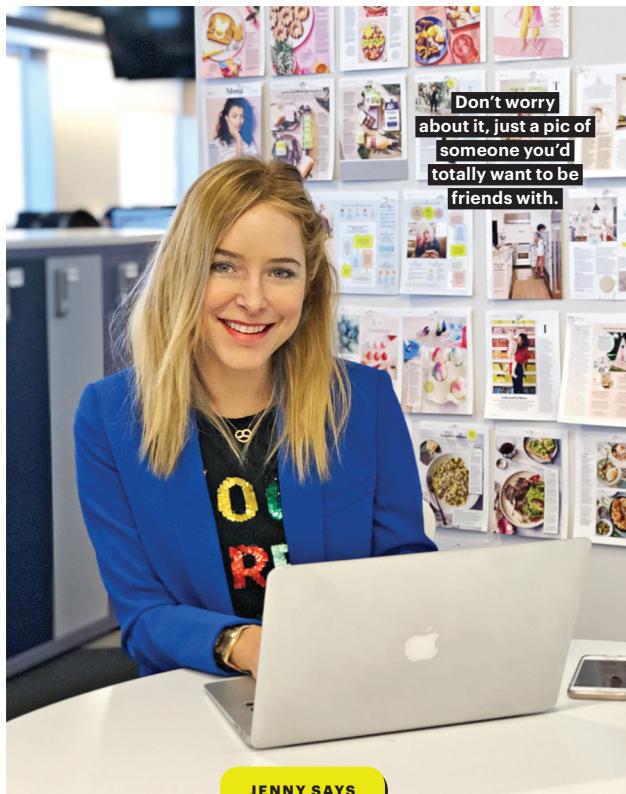


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WE ALL experience the pain of feeling like a social outsider at some point or another. But I assumed—naively, perhaps—that being viewed by my sons as a majestic demigod would allow me to cast off any feelings of inadequacy I'd carried with me from childhood. I would just walk around life with my biggest fans, giving zero forks and being an all-around Boss Babe. “Mommy, is that you?” my 4-year-old, Sid, will sometimes inquire as we walk past an outdoor ad featuring a twentysomething model wearing a bikini and cat-eye glasses, the only thing similar about us being our blond locks. “No, baby.” I'll smile back, momentarily flattered.

A part of me enjoys being on the outside, of being the Grendel of my apartment building and the mom who is too busy with work to indulge in a midday rosé with other parents. But those things are on my terms.

Then several weeks ago, I was on the phone with a mom friend, let's call her Kara. She's a woman I've deemed “my type,” a cool chick who I'd started making plans with outside of our children's playdates and birthday parties. Sid has two best friends in school: Kara's daughter and a little boy named Hayes. Hayes's mother, Melissa, is nice but not someone I hang out with like I do with Kara.



JENNY SAYS

Mom Gossip Hit Me Hard

My sons think I'm a goddess. The preschool mommies think I'm weird. How much do I need to care?

by JENNY MOLLEN

“So... I have to tell you something, and I don't know how you are going to take it,” Kara said, a slight quiver in her voice.

My mind started racing. “Did Sid do something crazy?” I asked.

“It's actually not about Sid,” Kara clarified. “It's about you.” “Me?” I asked, shocked.

“Don't be mad, but a few months ago, Melissa was telling people to steer clear of you because you're weird.” The words hung in the air for a good five seconds before I could hop off my bathroom

sink, where I was picking a chin zit, and refocus on what Kara was saying.

“Melissa thinks I'm weird!” I said, caring about Melissa's opinion for possibly the first time ever. “Why?”

“It doesn't matter. I just wanted you to know that I'm on your side,” she laughed.

Truthfully, I probably *am* weird, but being the subject of gossip sent me spiraling. In a second I went from not caring about fitting into the social hierarchy of my son's preschool parent group to caring deeply.

When I went to drop off Sid the next morning, I tried to figure out where I'd gone wrong with Melissa and how I was going to address it. I was still reeling when Sid spotted Hayes across the foyer.

Melissa smiled and walked over. “I wonder when we'll find out which kindergarten teacher they'll have next year?” she asked earnestly.

“Unsure,” I said coldly.

Melissa lamented for a bit about what the fall would bring but was quick to tell me that Sid was Hayes's best friend and that she hoped they'd stay together.

When the classroom door opened, both boys piled in, leaving Melissa and me alone. If I was ever going to say something, this was my moment. A question was on the tip of my tongue when I stopped myself, letting Melissa's words sink in.

Melissa didn't hate me. (Or maybe she did.) But when it came to our children's happiness, we were on the same team. I needed to swallow like a jilted lover. I didn't need to win Melissa back nor did I need to burn a bridge. Feeling like you aren't understood or accepted for who you are will always sting. But being a strong parent means brushing off the gossip, because at the end of the day, our kids' opinions of us are really the only ones that matter. And Sid thinks I'm a supermodel. ✖



Jenny Mollen has two sons and is the author of two best-sellers.