



Some of my daughter's friends seem to be teasing her a little more than they should. She seems hurt by this but tells me there is nothing wrong. Could she be hiding her feelings?

Girls can be just as aggressive as boys. In fact, some might consider female hostility more dramatic and damaging than boy bullying. Girls antagonize in a covert, complex and long-term manner; boys, on the other hand, are overt, obnoxious, and instantaneous. Girls employ socially manipulative tactics often causing good friends to be instant enemies.

Relational aggression is a growing area of concern for today's teen and the typical type of hurtful behavior most frequently used in female circles. Bully girls use exclusionary tactics to inflict hurt on others by crowding an unwanted victim out of a lunch table spot, encouraging friends to give a cold shoulder, and spreading inappropriate rumors. The results are internal scars that may take years to heal, and, unfortunately, most girls fall victim to this behavior at some point during the high school years.

Pay attention to how your daughter acts to determine if she is a target of a "really" mean girl. Look for dropping grades and listen to the language she uses to describe her day. Do your teen's comments indicate that she wants to switch schools and escape her world, is she acting overly tough to mask a source of unknown pain, or is she fearful that her relational problems will never end? These are signs of a distressed daughter facing intense inner turmoil.

Because girls tend to be overly critical of themselves, they need the support of their families and friends to develop defenses against daily dramas. Empathize with your daughter's distress and discuss relation building strategies.

- Teach your daughter to compliment the accomplishments of her peers. It is a sign of confidence that others will respond to with a positive attitude.
- Discuss how joining with others can help your teen reach her goals and build positive relationships based on success. Group studying, for example, is more rewarding than lonely late night learning.
- Emphasize the importance of open and honest communication. Confronting a situation with respect and working toward problem resolution will deescalate issues in a mature manner.
- Most importantly, encourage your daughter to engage in a variety of activities. Students that have multiple friends tend to cope better with drama because they have more social supports.

It may be difficult to determine if you daughter is a victim of relational aggression. A boy comes home with a black eye, but a young woman's inner scars may be unnoticeable. Staying connected with regular family time and frequent conversation is the best way to encourage open communication about this or any problem.