**How to Handle When Others are Mean**

While we can't stop kids from saying nasty stuff to our children, we can do things to reduce the chances our sons and daughters will be targeted. The most important thing you can do is teach your child how to respond in a way that discourages future teasing. With the large number of mean-spirited kids these days (kids who seem to get a charge from picking on their so-called friends), learning those comeback strategies can be an essential part of every child's friendship aptitude arsenal.

Here are some of the most effective comeback strategies that kids tell me have worked for them. Your job is to share these strategies with your child, and then have her choose the one she feels most comfortable with. Remember, what works for one child won't necessary be the best choice for another.

Once your child chooses a comeback strategy, you need to teach her how to deliver it effectively. Finally, help your child practice it again and again until your little one feels comfortable using it in the real kid world.

Here are a few strategies I have in my book, *Nobody Likes Me, Everybody Hates Me: The Top 25 Friendship Problems and How to Stop Them*. I hope they help.

**Step 1**

**Step 1. Choose a comeback strategy to take the sting out of the teasing.**

Your child is certain to be teased: it's a fact of life and a big part of growing up. Some kids handle it a whole lot better then others, and so can yours. Review these comeback strategies together, and then pick the idea your child likes best. Then rehearse the comeback together again and again until she feels comfortable trying it on her own. Here are a few "kid favorites."

* Question it. "Why would you say that?" "Why would you want to tell me I am dumb or fat or whatever and hurt my feelings?"
* Send a strong "I Want" message. "I want you to leave me alone" or "I want you to stop teasing me." The trick is to say the message firmly so that it doesn't sound wimpy.
* Turn it into a compliment. "Hey, thanks. I appreciate that!" "That was really nice of you to notice." "Thanks for the compliment."
* Agree. "You've got that right." "One hundred percent correct!" "Bingo, you win!" "People say that a lot about me."
* Say "So?" "So?...Whatever." "So?...Who cares." "So?...And your point is?" If your child likes this strategy, be sure to read the book, "The Meanest Thing to Say," by Bill Cosby (Scholastic, 1997).
* Use manners. "Thanks." "Thank you for that comment." "I appreciate that." But say it so it sounds sincere, and then turn and walk away.
* Use sarcasm. "Like I would care?" "Give me a break." "Oh, that's just great." The "look" has to match: rolling your eyes and walking away can do the trick. This works usually only for older kids who understand sarcasm.
* Ignore it. Walk away without even a look at the teaser, pretend the teaser is invisible, glance at something else and laugh, look completely uninterested or pretend you don't hear it. This one works best if your child has a tougher time delivering verbal comebacks. It works best in places where your child can escape his teasers such as on a park or playground. It doesn't work in closed quarters such on a school bus or cafeteria table.
* Be amazed. "Really? I didn't know that." "Thanks for telling me." Sounding like you really mean it is the trick.
* Express displeasure. "It really makes me mad when you tease me like that." Or "I don't like it when you make fun of me in front of the other kids. You may think it's funny, but it's not to me." "If you want us to continue being friends, stop teasing me." If this really is your kid's friend who is causing him such distress, then encourage your child to express his displeasure.

### Step 2

**Step 2. Help your child practice delivering the comeback effectively.**

Let's face it -- kids don't want to be around someone who's always teased. It just ups the chances they'll be picked on. And they especially don't want to be around someone who always crying, whining, or threatening to "tell" when teasing is playfully delivered among friends. So just remember that when you teach a comeback to your child, it is just as important to make sure he knows to say it calmly and confidently. Here are the six steps your child needs to learn so he delivers an effective comeback that stops the teaser.

* Decide if it's friendly or unfriendly teasing. If it's friendly teasing (the person is having fun with you) shake it off. If it's unfriendly teasing (making fun of you) try not to get worked up.
* Choose if you want to confront your teaser. If it looks like you could be hurt, get help.
* Look the teaser in the eye. Don't look down. Hold your head high and stand tall.
* Stay calm. You can't let the teaser think he's got your goat. So don't get worked up. Take a deep breath to stay calm, tell yourself to "chill out," or count to 10 inside your head.
* Use a strong, firm voice and say your rehearsed comeback to your friend. "Cut it out!" "Get real." "Thanks, but I've heard that one already." "You noticed; it's been a problem all my life."
* Walk away. Do not insult or tease the teaser back. Just keep walking.

Hang in there, keep practicing friendship skills together, and you will make a big difference for your child. Remember, simple changes can reap big results.

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