

## **The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns**

### **Fighting The Feeling That You Just Don't Fit In**

from the American Counseling Association

Our society places a large value on being popular. Television, movies and magazines tend to focus on "winners," people who excel at what they do and seem to be loved and/or respected by everyone around them.

But many of us are plagued by the anxiety that comes with not really being sure of where we stand with others. We may fear that someone is only pretending to like us while actually criticizing us negatively or laughing at us behind our backs.

If you're a parent, you've most likely heard these feelings from your child. When he or she comes from school complaining that "Nobody likes me!" or "I don't have any friends!" you are usually aware that what is being said isn't the full picture. But you also see how painful and traumatic the perceived situation is for your child.

Such feelings are a natural part of a child's development. Puberty and early adolescence have children facing a number of physical and emotional changes that, while a normal part of development, can leave a child feeling insecure and frightened.

As parents, we can help overcome these fears and related feelings by showing patience and understanding. When we listen carefully to complaints and offer positive advice, we can help a child get past his or her insecurity. The key is not to dismiss your child's concerns, but instead to offer positive, reassuring feedback without being critical or judgmental.

But this isn't just a childhood problem. Many adults also face feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Someone may believe he or she can't make friends and feels uncomfortable in social situations. A common feeling can be that everything you say or do is being critiqued or judged and that you are constantly found to be falling short.

While it's perfectly normal to have such thoughts and feelings at various times, if they have become almost constant and have you withdrawing from work and social situations, avoiding family and neighbors, or always trying to not be noticed so you won't be judged, the problem is a serious one that can lead to harmful depression.

In such cases, seeking professional support is important. A professional counselor can help put things back into perspective and help you more realistically evaluate your relationships with others. You can locate a counselor through the "Find A Counselor" link on the ACA homepage at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).

*“Counseling Corner” is provided by the American Counseling Association.  
Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at  
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