

Dealing with... Mean Girls

Don't get angry.
Don't yell.
Don't be so emotional.
Smile.
Make lots of friends.
Cross your legs.
Don't hit.
Be nice.

Sound familiar? As girls, these are the lessons that are drilled into our brains. You're either one of two things; a good girl who follows the rules or a bad girl who breaks them. Because of this, we cope with conflict, anger, frustration and stress in very different ways than boys. While boys push, shove, punch and kick, girls' anger and frustration should not be seen or heard. And so, we learn to deal with our anger in private ways like writing in our diaries, screaming into a pillow or maybe just bottling it up. Some girls may find ways of releasing their anger through sports or other physical activities but unfortunately, many girls direct their anger at other girls, especially those with whom they don't like, but even sometimes at friends.

Most girls have felt the hurt and humiliation of being excluded from a group, being gossiped about or receiving dirty looks, however, most girls have also probably experienced a feeling of power after making another girl look or feel bad. The truth is, being mean makes some girls feel good about themselves.

How do you cope when you are the target of girls' meanness?

- Talk to someone (a friend, parent, teacher or counsellor).
- Write down your thoughts and feelings about the situation. Try to list reasons why you think the girl is being mean to you. If you feel comfortable, share what you wrote with someone you trust. Even though it's not a direct solution, trying to understand a problem from another point of view can sometimes make us feel better.
- Be aware of how you interact with other girls, including your friends. Are you participating in gossip, rumours, excluding someone from a group? Think about how they may make another girl feel.
- Most importantly – be yourself! Sometimes being a little bit different from everyone else can be enough to cause another girl to be mean. You have to remember that is her problem and her insecurities! Some girls may become threatened or jealous of another girl's popularity, clothing, friend circle, intelligence or attention from boys. Girls who are happy about who they are do not need to put others down!



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This Resilience Research Centre Youth Factsheet was written by Nicole Landry, MA, a project manager with the Resilience Research Centre. Her book, *The Mean Girl Motive: Negotiating Power and Femininity* is published by Fernwood Publishing Ltd.

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