



SELF LOVE

Tips to Making New Friends and Being Proud of Who You Are



Big Sisters
of BC Lower Mainland



Kids who experience social rejection don't have it easy. Some people report being rejected in high school as the most traumatic experience of their lives. Socially rejected teens likely have low self-esteem, suffer from depression, drop out of school, and even consider suicide.

It is easy to say "people will like you no matter what you wear or how you act" or "what your classmates think about you doesn't matter" but realistically, we all know that's not true. We are social beings, and wanting to fit in and be accepted is human nature.

It should be noted that our popularity in high school doesn't always influence how popular or successful we will be later in life. To give some famous examples, Jessica Alba was tormented in high school for being of mixed race, Madonna didn't fit in with her peers, Rosario Dawson was teased for her looks, and even Chad Michael Murray said he had no friends. Obviously, high school popularity doesn't dictate the rest of our lives! Even so, the ability to fit in and get along with our peers is a skill that will help us in our future careers and daily lives.

High school is where we learn many skills, including how to get along with people, and we carry these skills off into the real world after graduation. If you are feeling isolated from your peers, rather than view it as an unfair fact of life, try to determine why it is happening. If people say they don't like you for a particular reason (eg. telling you that you are annoying or aggressive) look into it and consider whether or not you believe it to be true and if it would benefit you to change. You don't need to change yourself and your values just to make a friend, but you may have to compromise, change your bad habits, and build your social skills in order to make new friends. It's like learning a new dance, we all make mistakes until we figure out what works and it all begins to flow smoothly.

Also, don't just accept other people's word. Ask people you trust if they feel the same about you and how you could improve yourself. Remember, making friends doesn't have to mean being "popular," it simply means being happy with who you are and having one or two true friends who enjoy your company.



At some point or another, each and every one of us will find ourselves in a situation where we don't fit in. It might be a job, a friend's family reunion, or a parent's dinner party. One common place where thousands of kids feel they don't fit in is high school. The teenage years are our formative years, when we learn about close friendships, romantic relationships, determine who we are, what we believe in, and where we want to go in life. It can be tough to find our place in the world when we get conflicting messages on how we should talk, dress, do things, or act.

There are many ways we might feel different from our peers. From race, weight, sexual orientation, (perceived) attractiveness, socioeconomic status, or hobbies, some of us may find ourselves on the sidelines wondering how to be a part of the social groups around us. Sometimes we might be bullied for being different, but we don't necessarily have to be teased or bullied to feel unhappy. Being rejected, ignored, or left out by our peers can be just as painful, if not more. Teachers and other well-meaning types might step in when they witness bullying, but not when they simply see a kid sitting on the sidelines, especially if that child masks their hurt and appears indifferent to being left out.

Vocabulary

Discrimination: Unfair treatment of a person or group on the basis of prejudice.

Popularity: The quality of being widely admired, accepted, or sought after.

Outsider: Someone who is excluded from or is not a member of a particular group.

Isolation: A feeling of being disliked or alone.

Bully: To treat in an overbearing or intimidating manner.





The Problem with Popularity

Teenagers are not chosen at random to be liked or disliked. Kids who are accepted by their peers have certain characteristics that kids who are rejected by their peers might not have. “Popular” kids are seen as natural leaders, outgoing, good at communicating their feelings, and better at handling their impulses. However, popularity does not always protect a teen against peer pressure. It is important to note that qualities of a “popular” person in high school are very superficial. You do not have to obtain all of those qualities to be a well-liked person, or a good person. Unfortunately, popularity and peer pressure might also lead to negative behaviour, like drug or alcohol use, or risky sexual behaviour. It’s important to realize that doing things just to please others or meet their expectations does not create happiness in the long run. Whether popular or not, all teens can benefit from learning to stand up for what they believe in and respecting themselves.

Often, youths who don’t feel accepted or secure might tease or bully other kids to feel more in control or to draw attention to themselves. Bullies and other kids often play along or don’t stand up to the bully because they are afraid they might become the next target. If you are a victim of bullying, it can be easy to mistakenly assume there is something wrong with you, or that everyone hates you, but bullying says more about the bully than the bullied, and other kids do realize that even if they don’t speak up. Talk to your Big Sister about how you feel and get her advice on how what to do. In the meantime, talk to a teacher or your parents to figure out a plan to make the bullying stop.



