



Why Do Some Girls Become So Mean?

Why are they mean and why am I their target?

Mean girls do not discriminate.

they target anyone. A target may have caught their attention by saying something intelligent in class. A target may be someone who is primarily quiet and not in the way of anyone. A mean girl may have seen their boyfriend smile at someone and target them. Sometimes it is simply that the target was the wrong place at the wrong time. For example, the 'mean girl' may have recently experienced abuse in their personal lives and the target is first person they can take it out on.

Possible Causes:

- Media: TV shows, movies that make these behaviours seem acceptable and humorous i.e.: Mean Girls (movie).
- The natural awkwardness of teenage years: changes in their appearance, body, personality (hormones).
- Irritable mean behaviours can be a sign of a medical issue.

- Their basic needs in life are not being met. They search for i.e.: belonging, acceptance, power and control in their lives.
- Insecurity: jealous, envious, of something the others have. They are often too ashamed or embarrassed to show their pain and/or vulnerability, and therefore they take it out on others.
- Desperately seeking attention (positive or negative)
- They may fear being alone, abandoned, rejected, harmed, and/or becoming the target of bullying (again?)
- Have past or current issues of abuse in their lives. They need recovery.

Research shows that children who are born into chaotic environments. i.e. domestic violence, sexual abuse, parents are addicts and/or untreated mental health, are at a higher risk of becoming bullies and/or targets.

What do mean girls do to their targets?

- Groups of girls will glare and stare at their targets (intimidating/humiliation).
- Make fun of the targets characteristics i.e.: freckles, hair, clothing's, voice, size, height.
- They walk by their targets and laugh at them.
- They will refuse to sit near you on the bus and try to encourage others to do the same. "Ostracism or exclusion may not leave external scars, but it can cause pain that often is deeper and lasts longer than a physical injury" (Dr. Kipling Williams)
- Tell their targets to shut up in class or call them names like "weirdo, ugly, fat"
- If a target arrives at a party or event they say things like "you'll regret this".
- Sabotage their targets friendships, reputation, school work, projects.

These actions are abusive and when experienced over time, these behaviours can create serious harm to their targets physical, emotional, psychological health.

Cyber bullying has become a lethal weapon for mean girls.

Anyone who wishes to take their personal struggles out on others will now have powerful vehicles (computer/cell phones) with unlimited access and possibilities. Unless parents step in with a variety of controls, cyberspace gives mean girls (and boys) free reign for spreading gossip and rumours, sharing vicious images, cruel jokes, and uploading personal photographs of their targets in compromising situations i.e.: dressing in their school change rooms. This offensive threatening material is shared a) world wide b) indefinitely.

URGENT NOTE TO PARENTS

Your child's future children (your grandchildren) could be affected by this offensive material shared today. As for the 'mean girl's (and boys), their future children will also be aware of their parents mean actions. Today's parents teach and guide your children on this reality. It may help improve their choices today.

Signs That Your Children Are Affected By Bullying

- Symptoms of physical illness: headaches, stomach aches, intestinal issues, fatigue and more
- low self esteem, self worth,
- withdrawal, isolation, self harming (i.e.: cutting their arms or legs),
- loss of appetite or increased appetite (risk of eating disorders),
- loss of motivation, depression, anxiety, panic attacks,
- moodiness, irritability, emotional,
- act out abusively towards someone else i.e.: younger sibling or neighbour,
- thoughts and attempts to take their lives
- from elementary age through to senior citizens, many have taken their lives due to ongoing bullying.

What can we do?

