel from landing on his butt, he couldn't help but also think about the pain Jason probably felt from the group of kids laughing at him. The way Jason looked as his books went flying was sort of funny, but Jason, himself, wasn't laughing.



DID YOU KNOW? From birth, when babies see or hear another baby crying in distress, they start crying as though they are distressed. After about 14 months of age, not only will the babies cry but they will try to help the baby in distress. The older they get, the less they cry and the more they try to help. (Daniel Goleman)

Being laughed at is not funny at all. As much as laughing with his classmates may have been a fun shared experience, the empathy that Steve felt for Jason stopped him from laughing. He put himself in Jason's shoes and thought, *If I were Jason, I would not want people to laugh at me. In fact, I'd want someone to smile at me, make light of the situation and help me up.* So, that's exactly what Steve did. He walked over to Jason, extended a hand and said, "You should have seen the spill I took yesterday. Beat yours by a mile." Steve's compassion and appropriate humor enabled Jason

to feel better and less bothered by the guys laughing at him.

Feeling **empathy** and showing **compassion** are two **habits** you will probably want to develop. The more you put yourself in someone else's shoes, the more you are able to base your **responses** on what **you** would like to have happen if **you** were in the same situation.

Two things to know about **empathy**:

1. Empathy is a big deal because it has been shown to be the major difference between people who bully others and people who lead others. (People who bully don't have empathy. People who lead and inspire others, do.)

2. Empathy is innate (you are born with it) and all it needs is some nurturing to develop as a habit (more habits!). No matter how old you are, you can always work on your empathy! You may have had a tough childhood where you didn't experience much empathy from others, but you can still develop empathy!

Compassion and **empathy** are two useful power tools to have in your box because not only will they empower you to create more friendships, but they will have a profound impact on creating your character and reputation – remember those? (Another cycle? Yep.)

**HOW AMAZING WOULD THIS PLANET BE
IF WE ALL TREATED EACH OTHER THE
WAY WE WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED?**

Practice **compassion** and **empathy** and you will likely **feel** a difference in how you **feel** about yourself and how other people think about and treat you.

HOW WILL YOU BUILD YOUR SOCIAL FOUNDATION? -Your best friends-

Now that your toolbox has some useful instruments for creating an awesome social life, let's take a look at some areas for construction. First stop: **Your best friends**. (Notice we said "friends?" Nothing hurts more than referring to someone as your best friend in front of another friend who is not referred to as the best friend. Why not just have lots of **BFFs**?)

An increased desire to spend more time with your **friends** right now is common during the teen years and a valuable preparation for the rest of your life. Don't worry if you are not there yet and you'd rather curl up on the couch with mom, or your pet lizard, and watch old movies (yeah, like from 2008). Everyone develops differently.

Ample evidence confirms that your friends (your social world) have the **largest influence** on you right now. YES! Your friends are one of the biggest factors in determining just **who you are** and what your life experiences will be. That is why choosing friends who reflect more of **who you are** rather than who you don't want to be, is **CRITICAL**.

What's in your social toolbox?

- _____ **compassion**
- _____ **empathy**
- _____ **ability to stop and think**
- _____ **ability to become aware of feelings**
- _____ **ability to plan a response**

Go ahead, list other tools in YOUR box! These tools help you to build your....social foundation!