One third of high-school adolescents report experiencing peer rejection.



What if I am Being Teased?

Even if you feel angry, don't let it get out of control. Anger will only fuel bullying and might even cause you to get hurt. The most important thing is to stay calm and not let your tormentor know they are getting to you. It might help to remember the CALM acronym:

Cool Down. Stay calm and in control when you confront your bully.

Assert Yourself. Name the behaviour that bothers you and ask that it stop: "Stop calling me names, it's mean." Respond to an insult with a non-defensive question like, "Why would you say that?" or "Why would you want to call me that and hurt my feelings?" Tell the bully what you want, for instance, "I want you to leave me alone." One good way to show that bullying doesn't phase you is to ignore it or laugh it off. Bullying makes the bully look silly if they don't get the reaction out of their victim. You might want to reply to a teasing statement by saying "Really? You don't say" or "Thanks for telling me" while looking uninterested.

Look the Teaser Straight in the Eye. Look confident, stand tall, and hold your head high.

Mean it! Use a firm voice and say what you feel without being insulting back.

You might want to talk to a teacher or principal about the teasing in private so they can keep an eye out for it and pull the tormentor aside for a chat without making it obvious you were the one "told."



What if I Get Left Out Because I Have Different Interests?

If everyone was equally good at the exact same things, the world would be a boring place! We each bring special talents to the table, and that is what makes us unique and special.

If you are always picked last for a team at lunch or in P.E class, you might want to consider talking to your Big Sister to help coach you in that sport, or to practice with you so you can improve. But don't let things like that get you down, everyone has different talents. You could also ask a friendly classmate who excels in that sport to show you a few tricks.

If you find yourself playing activities you aren't interested in just because it feels like the right thing to do, try finding something else you enjoy more! You will meet like-minded people while actually having fun.

Research shows that adolescents who excel in sports are more well-liked and more accepted by their peers. This does not have to be true for only sports. Find out what you are good at—whether it is telling jokes, creating art, or making music—and find an outlet for you to be successful in that area. Your self-esteem will skyrocket, and others will take note of your talent.

If your school doesn't offer an activity you like, ask for permission to start a lunch hour comedy troupe or chess club, for example. You can be the expert the other kids go to for help to learn more about it and that will feel good!

Take note of the things you are good at, if there's something you wish you were good at, ask someone how you could get better at it. If you work hard and love yourself and what makes you unique, you will go very far in life. A scrawny guy named Ed Sheeran was bullied for being different, and now he is a very famous musician. Embrace what makes you different and use it to your advantage.



What if I Just Don't Get Along with People?

Getting thrown into the halls of middle school or high school can be terrifying, especially since we might not have the necessary social skills to deal with all the new people we are bound to encounter.

Withdrawn or shy students may be singled out as potential targets for bullies. Ask your Big Sister to role-play various scenarios with you, such as how to make new friends or how to stand up to a bully.

If you find other kids don't relate well to you, you might want to ask someone you trust (like a parent or your Big Sister) to offer you some constructive feedback on how you come across to people. Do others find you bossy or aggressive or too accommodating? You don't necessarily have something "wrong" with you to be rejected by your peers, but it can be helpful to learn how others see you.

Perhaps you are a different maturity level than the rest of your classmates, and you speak about things they don't know much about. Even if your peers don't share your interests, a fascination with geography for example, you can still be friends with them. Choose subjects that might appeal to a wider range of people your age (such as a movie you just saw) while with your peers and save the talks on earthquakes and climate change for others who share your interests.

Just because you go to school with these people doesn't mean they have to be your only social network. Join specialized after-school clubs or community groups where you can meet like-minded people who share your interests!





What if I Get Left Out Because of my Cultural Background or a Disability?

We're all a little afraid of the unknown. Sometimes when we're around people we don't understand or know well, we might ignore those people or tease them because we don't know how else to act. However, this is not the way we should act. Instead, we need to educate ourselves and others so that we can prevent ignorance.

