



## Every Parent's Back-to-School Tip Sheet for Today's Teen Girl

### *How to Avoid a Back-to-School Breakdown*

1. **Body Image Breakdown:** When girls feel bad about their looks, more than 70%, ages 15-17, avoid normal daily activities such as attending school<sup>1</sup>.
  - **TIP:** *Your daughter's body image starts with you! Show her each and every day how great you feel about your body and your looks. That will begin to set the tone in teaching your daughter about appearance and what it means to be proud of who she is – inside and out. By not insisting your daughter looks a certain way — whether it is what she wears, how her hair looks or how she has to behave in what she is wearing — you will build the foundation for how she sees her body and the importance of how she looks.*
  
2. **Super Girl Syndrome:** Girls may respond to the pressure around them from school, media, parents and peers by trying to do it ALL (look perfect, get good grades and have a busy social life), and do it all perfectly! Their quest for "Super Girl Status" can stress them out and cause their self-esteem to plummet.
  - **TIP:** *Encourage your daughter to find her favorite one or two activities and focus on doing them well rather than being the very best at everything. By honing in on activities/skills she can excel at, she will be able to better set realistic goals for herself and more easily recognize her accomplishments. Set an example for her by doing the same thing in your life.*
  
3. **Frenemies:** Frenemies are defined as relationships in which girls behave as half friends and half enemies. This could mean your daughter is bullying or spreading rumors/secrets about her friends or having the same done to her. Self-esteem plays a crucial role in determining a girls' tendency to engage in this type of behavior. In fact, 75% of girls with low self-esteem reported engaging in negative activities, such as disordered eating, cutting, bullying, smoking, or drinking, when feeling badly about themselves.<sup>2</sup>
  - **TIP:** *Talk to your daughter regularly and let her know you are aware of things that go on in school. If you suspect your daughter is bullying, tell her this is not acceptable behavior. Help her learn other ways to deal with anger and frustration and help her understand how her actions have affected the person she has been picking on. If your daughter is the victim of a frenemy, make sure she understands it is not her fault. Talk about ways of responding to this – role play with her, acting out different scenarios she might encounter. Encourage her to walk away from a friendship that harms her and make other friends.*
  
4. **Clashing with Cliques:** The teen years are an age when everyone is trying to define themselves and their independence. From jocks and geeks, to drama queens and cheerleaders, cliques are rampant in middle school and high school. Trying to fit in can be exhausting.
  - **TIP:** *Help your daughter recognize that being authentic is better than any label out there. Encourage her to embrace all different types of people and not to limit her friendships to just one group of peers. Expressing her own diversity in what she likes to do and who she likes to hang out with helps her remain well-balanced and true to herself.*

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs (Dove. 2006)

<sup>2</sup> *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem* (Dove, 2008)

5. **Cyberbullying:** The Internet has become an additional platform for the teasing and taunting of vulnerable girls. More than one in ten girls ages 8-17 have been bullied online<sup>3</sup>.
  - **TIP:** *If you find your daughter is participating in cyberbullying (by bullying or being bullied) do not ignore it, thinking it is harmless. Talk to your daughter about how it feels to be on the receiving end and ask her what is making her do this. Bring the implications of this action to life. If you find your daughter is being victimized, let her know you understand it hurts. Remind her that while she cannot always control what is said in school, she can control her reactions to it. Also, try not to overreact – your daughter may be afraid of involving you because she fears you will make things even worse.*
  
6. **Crush Crisis:** Does he like me? Will he ask me to the dance? How can I get him to notice me? Having a crush can be so exciting, but also confusing and potentially heart-breaking.
  - **TIP:** *Remember how you felt when you had your first crush? Try not to minimize your daughter's feelings. Instead, speak to her with compassion about her questions or uncertainties. Teach her about healthy romantic relationships, how to tell when someone is really into you and what to expect from them. When she tastes rejection for the first time, make sure you have extra hugs ready!*
  
7. **Sexual Pressure:** One in ten teen girls were unable to say no when a boy asked them to do something that made them uncomfortable. In fact, girls with low self-esteem are four times more likely to engage in activities with boys that they have ended up regretting later<sup>4</sup>.
  - **TIP:** *Do not avoid "The Talk!" Have open and consistent conversations about sexual boundaries with your teenager. Use everyday media examples (her favorite TV show, a pop song on the radio) to discuss the pressure girls face to be sexually active. Let her know you will not judge her for the things she shares, but you are there to help her navigate through this tricky time.*
  
8. **Creative Communications:** The top wish among all girls is for their parents to communicate better with them, which includes more frequent and more open conversations, as well as discussions about what is happening in their own lives<sup>5</sup>.
  - **TIP:** *We all know getting your teen girl to open up to you can be like talking to a brick wall. Find ways to engage with your daughter such as doing an activity together (run a 5K or learn to knit). By participating in things you have in common, you may find that the conversations begin to flow more frequently.*
  
9. **Dating Violence:** A shove, an angry text or a rude comment - young love may not always be innocent. Most violent relationships begin during the teen years. Verbal bullying, violent actions or emotional abuse are not 'normal teen behaviors' and should not be excused because the perpetrators or the victims are young and immature.
  - **TIP:** *First, make sure you understand the warning signs of dating violence. Then, use high-profile couples, like Rihanna and Chris Brown, to talk about what is going on in their relationship. Talk to your daughter about how she deserves to be treated in relationships. Intervene upon the first sign of violence - do not wait. It is most important to model a healthy dynamic with your spouse/partner if you have one. If you have violence in your home, get help, talk about it and make sure you are doing what you can to break the cycle for your daughter.*
  
10. **Sexting:** What used to be harmless flirting in the hallway now has a new edge. Teens are taking risks in their communication with the opposite sex by exploring their sexuality through 'sexting.'

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<sup>3</sup> *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem (Dove, 2008)*

<sup>4</sup> *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem (Dove, 2008)*

<sup>5</sup> *Real Girls, Real Pressure: A National Report on the State of Self-Esteem (Dove, 2008)*

Both boys and girls are pushing sexual boundaries and hiding behind the two dimensional nature of a text message. While your daughter may think it is harmless fun, the consequences could stay with her forever, as pictures posted through texts have wound up on Web sites around the world.

- **TIP:** *Talk to your daughter about the dangers of overstepping her own comfortable boundaries in a text message. Help her understand that while it may seem exciting, the consequences of her actions could be dangerous to her self-image, reputation and safety. Encourage her to express herself verbally with her friends so she is not relying solely on a touchpad for communication. If you have concerns that she has been sexting already, it might be necessary to monitor her cell phone usage or take away the device all together.*

To learn more visit [campaignforrealbeauty.com](http://campaignforrealbeauty.com) where you can download free self-esteem building tools for moms, mentors and daughters.

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