

# Drama in Middle School

*My friend Bonnie decided she didn't want to be my friend anymore. Now all my friends are hanging out with her. I don't know why she's mad at me, but she ignores me when I say her name. - Rebecca, 13, Texas*

*Those few weeks when I didn't know why my friends weren't talking to me, why they were purposefully filling up the lunch table before I came, were the worst. They'd say to each other, 'Remember last Saturday when we went to the mall together? Wasn't that great? Have you used your new perfume?' Except I hadn't gotten the invitation. It was like, 'Wow, they've always liked me. What did I do?' - Sara, 12, Florida*

If you've bypassed major friendship trouble — you've had a solid group of friends throughout childhood and into high school; a best friend hasn't dropped you, betrayed you, or iced you out — you're lucky. While we all experience friend issues (and they don't go away completely when you hit adulthood!), for most students, middle school is the time when the highs and lows of the friendship rollercoaster are the most pronounced.

We all know that middle school can be uncomfortable and awkward. Your body's changing, your hormones are going crazy, you're hoping you'll get through puberty intact. But those years aren't just a period of growth spurts — they're also a soap opera. If you ask a boy about girls or a girl about her life — her school, her friendships, her classmates — people almost always use the word “drama.” Also, when students talk about the “drama” in their school, it's often related to their relationships with other students. Two young adults who've been best friends their entire lives suddenly hate each other, or become frenemies, and neither one knows who can be trusted.

All that puberty-driven change is partly to blame. During middle school, students are living within a perfect storm of self-consciousness: there's so much change happening at once — biological, social, emotional, psychological — and they're suddenly so aware of it. And since most middle schoolers consider their friendships a top priority (which makes sense: middle school is when young people have left the confines of their family), when those friendships shift and change, fall apart and reassemble, it can feel like their world has turned upside down.

Life often feels much less stable in middle school than it did during elementary school, so these breakups and fights can hurt that much more, because they're rocking already-shaky ground. And while students might not be completely aware of it, they're often trying as hard as they can to find some semblance of stability — which can manifest as freaking out about friendships. Thirteen-year-old Jessie in Georgia explains it this way: “The

drama is pretty prominent in your thoughts, because it's like, if that doesn't work out, who's to say your other friendships will work out? Who's to say that everything won't crash because one thing crashed?"

Try to remember this:

**Rule #1. Avoid drama and gossip.** There will be lots of gossip and some really malicious (mean) rumors floating around. Ignore rumors, even when they're about you, and if anyone talks or asks you about a rumor, tell them to ignore it and not spread it around. Never start rumors: they only break friendships, create enemies, hurt feelings, and make things worse for everyone. Gossip may seem juicy at first, but it bites at the end. Do your best to stay away from it.

- Help to stop rumors and save lives by standing up for people and not participating by spreading the rumor.
- Protect other people's privacy and mistakes. You wouldn't want someone spreading your personal secrets around, would you?
- Drama is unnecessary. Some people think that a life has to be filled with melodrama to be important and appreciated by others. It does not. Focusing on the things, people and ideas that are really important is better than worrying about who is going to ask who to the dance.

**Rule #2. Choose your friends wisely.** This is very important. Be friends with people who don't start or participate in drama and you'll avoid the worst things that happen in middle school. Establish a small group of good friends. Every group will face a few problems, but if you suddenly feel like your life could be a Disney Channel show, you might want to consider a more sensible group of friends.

**Rule #3. Don't let your friends get you in trouble.** Similar to the step above, you shouldn't be friends with people who get you in serious trouble. If someone asks you to lie about something important, do something illegal, or do something to hurt someone else, then **Don't do it**. Don't do **anything** that makes you feel uncomfortable or what you think is wrong. This is called peer pressure and it can lead to all sorts of problems.

- Don't be afraid to tell an adult if someone asks or tells you to do something really bad. This doesn't make you a snitch: it makes you a good person doing the right thing. If you make a bad decision, talk to an adult you can trust. Talking to friends about it is the fastest way to start gossip.
- **Learn how to solve problems.** This is a really important skill, not just for getting through middle school but for getting through your whole life. If you learn good ways to solve problems, you'll be able to handle anything that comes your way.
- **Communicate clearly.** By doing this, you are avoiding most of the problems people face. A lot of the time, rumors get started because someone misunderstands what you say or you misunderstand what they say. You might also accidentally offend someone if you say something you don't mean. Be careful, clear and always make sure you know what you're saying.

**Rule #4. Last, but not least, Be nice!** If you want people to be friends with you, it's important to be a nice person.