You might ask your teacher to spend some class time discussing different cultures around the world. You could even volunteer to teach the class about your own cultural background! If your classmates understand your differences but are just plain mean, you might want to ask your teacher to introduce a lesson on racism or discrimination, such as learning about how African Americans were discriminated against in the United States, or how Muslim people are being discriminated against in North America right now. Perhaps you could each do a presentation on a famous person who suffered discrimination, like Anne Frank or Rosa Parks, and how they dealt with it.

This could also work if you are getting teased or left out for having a mental or physical disability.

Teach the class about your disability and explain how they can better include you in activities.

It is important that we teach people who aren't as educated on diversity to be more accepting and knowledgeable on topics like race, sexuality, religion, etc.

What if I am Confused About My Sexuality or My Gender?

LGBTQ+ youth (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, etc.) often already feel as if they don't fit in. They may also face teasing and discrimination from peers, confusion about their sexual identity or gender identity, and even possible rejection from loved ones. Some studies suggest that LGBTQ+ youth may be more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual, cis-gendered peers.

Refuse to become a statistic—talk to someone you trust today (like your Big Sister) or contact one of the resources listed on the last page of this article for support.



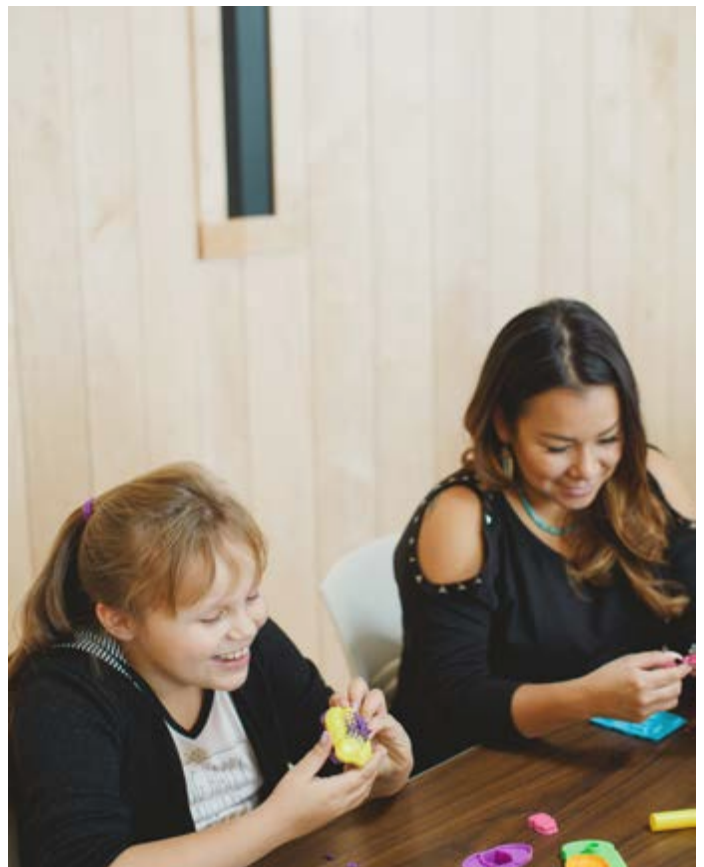
Tips for Making New Friends

- It's never too late. Even if you eat alone and have zero friends, it doesn't mean you're doomed. If you're just sitting around waiting for the cool kids to "discover" you, you might be watching too many Hollywood movies. Take matters into your own hands and try making friends with a person who seems lonely like you. Once you two bond together it will be easier to approach others.
- You don't have to walk up to a total stranger and ask "Will you be my friend?" That sounds awkward! Try asking for help on a homework question, or ask a question about what the cafeteria is offering for lunch. Most people will return your friendliness, and are more likely to talk to you again after you've done the hard part of making the initial contact.
- Join clubs and sports teams and volunteer around your campus. The best way to meet your fellow students is to work with them on fun projects. In the meantime you will discover new activities and learn new skills.
- Stick up for yourself! Don't be aggressive or rude, but don't be a doormat and let people walk all over you. People are drawn to confident people and respect those that show self-respect.
- Don't be a hypocrite. Never abandon your friends to spend time with the popular crowd. If someone asks you to stop being friends with someone else, there is no guarantee they won't ditch you once they are bored with you. Don't forget the old saying: "Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver but the other is gold!"
- Networking/Conversation Starting Tip: Be Curious! Typically, people like getting the opportunity to talk about themselves and their interests!



