



When Girls Get Mean

Yo-yo friendships, feeling different, and turf wars: You knew it was coming in middle school, but now? Early-elementary social struggles are indeed real, says Michelle Anthony, Ph.D., author of *Little Girls Can Be Mean*. Anthony gives four steps to bully-proofing your princess:

1. OBSERVE Listen for phrases like “She isn’t my friend anymore” or “She wouldn’t let me sit by her.” Other signs of a social problem include vague physical illness (headaches, tummy aches), increased worries, and more sibling battles.

2. CONNECT Your initial reaction will probably be to give advice, but try to keep your mouth shut instead. “Don’t tell, just ask,” Anthony says. By listening, you will get a better picture of what she’s going through. Use phrases such as “Tell me more about it” or “How did that make you feel?”

3. GUIDE After she’s explained what happened, offer your own perspective. “Show

her that you have gone through something similar and survived,” Anthony notes. Also, point out unfair or one-sided relationships: “It seems like you’re the one always inviting Ashley over.” If necessary, find a way to separate the girls. Tell your daughter it’s okay to use an excuse like “I can’t play—my mom says I have to practice the piano today.”

4. SUPPORT Help your daughter come up with ways to (nicely) break up with a friend, such as smiling at the girl even though she’s going to sit with someone else at lunch. Give her personal power by practicing what to say beforehand, like “You all go ahead, I’m busy” or “Friends don’t always agree, and that’s okay.” —M.S.