TIPS FOR PARENTS

1. Become knowledgeable about bullying. Read more than one article, books, and hear from a few different perspectives. Talk to a reputable anti-bullying specialist.
2. Hold family discussions about bullying and be sure to listen in. Let them teach you too. This is empowering for them.
3. Tune in, monitor behaviour changes:(moods, reactions, appetite, physical appearance). Talk to their doctor a check up may be needed.
4. Be available and present. Try not to force your children to talk, instead, create an environment where your children will experience you as really listening and understanding 'their perspective'. Accept their statements no matter how bizarre (right/wrong) they may be. Validate their feelings for this is 'real' to them. Once they calm and feel safe with knowing that you do 'get them', use their own language around this experience to 'explore other options'. If they become reactive with you, they simply do not feel heard or safe yet. Keep trying. Let them know you are there.
5. Give them material to read, watch videos about bullying (i.e.: You Tube) together. . Share your own experiences when you were a child. Walk with them and 'empower them' as you brainstorm solutions.
6. Children will often refuse to let you to address the abuse. Gently teach them about the seriousness (i.e.: it is progressive) and importance of reporting (others are being abused too). Remind them they are not alone, you are going to protect them no matter what.
7. Set time limits on computer/cell phone usage. Monitor their usage and download parental control apps. We highly recommend that your children do not have passwords you cannot access. Empower them by being willing to negotiate. Though they may complain, all children like to know that their parents are strong enough to stand by their rules and set these limits for them (stability).
8. Do not ignore signs and do not seek revenge. You are an important role model for problem solving. Use wise, ethical, moral judgement when acting on this issue.
9. Talk to the teacher(s) and the principal and request a follow up in writing. Following your discussion provide them with a summary of your discussion via email. A paper trail is important.
 - Ask about the schools protocol/policy for addressing bullying? Read through this and monitor how it is being followed. Identify any gaps in their processes (in writing).
 - If they have no protocol/policies you need to insist that this be implemented immediately. Gather other parents to request the same. Go above each person until this is accomplished. You can always talk to the media, contact your MLA, and/or police.
 - Request that an anti-bullying program come to the school to teach children, parents, and school staff on how to address bullying.
 - Arrange a workshop in your community league for children and parents
10. See a family counsellor for support, guidance and healing. A professional documenting your concerns is important too, but health and safety always comes first. Plan activities they enjoy. Help them remember to have fun, laugh, and feel good. Ask those who love them to give positives and highlight their attributes.

TIPS FOR YOUTH

1. It is important for you to learn about bullying and cyber bullying. There is plenty of material on line, books, and anti-bullying programs for all ages to join.
2. Talk to someone: parents, other adults you are close to, siblings, and allow people to support you. Keep trying until someone 'understands'.
3. Keep a journal (if you can) of your experiences. Dates, names, details of what occurred. "IF SAFE" use your phone to record voice or actions. Bystanders can keep records too.
4. Know that you are not alone, you did not cause this and you do not deserve this. The person who is bullying you is in the wrong. There are many possible explanations for their abusive behaviour but none of them are about you. Even if you were perfect, once you become a target, they would bully you for being perfect. It is not your fault.
5. If possible, try not to be alone walking to/from school. Ask a friend for this kind of support. Try not to feel embarrassed for your feelings are valid. If you do not have someone to walk with, ask that your parents or another adult assist you. Ask for help.
6. You are not alone! Got to YouTube and listen to songs like: Who Are You or Who's Laughing Now, by Jessie J, Brave by Sara Bareilles, Wings by Little Mix, Mean by Taylor Swift and What Got You by Mary J. Blidge. These songs will bring up some feelings for you. Express your feelings through writing, art, poetry, and talk to someone.
7. Ask other what they have gone through. Your parents, older siblings, and others.
8. When you see the 'mean girls' acting out and hear them whisper, always know that something is not going right in their lives. They are suffering and using you to hide it. Remind yourself this is not about you. They will target someone else as soon as you no longer react to their abuse. Find

help to get you through this and you will find the strength to no longer react.

9. Be good to yourself. Do not isolate. Return to doing the things you enjoy. It is important to build your strength by having fun, laughing, and feeling connected to those who do love and appreciate you.
10. Take care of you by eating right, sleeping well, exercising and focusing on your positives. If you are struggling to recall positives, ask for help with this.

Never give up.

Children, parents, teachers and other professionals may experience barriers, resistance, and many frustrations when addressing this issue. Keep reaching for help. Resources are now available to you. Contact ABRC for information about resources in your area.

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**Source on Ostracism:
<http://williams.socialpsychology.org/>**