What Big Sisters can do When their Little Feels Left Out

- Be Available to Talk and Listen. Try to step out of the situation and make sure any advice you give is appropriate for your Little's situation and isn't overly influenced based on your high school situation—eg. If you were the "popular kid" or the "left out kid," try to be impartial.
- Don't fill your Little's head with unrealistic expectations like "Everyone wants to be your friend!" Not everyone in the world (or their high school for that matter) will want to get to know them. Explain that it is better to have one or two true friends who stick by you than a large crowd of acquaintances who don't respect your feelings and individuality.
- Encourage your Little to solve the problem themselves. It's normal to want to save the day when a child you care about is being left out, but isn't necessarily the most helpful thing for them. By intervening and coming to the rescue, you are telling your Little you don't trust them to deal with things on their own. If your Little is becoming depressed or you think they might become injured, you must take action, do it in a way that will not embarrass your Little or yourself. Talk to your Big Sisters caseworker before taking any major steps. Never encourage violence.
- Teach your Little to be confident in their individuality. Every one of us is unique in our own way. Just because your Little might enjoy an activity that is different from their peers or wear clothing that is considered to be "out of style," that is not an excuse for bullying or a good reason for being left out. If your Little experiences a lot of bullying because they are different, ask them if they want help with making friends and dealing with bullies. However, they should always tell an adult such as a teacher or a parent about the situation.
- Teach new social skills. Role-play with your Little how to make friends and how to stick up for themselves against bullies or teasers. That's what being a Big Sister is all about!





Resources

For LITTLES (6-12)

- Big Bad Wolves at School. Stephan Krensky. NY: Simon and Schuster, 2007.
- Joshua T. Bates Takes Charge. Susan Shreve. NY: Knopf, 1993.
- The Brand New Kid. Katie Couric. NY: Doubleday, 2000.
- The Gold-Threaded Dress. Carolyn Marsden. MA: Candlewick Press, 2002.
- Clancy the Courageous Cow. Lanchie Hume. NY: Greenwillow Books, 2007.
- Cliques, Phonies & Other Baaloney. Trevor Romain. Minn: Free Spirit Pub, 1998.

For TEENS (13-17)

- Odd Girl Speaks Out: Girls Write about Bullies, Cliques, Popularity, and Jealousy. Rachel Simmons. Orlando: Harcourt, 2004.
- Colour Blind (VHS). Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 1999.

For BIG SISTERS & PARENTS

- 101 Ways to Deal With Bullying: A Guide for Parents. Michele Elliot. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997.
- Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In. Perri Klass and Eileen Costello. NY: Ballentine Books, 2003.
- Cliques: 8 Steps to Help Your Child Survive the Social Jungle. Charlene C. Gianetti and Margaret Sagarese. NY: Broadway Books, 2001.
- Teaching Tolerance: Raising Open-Minded, Empathetic Children. Sara Bullard. NY: Doubleday, 1996.
- The Bully, The Bullied, and the Bystander. Barbara Coloroso. Toronto: Harper Collins, 2002.
- Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls. Rachel Simmons. NY: Harcourt, 2002.
- You Have to Say I'm Pretty, You're My Mother: How to Help Your Daughter Learn to Love her Body and Herself. Stephanie Pierson and Phyllis Cohen. NY: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

Kids Help Phone

1-800-668-6868

Youth in BC Live Chat:

www.youthinbc.com

Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada

Make some new friends!

www.bgccan.com

QMUNITY

Support for Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit individuals.

http://qmunity.ca

PFLAG Canada

Support for anyone with questions about sexual orientation
or gender identity.

www.pflagcanada.ca

**Thank you to the following members of our Panel
for Reviewing this Article:**

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