Teasing, taunting, gossiping, spreading rumors and exclusion are all forms of bullying that are often written off as a normal phase kids go through ...but it's not. In fact, research shows that these forms of aggression are just as harmful as physical bullying, with long-lasting negative effects. ETC recently interviewed author Trudy Ludwig about her new children's book, My Secret Bully, which tackles the difficult issue of emotional bullying among friends. Because Trudy’s book is generating much positive interest from leaders in education and counseling circles nationwide, we chose Trudy as our April 2004 Author of the Month.

Interview With Trudy Ludwig, March 24, 2004

ETC:

Is My Secret Bully your first children's book?

Trudy Ludwig:
Yes, it is. Like many aspiring authors, I’ve always wanted to write a children's book but found myself intimidated by the creative process and the daunting task of finding a publisher to make it happen. Two years ago, I reached a point in my life where I was tired of shelving this dream, letting it collect dust while I continued my career as a freelance copywriter—cranking out ads, newsletters and direct mail about products and services that didn't inspire me. I wanted to write something special that would make a positive difference in children's lives. My Secret Bully, for me, was that something special.
bullies employ relationships, words and gestures as their weapons of attack. Emotional bullying is often dismissed as a normal rite of passage, but research shows it is as harmful as physical aggression, with devastating, long-term effects.

Name-calling, humiliation, exclusion, and manipulation are some bullying tactics Monica’s friend Katie employs. Monica learns to face her fears of betrayal and social isolation, and reclaims her power from the bully with the help of a supportive adult—her mother. Helpful tips, discussion questions, and additional resources are listed in the back of the book, which is a wonderful vehicle for parents, teachers, and counselors.

--RiverWood Books 2004

RESOURCES IN BACK OF BOOK:
Making a Difference: A Note to Parents & Teachers
What Can a Victim Do? An Opportunity for Discussion
List of Empowerment Organizations
Bullying Web sites
Recommended Readings

For Additional Books on Bullying

ETC: What inspired you to write this book?

Trudy Ludwig: I owe my creative spark to what had happened to my daughter Allie. During her first week of second grade, Allie was bullied on the school playground by a group of friends who viciously taunted and teased her. Bullying is a very traumatic experience for anyone to go through. But what do you do as a parent when the kids who are bullying your child are her friends…and you're friends with these girls' parents? How do you help a young child cope with bullying friends?

These were the questions I asked myself after Allie's bullying incident. In my search for answers, I met parents, anti-bullying experts and counseling professionals who were on the lookout for tools to help them address this very issue. Because there really weren't any age-appropriate resources available, I decided to write My Secret Bully.

ETC: Have you ever been bullied?

Trudy Ludwig: Yes. Allie's experience triggered in me my own childhood memories as a target of a bullying friend. I still remember feeling helpless, confused and angry. As a parent, I found it even more painful to see those same feelings flutter across my daughter's face as she tried to cope with her bullying encounter.

ETC: Have you ever been a bully?

Trudy Ludwig: There are times in life when we make poor choices or learn inappropriate social behaviors from others and I'm no exception. In my case, I retaliated against a girl who was mean to me by giving her the silent treatment for the remainder of the school year. Was that the right thing to do? Absolutely not. I responded to the situation by becoming a bully myself. That type of behavior doesn't stop bullying…it perpetuates it.

ETC: My Secret Bully is more than just a story, isn't it?
Trudy Ludwig: Definitely. It's a story for children and a resource tool for adults. I like to think of my book as a springboard for discussion, information and further assistance for folks who need it.

ETC: What do you hope your book offers to young readers?

Trudy Ludwig: I hope *My Secret Bully* gives voice to what many children experience and helps them to connect with others—both young and old—who share similar stories. I want to empower children when it comes to making healthy friendship choices, encouraging them to choose friends who bring out the best in them and avoid others who don't appreciate them for how special they are.

For more information about Trudy, her book, and additional resources on relational aggression, visit her website [www.mysecretbully.com](http://www.mysecretbully.com).