

CASE 8

Friends

Tanner and Ethan have been Jared's closest friends since preschool. The three boys have always had much in common; over the years, they've had similar interests --first in Legos, then in lizards, and eventually in model trains. They belonged to the same Cub Scout troop, and they've always made sure they were on the same team in the city baseball and basketball leagues. They've even dressed alike, wearing T-shirts, jeans, high-top sneakers, and Atlanta Braves baseball caps. At their small neighborhood school, they've always been in the same class.

But now that they're in junior high school, things seem to be different.

Although Jared and Ethan have lockers next to each other, the three boys have been assigned to different homerooms and different classes, and each one eats during a different lunch period, so they hardly ever see one another during the school day. Furthermore, Tanner and Ethan don't seem to be the same guys that they used to be. Tanner started wearing an earring the week after school began. His clothes are different, too. His baggy pants hang down low on his hips, and his shirts are always so large that they reach to his knees. He's usually so interested in flirting with girls in the hallway or riding his new skateboard with the other "skaters" in the school parking lot that he has little time for Jared.

Ethan has changed, too, although in different ways than Tanner has. For example, he's about six inches taller than he was last year. His voice has grown deep like his dad's. He's become a real "neatnik," with his hair carefully combed and his designer shirts tucked carefully inside his well-pressed pants. He's joined the soccer team and stays for two hours of soccer practice every day after school. Like Tanner, Ethan seems to have little interest in maintaining his friendship with Jared.

Thinking that he would be too busy playing football after school with his friends, Jared didn't sign up for any of the extracurricular activities at his new school. So he comes home right after school each day and retreats to the basement to play with his model trains.

"Gosh, Jared, I haven't seen Ethan and Tanner over here for quite some time,"

his mother comments one day. "Don't you ever see them at school?"

"Not really, Mom," Jared replies. "

them to come over."

And they're usually too busy when I ask

"Well, you know, I ran into Ethan's mother at the grocery store the other day, and she said that Ethan made lots of new friends when he joined the soccer team. Maybe you should think about joining one of the teams or clubs at school, too. What about the swimming team, or the Spanish Club, or maybe the school band?"

As luck would have it, Jared sees announcements for school band tryouts posted around the school building the following day. Having taken a few trumpet lessons when he was in fourth grade, Jared thinks that playing trumpet in the band might be fun. When he gets home that afternoon, he pulls his trumpet out of his closet and begins to practice. "It's coming back to me," he happily discovers.

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Possible questions for "Friends":

1 . The transition to junior high school is often an unsettling time for students because many changes seem to occur almost simultaneously. What specific changes do we see at this point in time?

2. If you were a junior high school teacher, what strategies might you use to make new students feel more comfortable and secure?

3. Explain Jared's newly found interest in extracurricular activities from the perspective of social cognitive theory.